Unlocking the Portals of the Political Culture: Marginalized Feminist Voices of Color and Fictional Women Leaders

Linda Smith

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 10, 2018

Department of English
College of Humanities
University of Puerto Rico

Approved by:
Dr. Alma Simounet
Reader

Dr. Dannaang Kuwabong
Reader

Dr. Reinhard Sander
Thesis Director
# Table of Contents

List of Tables and Graphs  
Key Words  
Definition of Key Terms  
Dedication  
Acknowledgements  
Abstract  
Biographical Information  
**Introduction**  
chapter one: Postcolonial critiques and contemporary Caribbean feminist  
Decolonizing Arguments on Female Subordination  
  
**Part I**  
Caribbean Women and the Rewriting of Postcolonialism  
-Carine Maradossian  
Fanonian Decolonizing Philosophy and Postcolonial Women Writers  
Freirian Liberatory Pedagogy  
Contemporary Feminist Critics  
-bell hooks  
-Carole Boyce Davies  
-Ranjana Ash  

**Part II**  
Caribbean/Feminist Writers of Color on Identity, Gender and Justice  
-Emilia Ippolito  
-Jamaica Kincaid  
-Maryse Condé  
Objectification and Commodification of Black Women’s Bodies  
-Marlene Nourbese Phillips  
-Muzigira Bonaventure on Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo as a Prophetic Writer of Justice
Chapter Two: Caribbean Women, the Significance of the Woman Writer's Presence and Voice of Resistance

Part I

Caribbean Women Writers, The Ancestral Mother Bond, Memory and Historical Consciousness as Forms of Resistance to Planter Class Oppression and Revolutionary Feminist Language

-Ryhaan Shah 68
-Joy Mahabir and Miriam Pirbhai 69
-Cristina Cabral on Caribbean Women, Memory, Borders and Resistance 78
-Revolutionary Feminist Language 82
-Michelle Rowley and Reconceptualizing Voice 92
-Audrey Lorde and Women of Color Poetically Speaking Dreams and Writing Themselves into Reality 93
-Audrey Lorde and the Female Erotic Agency as a Form of Resistance 95
-Mimi Sheller on Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom 97

Sisterhood as a Rubric against Hegemonic Oppression 97
-bell hooks 97
-Liberatory Articulations against Hegemonic Oppression 99
-Walter Rodney 99

Contemporary Feminist Resistance to Essentialist Enlightenment Discourses 101
-Eudine Bariteau-Foster 101

Historic Examples of Black Enslaved Women, Indo-Caribbean, and Stands by Other Women of Color against Female Subordination 101
-Excerpt from the Autobiography of Mary Prince of Bermuda 103
- Formerly Enslaved Women and the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica 105
- Excerpt from the Autobiography of Anna Mahassee of Trinidad 107
- Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert on the Mirabal Sisters of the Dominican Republic 109

Part II
Women Rulers in Pre-Colonial Africa, Africana Womanism, and Kemetic Feminine Knowledge 112
- Anna Nzinga, Ruler of West and Central Africa in the 1600s 112
- Queen Aminatau Ruler of the Zazzaus 113
- Queen Makeda Ruler of Ethiopia 113
- In Praise of the Struggles, Strength and Leadership Qualities of Women of Color 115
- W. E. B DuBois 115
- African Priestesses, Goddesses, Seeresses, Leaders, and Spirituality as Feminist Liberatory Tools 119

Africana Womanism, Africana Women Leaders and African Female Kemetic Knowledge 120
- Clenora Hudson-Weems 120
- Molara Ogundipe on African Women and African Fundamentalism 122

Green Global Sisters Organization as a Force against Political and Cultural Stagnation 124

Part III
Revolutionary Caribbean Women Leaders of Color 1878 to 1970s 127
- Amy Jacques-Garvey of Jamaica 127
- Daisy "Wong" Richardson of Anguilla 129
- Three Revolutionary Queens: Mary, Agnes, and Mathilda of the U.S Virgin Islands 133

Part IV
Caribbean/Women of Color and Leadership 1980s to the Present 134
- Caribbean Women Leaders and Their Fictional Representations of Leadership 135
- Merle Hodge 135
- Zee Edgell of Belize 138
-Jane Phillips-Gay of Guyana

-Leading Women’s Organizations and their Aim to Uplift Women of Color

-Red Thread Movement of Guyana 1986
Two Cases of Societal Resistance to Women as Political Leaders
- President Dilma Rousseff of the Brazilian Congress 2011-2016
-Senator Janette Millin-Young of St. Thomas, U.S Virgin Islands 2011- the Present
A Trajectory of 6 Contemporary Real-Life Women Leaders and Freedom Fighters from India, Pakistan, Africa, and the Caribbean and how they Mirror Fictional Women Leaders

Chapter Three: Aleyah, the Reclaimer
Chapter Four: Veronica, the Returner
Chapter Five: Wariinga, the Replacer
Conclusion
Works Cited
Appendices
List of Tables and Graphs

Appendix A: Table Showing Real-Life Freedom Fighters and Women Leaders from across Communities of Color

Appendix B: Flow Chart Showing Trajectory of Real-Life Women Leaders and Freedom Fighters from across Communities of Color who Helped to Create Spaces for Women of Color

Appendix C: T-Chart Showing the Roles of Women in Pre-Colonial Africa and Women in Present-Day Caribbean Society

Appendix E: Venn Diagram Depicting the Relationship Among Women in Pre-Colonial Africa, Revolutionary Caribbean Women Leaders 1878-1970s and Women Leaders of Color 1980s to the present

Appendix F: Table of Comparison Showing Roles of Subordinated Heroine in Canonized Literary Presentations and Liberated Heroines in Non-Canonical Writings by Postcolonial Feminist Writers

Appendix G: Table Showing Sexist Language That Degrades Women

Appendix H: Excerpt from Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Novel Devil on the Cross
Key words: Postcolonial theory, hegemony, Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Theory/Criticism, Freirian Pedagogy, Erotic Agency, Dependency Complex, Inferiority Complex, Caliban.
Definition of Key Terms Used in the Dissertation

Patriarchy- An hierarchal oppressive system of political, societal and cultural domination by men.

Hegemony- An elitist hierarchy of institutionalized social rule with divisions along lines of gender, race and class.

Hegemonic Oppression- Oppression and pressures felt by poor and marginalized classes of individuals and caused by an oppressive, institutionalized, elitist hierarchy and its various systems of rule.

Political Economy- An institutionalized financial system widely referred to as the Free Market Economy.

Matriarchy- A system of rule by women or maternal figures.

Female Agency- The ability of women to assert selfhood and assume liberty, power and access to powered spaces.

Imperial Project- An empire or an hierarchal system of global regulatory financial institutions, that rule supremely over various territories, colonies or dependencies.

Feminist Economy- A female- based economic system in which women have access to financial resources and enjoy cultural, economic, and political freedoms.

Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Theory/Criticism- Scholarly critiques and analyses of gender bias and discrimination against women of color and the inconsistencies, differences, exclusion, and contradictions that exist within Mainstream Feminism’s gender and social practices.
Postcolonial Theory- The scholarly analyses and critiques of the formerly colonized world societies and the lingering impact of colonialism on the colonized world cultures.

Freirian Pedagogy- A liberatory educational paradigm that examines the status of oppressed subjects and offers strategies for societal transformation, developed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator.

Universal- universally accepted principle.

Aphorism-universally accepted principle

Maxim-universally accepted principle.

Sadomasochism- The idea or practice of giving or receiving pleasure by inflicting torture or suffering on others.

Binary Oppositional Logic- The practice of dividing or classifying individuals by gender, race or class.

Erotic Agency- The ability of females to assume spiritual, cultural and or political freedom.

Prospero Complex- The colonial tendency to control or subordinate others without expressing consideration or respect for them.

Dependency Complex- According to decolonizing thinkers including Frantz Fanon and Pamela Powesland, the Dependency Complex is the result of Europeans’ ability to come to the colonies and become wealthy at the expense of the natives, thus leaving them disenchanted with feelings of an inferior status.
Inferiority Complex- The colonized native’s psychological lack of self-worth, a doubt and uncertainty about oneself, and feelings of not being able to measure up to culturally-espoused colonial standards.

Caliban- A fictional character in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, who was subjugated by Prospero, the colonial interloper and son of the King of Milan, who comes into Caliban’s territory or native land, dispossesses him, enslaves him and renders him a dark and monstrous inferior. This fictional character, Caliban, has been used by postcolonial literary critics, as a central character and pivotal benchmark of their scholarly analyses involving the binary oppositional logic used by Imperial Hegemony and its various institutionalized structures.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first, to my "Great Mother," Mrs. Viola Richardson, and second, to my two offspring and heartbeats, Jiva and Justin Niles. Yes, Momma dearest! Indeed, I am about to start the journey to realizing "your dream for you and your daughters of becoming some of the world's greatest women." Thank you for being an ever-present force in my life! Thank you for your unmatched and unconquerable strength! Thank you, Momma, for your undying love, support, and for your spiritual guidance, always!
Acknowledgements

I wish to formally acknowledge the following persons, without whose help this dissertation could not have been completed. First, I wish to thank my advisor, the illustrious, erudite and dedicated professor, Dr. Reinhard Sander, who willingly agreed to be my course advisor, as I entered the PhD program in Anglophone Caribbean Literature, at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus. Not only would Dr. Sander become my course advisor, he shortly after agreed to take on the task of being my dissertation director. Heartfelt thanks are also extended to my knowledgeable and resourceful committee members, Drs. Alma Simounet and Dannabang Kuwabong, for their critical feedback and helpful suggestions during the compilation stages.

Additionally, sincere appreciation is extended to my biological family for their allegiance and emotional support. Special thanks go out to Mrs. Marlene Aponte Cabrera, my Puerto Rican sister, who helped to support me morally throughout this doctoral program of studies. Simultaneously, sincere thanks are extended to Dr. Malik Sekou and Attorney Nandi Sekou for their moral support. Similarly, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to my biological “Big Sister,” Hya, for her academic support and for constantly offering me her kind words of encouragement. Commendation must also be given to my big brother Vern, for picking up my first conceptual error in the embryonic stages of this dissertation and insisted that I work on it, before Dr. Sander’s eyes could notice it. Likewise, heart-felt thanks go out to my precious daughter, Ms. Jiva Niles, for volunteering to assist me with the formatting process. Words of gratitude must also be expressed to Michelle Beal, Raúl Cruz, and Ángel Rivera, for their kind assistance with the final formatting of the manuscript.

Of equal note, as an educator and scholar, I consider it my duty and responsibility
to honor the remarkable and noteworthy contributions, memories, and historical legacies of my fellow Caribbean women, mothers, sisters, and predecessors, both in the field of Caribbean Literary Studies, as well as those who have participated in one capacity or another in the revolutionary and liberatory struggles of women and men of color. Lastly, Paulo Freire’s insightful advice seems pertinent: “Revolutionary leaders must realize their own convictions of the necessity for struggle (an indispensable dimension of revolutionary wisdom)” (67).
Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation first seeks to analyze and evaluate various arguments that have been put forward by Contemporary Caribbean Feminist thinkers on critical feminist cultural, gender, identity and race theory. These scholarly discussions encompassing Women’s Writers and Postcolonialism, Contemporary Feminism, Identity and Resistance are dealt within the first section of the study. It presents these feminist discussions on the significance of the writer’s presence and voice of resistance, historical examples of resistance to hegemonic female subordination by women of color, and their various revolutionary acts and their significant forms of leadership. The crucial contexts in which these feminist discussions and forms of resistance occur are the Communities of Color in Africa and the Caribbean. Hence, this study examines the strategies of resistance to the oppressive established socio-political structures that were used by revolutionary fictional heroines of color in works by Ryhaan Shah, A Silent Life (2005), Maryse Condé, Heremakhonon (2000), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Devil on the Cross (1982), with theoretical applications of the Contemporary Feminist arguments involving women’s resistance to oppression. Similarly, it traces various methods of survival, attempts to recreate gendered stereotypical images, and forms of resentment to the gendered norms used by revolutionary real-life heroines and freedom fighters in their respective societies. Equally important, it identifies creative ways in which the real-life and fictional heroines mirror each other and manage to circumvent societal boundaries, move beyond cultural gender subordination, assert themselves educationally and politically, and make unprecedented and marked differences in their own lives, and in those of the common woman and man. Particular emphasis is placed on the complexities of gender, race, and class, how these complexities intersect and serve to marginalize women of color in Caribbean and African Society within the political milieu of Patriarchal Hegemonic Society. The theoretical framework centers chiefly on Contemporary Caribbean Feminist
Criticism which highlights a vision of sisterhood and feminist political solidarity as a forward moving force for women of color, against hegemonic oppression. Likewise, it leans towards Freirian Pedagogy, which is a pedagogical analysis of the liberatory process for oppressed peoples as presented by Paulo Freire. Finally, this study proposes that if women of color were to use their creativity, assert self-hood and assume leadership positions, it could help to lessen the incidence of female subordination.
Biographical Information

Linda Smith was born on St. Thomas, U.S Virgin Islands and raised on Anguilla. She is a teacher by profession. She completed her undergraduate degree in English at the University of the Virgin Islands. She enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Caribbean Literature at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus in August 2015. Prior to her enrollment in the Ph.D. program, she taught on the island of Anguilla for ten years. She also taught at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez for two years meanwhile she pursued her MA degree in English Education. She has also taught in public high schools on St. Thomas, U.S Virgin Islands for eight years, and at the University of the Virgin Islands for two years. Miss Smith has participated in the ALANA Conference held in Boston, USA in November 2000, the Literary Conference of the University of the Virgin Islands in 2002 and 2003, the TESOL Conference of Western Puerto Rico in 2005, the Islands in Between Conference held in St. Kitts in November 2015 and the Caribbean Without Borders Conference held in Puerto Rico in April 2016. She also participated in the TESOL Conference of Puerto Rico, Northern Chapter in January of 2017.

Miss Smith composes poems and writes skits and plays in her spare time. She plans to write and publish stories about her childhood and young adult experiences on the island of Anguilla. She also plans to have some of her plays enacted in local Anguillian and Virgin Islands theatre. Her research interests include Postcolonial Women’s Literature, Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies.
Introduction

Objectives

The purposes for carrying out this investigation are as follows:

First, to analyze and critically evaluate the various arguments that have been advanced by Contemporary Feminist writers and thinkers on the relationship between critical gender, and cultural race theory.

A second objective is to examine the roles of women of color in pre-colonial Africa (before 1800s).

A third objective is to comparatively trace the historic revolutionary acts of resistance that were carried out by women of color in the Caribbean region between 1878 to the present.

A fourth objective is to identify the strategies of resistance to oppressive socio-political structures as depicted in the following literary texts: Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* (2005), Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon* (2000), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross* (1982).

A fifth objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of these resistance strategies to help lessen the incidence of female marginalization and gender conflicts among women and men of color in Contemporary Caribbean Society.

A sixth objective is to examine some of the various gender conflicts involving African and Caribbean women such as cultural female subordination, gender struggle, political struggle, identity struggle, unemployment, wage inequity, domestication, sexual exploitation and bodily objectification, as presented through the various Contemporary
Feminist voices of color and in texts by Ryhaan Shah, Maryse Condé, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o.

A seventh objective is to use the ideas advanced in this dissertation to help educate and empower Caribbean women against hegemonic oppression.

An eighth objective is to sensitize Caribbean women to emulate the survival and coping strategies utilized by the literary heroines as well as their ancestors, to examine their efforts to recreate the gendered images, and to attempt to secure womanly spaces, within the confines of Patriarchal Hegemonic Society.

A ninth objective is to inspire women of color in Caribbean and African Society to assert themselves educationally, politically and spiritually to challenge the socio-political power structures that objectify their bodies and limit their potentials.

A tenth objective is to promote positive socio-political change, visionary and revolutionary attitudes in marginalized women of color so that they too can strive to assume positions of leadership and power themselves.

Justification

The Colonized woman of color has been subjected to an inferior and subordinate position by virtue of her physiology, coupled with the culturally engrained mindset in Western Tradition, regarding the role of women as “the other” or “second sex.” I deem the practice of cultural female subordination to be one of the underlying reasons for the inability of the colonized woman of color to assume more leadership positions. Historically, the tendency in the Caribbean and in other parts of the colonized world culture has been for men to be at the helm in the labor force, as well as in positions of
leadership. Regionally, Guyana has the highest women representatives in public office, which is a little over 30%, meanwhile on the island of Antigua, only 5 women form part of the legislature (Chambers 2018). Similarly, in the U.S Virgin Islands only 3 women are presently elected members of the legislative body (Millin-Young 2018), while on the island of Anguilla, between 1970 and 2014, only 1 woman in the person of Albena Lake-Hodge has held political office. However, 2015 saw a slight increase in the presence of women in the Anguillian parliament with 3 women, namely Mrs. Evalie Bradley, Mrs. Cora Richardson, as members of the majority party, and Ms. Palmavon Webster, as the leader of the opposition party, for the first time in Anguilla’s recorded history.

I have also observed, that from birth, girl children in my home community of Anguilla are labeled with cultural and gendered expectations and norms that limit them not only during their childhood, but throughout their lives. Meanwhile, male children generally seem to be favored and so are allowed more freedom to participate in certain activities such as climbing trees and riding donkeys without their actions being stigmatized. On the other hand, when such activities are performed by girls or women, they are labeled as “Tom Boys” or “Cow Girls.” Furthermore, little Anguillian girls are treated as if they should remain “baby dolls” to be preserved in a China cabinet. Thus, one notices evidence of gender stereotyping in the language labels that are used to refer to Black/Brown girls and women who defy the established cultural prescriptions in Anguillian and in the wider Caribbean Society. Simply, girls and women are treated differently.

Such heavily institutionalized and normative cultural practices contribute to female subordination and gender inequity. By the same token, I believe that the
perpetuation of gender stereotyping does not enable the image of the female to flourish in a male-dominated socio-political context. Hence, I propose that the presentation of positive and enlightening female images such as those presented by Contemporary Feminist Scholars, and in Ryhaan Shah, Maryse Condé, and Ngũgĩ, wa Thiong’o’s work that place the colonized woman of color in a super-ordinate position could help to lessen the incidence of female subordination, gender disparity, and significantly increase the chances for Caribbean women to prevail in general elections and assume political leadership positions.

These writers, Ryhaan Shah, Maryse Condé, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, are Postcolonial thinkers whose literary presentations of women characters reverse the societally-established roles for women in the broader societies of the Caribbean and Africa. Interestingly, Ngũgĩ, a male writer, crafts a female heroine with exceptional abilities for asserting leadership and reaping justice. Ngũgĩ’s literary presentation of a heroine with such a high degree of leadership abilities, professional and forward moving skills speaks volumes of women’s potential in the real-world setting. Likewise, it could be indicative of Ngũgĩ’s vision for an African society that is less reflective of the European political and cultural value systems. Besides, Ngũgĩ might well be aware of the fact that women in traditional African culture have always assumed a leadership role. In addition, they were very much revered. And Ngũgĩ’s Wariinga strikes me as the Kenyan version of the Haitian Goddess Erzulie, who is mentioned in works of fiction by Contemporary writers, variously. Interestingly, African writing has been influenced by Caribbean writing. Africa is the ancestral homeland for scores of Caribbean people.
Furthermore, the presence of the male writer’s voice serves as the equalizer or balancing device in my discussion on cultural female subordination and women in leadership.

Equally important, the texts for this study were selected as they seem to speak to my research question which is to evaluate the effectiveness of using the strategies of resistance utilized by the literary heroines, first, in seeking justice for injustices done to them and their people, and second, to explore the degree of usefulness of women in asserting positions of power in society, in helping to lessen the incidence of societal female subordination and denigration. In short, this study explores the usefulness of literary texts as tools that can potentially empower women and girls of color against hegemonic marginalization and in asserting political and other leadership positions.

Simultaneously, the texts I selected by Ryhaan Shah, Maryse Condé, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o not only challenge the status quo and women’s subordination in the fictional world, but they also challenge the same in real-life settings. Moreover, the heroines presented in the texts selected are reflective of women and the realities of women and men of color in Africa and the Caribbean. For instance, Ryhaan Shah’s protagonist, Aleyah Hassan, is of Indo-Guyanese and Muslim background, and travels across the diaspora to India, Africa and parts of the Caribbean, while Maryse Condé’s protagonist, Veronica, is of mixed European and African descent. She too, travels across the diaspora to different parts of Africa such as the fictional land of Heremakhonon, meanwhile Ngũgĩ’s protagonist, Wariinga, is of African/Kenyan descent. Thus, the selected texts allow for a substantially reliable comparative analysis of the forms of female subordination presented in the various African/Brown diasporic spaces. Categorically, ideas and philosophies presented in the texts such as Marxist-Leninism, Post-
structuralism, and Black and Brown Feminism, present a decolonization mindset for people in the Caribbean, (Guyana and Guadeloupe) and in Kenya (East Africa). Hence, the theoretical framework encompasses Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Criticism, Postcolonial Criticism, Caribbean and African Marxist Criticism, and Freirian Pedagogy. The strategies of resistance to the established social orders that are depicted by the heroines in the texts by Shah, Condé, and Ngũgĩ are identified, and the extent of their effectiveness, are evaluated.

Additionally, as a statement of Contribution to the field of Caribbean Literature, this dissertation adds to the existing literature in the following three ways:

1. Its documentation of the roles of women of color in Pre-colonial African society, it illustrates enslaved and colored women’s resistance in plantation society, as well as shows how this resistant trajectory resembles those expressed by women of color in present-day colored diasporic spaces, as well as in the Postcolonial fictional world.

2. Its use of interview, autobiographical and narratorial data collection strategies on the origins of the oppression of the woman of color and the various forms of resistance exercised by revolutionary real-world heroines and feminist thinkers of color, with applications to the literary texts by Shah, Condé and Ngũgĩ.

3. Its scope of comparison.

Thus, I deem that through my documentation of historical data on the trajectory of the struggles of real-life women of color, through my inclusion of excerpts from autobiographical narratives, interview data, and through a comparison of these primary sources of data, coupled with theoretical applications to my primary literary texts by Shah, Condé, and Ngũgĩ, each has served to help foreground my discussion on female
subordination and women’s leadership. Likewise, historically women of color have constantly resisted oppressive systems. In a similar vein, the heroines by Postcolonial writers each defy authority figures and established social systems. They help to bring about considerable differences in their own lives and in those of other individuals in their communities. Therefore, these texts by Shah, Condé, and Ngũgĩ, promised to be reasonably pertinent and reliable primary sources to help buttress this study’s thesis.

Furthermore, the liberatory roles and escape routes of the heroines from female subordination seem substantially favorable. One argument arising on the liberatory and decolonizing thought is advanced by Dave Kennedy, in his article, “Imperial History and Postcolonial Theory.” In this article, Kennedy maintains that the historiography of British imperialism has long been colored by the political and methodological conservatism of its practitioners. He adds that its purpose was to contribute historical insights into past experiences in overseas power that could be used to inform and inspire contemporaries to shoulder their obligations as rulers of a world-wide imperial system. Simultaneously, he emphasizes that decolonization has robbed imperial history of most of its practical incentives. Yet, it continued to cling to the methodology and mentality of “the official mind.” From this observation, it would seem that decolonization can greatly reduce the influence of the institutionalized oppressive imperial political and cultural values. Quite timely and in tandem with Kennedy’s line of argument is the following quote by Mayra Santos Febres: “The world of a woman is vaster than her gender” (Santos Febres qtd. in De Costa-Willis 455). What this quote suggests is that women are subordinated and seen principally in terms of their bodily and biological attributes. But if women were seen in terms of their wit and creativity, for their exceptional leadership
abilities and potential, it could lessen the incidence of female subordination. Perhaps, the latter could possibly lead to a shift in attitudes toward women.

First, to provide the historical backdrop for how women are subordinated in the fictional world, I will briefly refer to William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for example, in which Miranda, the heroine, is given a secondary and subordinate role which limits her in more ways than one. On the other hand, in Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*, the women characters are given more non-traditional and leadership roles, which considerably allow them choices for self-realization and to assert themselves either educationally, spiritually, politically, or economically. In Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Miranda is given a subordinate role and remains subjugated by the dominance of her paternalistic father, Prospero, the emblem of the Imperial colonizer. Likewise, Caliban’s, mother Sycorax, a secondary character is dark skinned and also demonized. Caliban is said to be the byproduct of intimate relations between the devil and Sycorax, Shakespeare’s “othered” female character and “black” witch. This is an instance of reductionist philosophy towards a fictional woman character of color.

*The Tempest* was written in the early 1600’s and can be considered a pivotal literary text, which presents the female as “the inferior other.” It is also reflective of the globally-driven masculine ideology where women are usually regarded as “the other” and “inferior” beings. Miranda is given a subordinate and secondary role, and her marginalized position epitomizes the broader group of females in canonical literary discourse and in real-world settings. In brief, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* also clearly reflects the lived realities of contemporary women of color in Africa and the Caribbean. Moreover, that women in fiction and in the real-world continue as gendered beings and
are seen as “the other” or “inferior” individuals (despite their invaluable contributions to the maintenance of society both in the private and public spheres as they are mothers, nurturers, culture bearers, usually the chief cooks, and bottle washers), I find their othered position to be deeply troubling. What can be observed here is that the fictional world has served to help uphold and transcend the various forms of female marginalization, the cultural subordination and negative perceptions of women, particularly, women of color.

In general, the tendency in canonical literary tradition (which consisted of chiefly male writers) has been to portray women as “the other” and less significant characters, which rarely were recognized and merely presented as an afterthought. More often than not, women’s voices have been silenced and their presence was overshadowed by the more predominant male characters. Therefore, I deem William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, as a foundational text since it serves to foreground the seemingly biased attitude of canonized male writers towards women characters. Simultaneously, it mirrors the culturally-limiting mindsets of a majority of individuals in the broader Caribbean and in global societies towards women of color. Thus, this study argues that women in the real world as well as fictional women characters should be given as equal a role as male characters since women self-sacrifice, bear the greater social burdens (as they balance family and social lives), and they make marked contributions to the function and maintenance of society. Coupled with their maternal functions, women are the culture bearers and the shapers of history. Thus, the critical roles that women play in society should not be discounted. Moreover, the literary texts by Shah, Condé, and Ngũgĩ defy the literary presentations of women by canonized writers and in real-world settings.
Likewise, the literary contestations seem to be consistent with some of the opposing arguments to hegemony that are being put forward by the Contemporary Feminist Scholarship.

Indeed, the pivotal roles that Caribbean and African women play and the major impact that they make in their respective communities should never be discounted. For instance, African women were rulers and Queens in pre-colonial times. Likewise, Caribbean and African women have been front liners in revolutionary protests and struggles since pre-emancipation years up to the present time. That historically women rebels such as those from the Kirinyaga County of Kenya assumed key roles during the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, for example, is remarkable. (Africa.com) Then too, Isalee Lake-Harrigan, Daisy Richardson and Dora Bryan, assumed leading roles in the Anguilla Revolution (Anguillian Newspaper). Additionally, Wilma Espin was an ever-present force in the Cuban Revolution. Likewise, enslaved women in the likes of Queen Breffu helped to orchestrate the 1733 Slave insurrection on St. John, U.S Virgin Islands. Even more, Queens Mary, Agnes and Mathilda were instrumental in the planning and execution of the “Great Fireburn,” on St. Croix, Virgin Islands in 1878 (Millin-Young 2018). Then too, the female protest singers of Cariso/Kaiso in Trinidad challenged the status quo during pre-emancipation years. These noteworthy acts of defiance to the status quo, coupled with women’s pivotal roles in liberatory movements and struggles in the Caribbean region, suggest the tremendous leadership potentials of women of color. Thus, it also insinuates that if more women of color united, they could potentially be a mammoth and relentless force to reckon with. Moreover, that women in more recent and contemporary history and politics such as Wangari Maathai, an African liberationist, who
led the Green-Belt political movement in Kenya between 1976-1987, and made such a major impact that there now exists a documentary in her honor entitled *Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai* (Marlboro Productions 2008), is heartening. Then too, the contributions made by women of color cross-culturally and spanning the colored diaspora, including Indira Gandhi of India, Winnie Mandela of South Africa, Eugenia Charles of Dominica were notable. Then more recently, the resistant acts of Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan in 2012, who stood up for education and is shot by the Taliban, is again admirable. But seeing that Caribbean women political figures such as Claudette Warleigh served as head of state in Haiti from November 1995 to February 1996, Janet Jagan, served as head of state in Guyana from March 2006 to September 2007 (Nelson), is enlightening.

Furthermore, Maryse Condé, a woman writer and political candidate, who ran for the Regional Council in Guadeloupe, made it to the general election finals in 1992 is also encouraging. Considering that women of color have each helped to shape the political culture of the Caribbean and African landscapes), yet a vast majority of them remain socially marginalized, despite their efforts, is unnerving. In the same vein, Jaevion Nelson, points out that

Based on the ranking of Caribbean countries in terms of female parliamentary and prime ministerial representation, it is reasonable to assume that the Caribbean has not done enough to remove social, economic and political barriers to gender equality. Doing so would be a critical step forward in ensuring that all genders equally contribute to, and benefit society at large. (3)
However, even more disturbing is the realization that despite women’s accomplishments, the global masculine mindset towards women coupled with cultural female subordination not only denies scores of Caribbean and other women of color in the formerly colonized world a fair and equal chance to educational opportunities and economic resources, it actually places them in positions of dependency on their male counterparts. Seemingly, cultural practices, both in the real world and the fictional world, havenot helped to erase the degrading societal images of womenfolk.

Worse still, scores of Caribbean women and women in various parts of the globe, for example, are domesticated and abused by the men in their lives. Sadly, a considerable percentage of domesticated women are abused, if they fail to submit to the gendered expectations of men. Not only do women become victims of abuse, their children fall prey to the abusive male predators. Considering that more than 77% of the respondents in a survey (conducted in 2008-2009 in the Eastern Caribbean, involving the societal perceptions of women) indicated that the way a girl dresses, for instance, draws sexual attention from men. The latter is a classic example of the societal binds on the female child (UNICEF 2014). Then too, given that women form approximately 39.6% of the labor force (World Bank 2015) and receive considerably lower wages than men, is staggering. Furthermore, given that a report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2012, indicated that more than 92% of women in Delhi, India, lose their lives annually to domestic violence, are killed by intimate partners or family members, exemplifies this view. Of equal note, that women remain underrepresented in the parliament of Jamaica for instance, filling only 8 of the 60 available seats in the lower parliamentary chamber, is not enough for women with equal talents, creative abilities,
and intellectual fortitude, to accept underrepresentation in any societal capacity as their lot (Nelson 3). Thus, this study proposes that if more women of color asserted leadership, and clearly and positively demonstrated their resolve for influencing the political culture of their particular spheres, the perceptions and treatment they receive from society’s establishment and other oppressed poor and working class women and men, could shift from the negative to the positive degree.

Notably, Ryaan Shah, an Indo-Caribbean woman writer, Maryse Condé, a Guadeloupean woman writer, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, an African male writer, are non-canonical postcolonial writers, whose works present literary heroines who defy and serve to challenge the towering barriers of the canonized literary tradition. The roles of their heroines as leaders give voice to matters that address the unsung, untold stories and ever-changing realities of historically and socially marginalized women both in the Caribbean and Africa. Thus, the ideas of women’s resistance that are advanced in historical accounts and autobiographical narratives by women of color and in Shah’s A Silent Life, Condé’s Heremakhonon, and Ngũgĩ’s Devil on the Cross could help to shed new light on women’s discourse in colored communities in the Caribbean. Literary texts that place women characters in a super-ordinate or leadership position can potentially be used to inspire Caribbean women to challenge the status quo, and help to lessen the incidence of female subordination, gender disparity and female degradation.

Of equal note, Caribbean and African women can relate to the tribulations of the heroines in the novels by Shah, Condé and Ngũgĩ, since the political and cultural spaces are similar. The female subjects of both the Caribbean and the African landscapes have been colonized and appear to be “un/becoming the subjects” as described by Kevin Enrod
Quashie in his book *Black Women, Identity and Cultural Theory*. Women across the Caribbean’s cultural circles have similar struggles and are oftentimes stuck in similar political quagmires. Hence, the study proposes that more women in communities of color should identify new and different strategies for asserting selfhood and assuming leadership positions at various levels of the respective societies in which they find themselves. They can mirror the resistant methods that were utilized by historical heroines to help lessen the impact of their troubles. The study deems that by virtue of women’s active presence on the scene, in various societal organizations or associations, can be help to reverse perceptions. Moreover, women’s presence on the political scene can enable them to start conversations and articulate their views and convictions about the status of women. More importantly, women leaders can potentially be the agents of change from the stifling and decadent colonial hegemonic baggage that remains in their respective communities.

**Theoretical Framework**

The critical approach for conducting this dissertation has been Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Criticism. According to bell hooks, a “womanist” feminist, in her book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, Contemporary Feminism is a body of theory and shared practice that can be used to teach new converts to feminist politics what must be done to create, sustain, and protect feminist solidarity. Similarly, hooks claims that as the movement progressed, as feminist thinking advanced, enlightened feminists saw that men were not the problem, that the problem was the patriarchy, sexism, and male domination. She further points out that feminist education for critical
consciousness must be continuous. Likewise, she maintains that a renewed feminist movement must once again raise the banner high to proclaim anew that “Sisterhood is powerful.” Additionally, hooks insists that Radical groups of women continue their commitment to building sisterhood, to making feminist political solidarity between women and their ongoing reality. She adds that the work of bonding across race and class must continue.

We must continue to put in place the anti-sexist thinking and practice which affirms the reality that females can achieve self-actualization without dominating one another. And we have the good fortune to know every day of our lives, that sisterhood is concretely possible, that sisterhood is still powerful. (17)

hooks sees Sisterhood as a useful avenue forward for marginalized classes of women. Similarly, Eudine Barritteau-Foster, a Contemporary Caribbean Feminist thinker, who examines the lingering and limiting societal binary oppositional logic, the critical class issue and gender division that exists between women and men, maintains the following in her article “Theorizing Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean:”

There has been a rupturing of traditional relations of gender inherited from post-slavery, ‘emancipated’ nineteenth-century Caribbean. . . By questioning the prevailing myths about Caribbean women and by prioritizing the multiple, complex realities of our lives, feminist scholars have stabilized the definition of masculinity as omniscient, even as it sought to escape any commonality with the concept of the feminine. . . I
develop a theoretical framework around the concept of gender and gender systems to examine how they operate within the political, social, and cultural economy of states. . . I argue that postcolonial states inherited a complexity of social relations and structures from the Enlightenment discourses of Liberalism. This web of social structures creates gender systems that pose critical challenges for women in the transition from colonial to postcolonial, modernizing state structures. Central theme of my work is that the philosophical contradictions of liberal ideologies predisposed states to institute unjust gender systems. Such liberal ideologies in turn formalized hierarchal and differential roles for women and men which further embedded in new social relations when states actively pursue(d) the modernization project in the post-cold war, postcolonial phase of social and economic transformation. (187)

Barriteau-Foster challenges the patriarchal hierarchy. She also seems adamant about the gender divide, the women of color’s agency, and their ability to ascend societal barriers culturally, politically, and economically.

**Methodology**

The research instrument that was followed in this dissertation was chiefly a qualitative literary analysis of Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Criticism, Post Colonial Critiques, and Freirian Pedagogy to help inform understandings of the literary presentations of the heroines in Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*. The themes of female
subordination, gender inequity, along lines of class and race division, were also examined and the socio-political contexts were analyzed. Likewise, the strategies for lessening the incidence of female marginalization that are utilized by the heroines in the literary texts were compared and contrasted in detail. Interviews with women’s leaders from select islands were done for support purposes and juxtaposition of my discussion. I also drew information from observational, autobiographical accounts and archival sources.

**Chapter Outline/ Organization of the Chapters**

Chapter One presents Contemporary Caribbean Feminist articulations with cultural and social scholarly applications to ground the study in its intellectual context. This chapter is entitled “Postcolonial Critiques and Contemporary Feminist Decolonizing Arguments on Female Subordination.” It is subdivided into two main parts. Part I is entitled “Caribbean Women and the Rewriting of Postcolonialism.” Part II is entitled “Caribbean/ Feminist Writers on Identity, Gender and Justice.”

Chapter Two is entitled “Caribbean Women, The Significance of the Woman Writer’s Presence and the Female Voice of Resistance.” This chapter has been subdivided into four major sections which read as follows: Part I is entitled “Caribbean Women, The Ancestral Mother Bond, Memory and Historical Consciousness as forms of Resistance to Planter Class Oppression and Revolutionary Feminist Language.” Part II is entitled “Women Rulers in Pre-colonial Africa, Africana Womanism and Kemetic Feminine Knowledge.” Part III is entitled “Revolutionary Caribbean Women Leaders of Color 1878 to the 1970s.” Part IV is entitled “Caribbean/Women of Color and
Leadership 1980s to the Present.” At the end of Chapter Two, an additional trajectory of 6 Contemporary Real-life Women’s Freedom Fighters of color from Pakistan, Africa, and the Caribbean in the persons of Indira Gandhi, Winnie Mandela, Eugenia Charles, Mia Mottley, Albena Lake-Hodge, and Malala Yousafai, has been included, to illustrate the connection between the fictional and real-life women’s leaders and their methods of survival and resistance to the hegemonic structures of their respective societies. A comparison of these women’s leaders is demonstrated in the discussion. Then, Chapters Three to Five present a comparative analysis of the novels by Shah, Condé, and Ngũgĩ with Contemporary Caribbean Feminist applications.

Chapter Three is entitled “Aleyah, The Reclaimer.” It presents an analysis of Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*. First, I must point out that Ryhaan Shah is an Indo-Guyanese writer. Shah’s heroine Aleyah struggles for equality in both the private and public spaces. Aleyah’s pursuit of higher education lands her leadership job opportunities. Aleyah travels to the fictional land of Heremakhonon, Africa and Calcutta, India, conducting humanitarian work and research. Here, Africa and India can be seen as reference points to an Afro-Caribbean woman, in the colonized world setting. Ryhaan Shah’s writing is very political. Given that Shah has participated in political projects in her native Guyana, it suggests that *A Silent Life*, might be a reflection of her vision for change in the lives of women of color in the Guyanese community.

Next, Chapter Four entitled “Veronica, The Returner” is discussed. It presents an analysis of Maryse Condé’s work *Heremakhonon*. Maryse Condé is a postcolonial Caribbean writer. Her Afro-Caribbean heroine, Veronica, struggles for equality, identity, justice, liberty, space, and recognition in the institutionalized hegemonic society of the
colonized world. Veronica travels to the fictional world of Heremakhonon, Africa to connect with her roots. Here Africa is seen as a base/reference point of Veronica’s history, identification, and her cultural or sacred space. Veronica wields her way through political spaces by her association with male political figures in Heremakhonon in the likes of Ibra Sory. She also experiences self-actualization and helps to promote revolutionary thinking attitudes in her students. Maryse Condé, not only exhibits an interest in the politics of people in the Black community in Africa, through her fiction, but she has shown interest in politics in the real-world setting, by running for political office in the Regional Council of Guadeloupe, in 1992.

Then, Chapter Five, entitled “Wariinga, The Replacer” is presented. It presents an analysis of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Devil on the Cross. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o is a postcolonial thinker. His work brings the male perspective into the feminist discourse. He also gives his heroine a super-ordinate role unlike various established canonized male writers. Additionally, Africa is used as a reference point. Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga, comes from Kenya, in East Africa. Wariinga’s struggles strongly resemble those of Caribbean literary heroines. And Caribbean Literature, seems to have influenced African Literature. As a case in point, Kenneth Ramchand in his The West Indian Novel and its Background, draws a parallel between Africa and the Caribbean. He shows how this relationship depicts the West Indian Negro’s attitude to Africa. For instance, he references George Lamming’s works Season of Adventure and Pleasures of Exile which illustrate the connection between the West Indian and Africa. In Season of Adventure, Fola, the protagonist, goes to Africa on a journey of self-discovery and tries to connect with her African roots and she practices African spirituality. It is on this journey that she
is able to flesh out her own identity problem and obstacles. In addition, Ramchand further indicates that Lamming advances the following in his work *The Pleasures of Exile*.

The West Indian Negro who sets out on a similar journey to Africa is less secure. His/her relation to that continent is more personal and more problematic. It is more personal because of the conditions of his life today, his status. . . are a clear indication of the reasons which led to the departure of his ancestors from that continent. . . His /her relation to Africa is more problematic because he has not been introduced to it through history. He/she knows it through rumor and myth which is made sinister by a foreign tutelage . . . he/she appears reluctant to acknowledge his or her share of the legacy which is part of his or her heritage. (160-161)

Clearly, George Lamming like Ngũgĩ seems aware of the historic trauma, identity struggle, and societal holdover that plagues the descendants of enslaved African people. Equally important, he seems aware of the racial, class, and gender divides that impact women of color in the postcolonial Caribbean and African societies. I consider Lamming’s analysis as a good source that illustrates the connection between Caribbean and African writers, particularly works about women of color by male writers, and simultaneously, seems to give substance to my selection of Ngũgĩ’s work *Devil on the Cross* and it serves to inform the male stance on the woman question. Similarly, as Caribbean and African societies redefine themselves, there seems to be a growing need for a deeper understanding of the male self. Perhaps, an understanding of the male self can help to enhance gender relationships between women and men of color.
Furthermore, Maryse Condé’s novel *Heremakhonon* in which the initially troubled heroine, Veronica, like Lamming’s protagonist Fola, is able to flesh out her identity, race and class issues once she personally goes to Africa on a journey of self-discovery and comes to terms with the underlying reasons for her troubled past in Guadeloupe, depicts Lamming’s point. The critical knowledge of Veronica’s ancestors and their struggle for survival in a new and unknown world culture makes Veronica a more critical thinker, and willing to embrace the African historic legacy that she is very much a part of. Furthermore, Kevin Enrod Quashie, a Contemporary male Feminist thinker, especially in his section on “Self(full)ness and the Politics of Community,” discusses Myriam Warner Vieyra’s protagonist Juletane, and shows how her “selffull” movement also causes Juletane to grow, create and invent. Likewise, Vieyra and Condé’s heroines experience identity re-formation and growth as a result of their journeys of self-discovery. Simultaneously, George Lamming’s account also seems to give substance to my selection of Ngũgĩ’s work *Devil on the Cross* as it helps to inform the male stance on the woman question. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o is also one of the most prominent male writers on literature involving societal injustice and women of color.

To date, very few male writers address the woman question and so there is a lingering need for more research to be done on the same. I also believe that a dissertation that addresses the male perspective in the Contemporary feminist conversation, should help to further understandings in Caribbean Women’s Literature. Finally, conclusions will be communicated along with pedagogical implications of the study and considerations for future research will be offered.
Chapter One

Postcolonial Feminist Critiques and Decolonizing Arguments on Female Subordination

The scholarly feminist discussions span Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Criticism and Postcolonial analyses of Women’s subordination. The Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Criticism and Postcolonial analyses should enable this study to fathom the scope of women’s marginality within the literary and real-world cultural traditions of Western Culture. Hopefully, this study should help to determine the potentiality of women to weave through societal labyrinths and secure positions of power. To begin with, Jeff Hearn and David Morgan posit that owing to the insidious design and nature of political structures and institutions of Western Tradition, one does not readily notice one’s oppression.

The picture of the “hierarchy of powers” so easily places woman in a position of victim, as being subordinated and oppressed, and so denies her own activity and power to shape her own history. At one level, a similar problematic can be identified within post-structuralist theory because it assumes that subjects or identities are the products or results of discourses. It tends to present people as passive. The vision of people as victims has a powerful hold within the different traditions of social theory. (224)

From these observations, subordinating women seems to be part and parcel of the imperialist paradigm. By subordinating women, they would remain as passive, docile and subservient beings and even slaves to the powerful males who commodify women’s bodies. By subordinating and commodifying the women’s bodies, the rich and powerful
men would also be able to dominate and treat the women as their children. The latter idea is evidenced by Prospero’s subordination of Miranda, in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (aforementioned), and placing value on her biological state (body) and the market value he envisions from having her marry Prince Ferdinand. Prospero sees his daughter’s marriage to the prince as a status symbol. The following lines of the play exemplify Prospero’s glorification of Prince Ferdinand and his plan to trade Miranda for personal gain and expand his empire. “I ratify this rich gift, o Ferdinand… then as my gift and thine own acquisition/worthily purchased take my daughter. But/if thou dost break her virgin-knot before/all sanctimonious ceremonies may/with full and holy rite be ministered…/to make this contract grow, but barren hate” (Graff and Phelan 64-65). Just as women are seen for their market value and their images as being victims are presented in literature, it is a widely-driven tendency in world societies. Equally important, Hearn and Morgan, insist that “the vision of people as victims” is deeply rooted in the social constructions of Western Culture. Of course, a considerable percentage of the people whom Hearn and Morgan, to refer as being “victims” in their respective societies include women. Nevertheless, Postcolonial, Neo-colonial and Contemporary Feminist thinkers challenge the subjectivity and subordination of women, particularly women of color, who continue to struggle for survival in the racist, imperial-capitalist marketplace.

Even more, Pamela Powesland, whose book examines the dialectic of power relations that exist in Western Culture, shows how these social constructions such as gender, race, and class intersect and are designed to enable the oppressors to maintain their dominion over women and other colonized subjects. Powesland also details the socio-genesis of civilized versus uncivilized/savage and the powerful versus the
powerless. She also references William Shakespeare’s colonial imagination in *The Tempest*, and Prospero as the colonial symbol who invades Caliban’s territory and, thereby, socially uprooting Caliban and imposing his way on Caliban. She also mentions the crippling effect of the “Prospero Complex” on subjects in the Colonial State. For example, she asserts: “The Prospero Complex” draws from the inside a picture of the paternalist colonial, with his pride, his desire to dominate, and at the same time, portrays the racialist whose daughter has suffered an attempted rape at the hands of an inferior being” (130). Interestingly, it is ironic that although Miranda is dominated by Prospero, she too regards Caliban, as “the inferior being,” and with disdain. Miranda and Caliban are in a very similar position, yet she perceives him as the dark “othered” being. Perhaps one could add here that women of color, like Caliban, are seen differently by virtue of their race, class and gender.

Undoubtedly, women of color seem to be contracted into positions of subordination by performing the labor necessary for the maintenance of the home and society by virtue of their lesser social status to men as well as to women of the Middle and privileged classes. Accordingly, Zermarie Deacon remarks that “Women are thus oppressed as they perform the labor necessary for the upkeep of society by virtue of their own expertise, in other words, they relinquish a level of control over their lives and freedom in order to perform their domestic duties” (224). Here one observes that owing to their allegiance to their families and maternal duties many women of color remain marginalized. Furthermore, Gita Sen and Karen Brown inform us that women’s subordination is one of the decisive pillars of Western Civilization that allows for market expansion, consumption, and commercialization.
The cultural subordination of women has reinforced male control of resources and power. And the divisions of labor that have enshrined male privileges, while gender-based systems of subordination have been transformed by economic growth, commercialization, and market expansion. Thus, subordination persists. (28)

This realization is disturbing since it shows how egregious a capitalist marketing strategy female subordination can be. It not only represses, but it insults the intellect, skills, and talents of women. Besides, it is a dehumanizing construct. It treats women as if they are subhuman, and in the unique situation of the Black woman, who has suffered historic trauma of enslavement and a denial of access to material resources, it is unsettling. In light of this, women of color should seek redress for the negative treatment and commodification of their bodies. It is the body that is the marker of the socially-driven and divisive construct of gender. Hence, it becomes imperative that women of color attempt to reverse the negative perceptions and images about them and their black or brown bodies. Seemingly, one possible way to challenge the commodification of the woman of color’s body is through critical academic inquiry and serious assessment of the historic and cultural forms of our society. In short, the elements of equality and difference seem to be necessary core elements of change for the negative bodily portrayals of women of color.
Part I: Caribbean Women and the Rewriting of Postcolonialism

- Carine Maradossian

Carine M. Maradossian, a Contemporary Feminist, postulates in her book *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism*, that the women writers of the third phase (third wave feminists) should transform their approaches to writing of postcolonialism with giving special consideration to identity. She suggests that postcolonial women writers of this third phase of rewriting could make their literary presentations more attuned to the contingent working of difference. In brief, these writers of the third phase should focus on groups and themes that traditionally, have not been a part of the critical feminist dialogues and conversations. They challenge the idea that racial and cultural identities function as stable points of reference in our unstable world. They also examine the interdependence of colonized subjects who cannot be adequately accounted for by identity-bound-differences. Thus, she suggests that correlativity be addressed through critical reading strategies.

Reading through such a model means foregrounding “relational identity” as alternative to the static “root identities” that perpetuate fixed and exclusionist notions of nation, race, or culture. It subverts the binaries and inflexible categorizations (same/other, colonial/postcolonial, black/white, and male/female) through which official cultures and languages operate. It proposes instead, a rhizomatic network that emphasizes the new, global interrelationships. . . The Caribbean women’s writings embody the radical revisionary venture of this NewWorld Culture insofar as, in linking the dynamic of Caribbean creolization to the complexities of diversity in our
postmodern world, they recast our understanding of culture and identity. . .

. In fact, this identity-bound version of difference is instrumental in producing the Majority-Subject through its very alterity… It is imperative that we reconfigure difference as a relational concept that, insofar as it reveals the irreducible interdependence of self and other, is better equipped to reduce hegemonic cooptation. (4-7)

Maradossian articulates the viewing of Caribbean postcolonialism in terms of the region’s historical and cultural contexts. She also sees Caribbean postcolonialism and Caribbean women’s subjectivity in terms of more circular global connections and the Caribbean’s interrelationships with the rest of the world. The region’s relational identity as an alternative to the socially-established roots or grains of the binary hegemonic constructions, she emphasizes, should be central to any serious gender and societal revisioning in the Caribbean. In brief, Maradossian envisions Caribbean difference in circular terms rather than the linear and divisive aspect that excludes the cultural and lived realities of Caribbean women and men. Equally important, race, gender, nation, age difference, and socio-economic factors should also become integral elements to help balance the equation and increase the chances of hegemonic subversion.

**Fanonian Decolonizing Philosophy and Postcolonial Women’s Writers**

Thinking along these very lines, Frantz Fanon, a Martiniquan writer and postcolonial thinker, posits that the colonized native develop a strong sense of self and assert selfhood and identity as a way forward to hegemonic subversion. In his poignant and piercing text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon examines the black person and
relations of independence and how colonized women and men can utilize selfhood as an instrument against hegemonic oppression. For example, he suggests that from whatever direction or angle one approaches the analysis of abnormal psychogenic conditions involving oneself and the other, one soon discovers that oneself will be centre stage. Accordingly, he states the following:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. . . The other has to perform the same operation . . . they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other. . . In its immediacy, consciousness of self is simple being –for-itself. In order to win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential. (216-217)

Fanon calls into question the dialectic of colonizer/colonized, civilized/savage and master/slave. His advice to the colonized native, so-called savage, slave or the othered being is to become recognized by making his or her presence known. In so doing, the native compels the other to respond in kind. The statement, “The other has to perform the same operation,” insinuates that the colonial other will realize that the othered native signals a shiftin tide. To be more specific, when the native makes his presence known to the colonizer, he would be shocked to realize that the silenced native has awakened and is prepared to challenge him. “The imposition of one’s existence on another man”
functions as an invitation or a challenge for the colonized native to demand this recognition and respect from the other. In accordance with Fanon’s view on the imposition of one’s existence on the other, perhaps, marginalized women of color can assert themselves to challenge the patriarchal other and eventually be recognized, respected and become his equal.

Fanon also maintains this view in his other classic work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Here he advocates a decolonizing philosophy. He takes issue with the marginalized natives and recommends that they seek a reversal in the binary and divisive roles of colonizer/colonized. He challenges the colonized native to reclaim the resources and legacies which the colonial oppressor has stolen from his people for centuries. For instance, Fanon prophetically acknowledges that during the period of decolonization the colonized masses and (including women and men of color), will mock the very dehumanizing values that keep them colonized.

In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up. . . For a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. . . As far as the native is concerned, morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler’s defiance, to break his flaunting violence-in a word, to put him out of the picture. The well-known principle that all men are created equally will be illustrated in the colonies the moment that the native claims that he is the equal of the settler. One more step and he is ready to fight to be more than the settler. In fact, he has already decided to eject him and to
take his place; as we see it, it is a whole material and moral universe
which is breaking up . . . his voice no longer turns me into stone. I am no
longer on tenterhooks in his presence; in fact, I do not give a damn for
him. (43-45)

Undoubtedly, Fanon seems irate on the “othered” state of being of his native people, and
in no uncertain terms, he appears to lay bare the notorious settler, who has displaced his
people and has long managed to colonize their lands and minds. Hence, he proposes a
well fortified force of natives to challenge, “break the flaunting violence,” and
ultimately eject the settler from their native lands. He also urges the colonized natives to
see the combined struggle as a liberatory mechanism that can dematerialize and dissect or
break up the settler’s universe. Of equal note, realizing that Fanon shifts between the first
person singular and plural, it also supposes that he is craftily stressing the urgency of the
colonized natives to begin to think along lines of using unity as a subversive strategy, to
eject the settler’s presence and assume their rightful place in their native lands.

In his work Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon further advocates that the colonized
native refuse exploitation by the colonizer and not submit to the colonizer’s class-based
and racist oppressive structures:

I sincerely believe that a subjective experience can be understood by
others; and it would give me no pleasure to announce that the black
problem is my problem and mine alone and that it is up to me to study it . .
. In this work I have made it a point to convey the misery of the black man.
Physically and affectively . . . Is there in truth any difference between one
racism and another? Do not all of them show the same collapse, the
bankruptcy of man? . . . It is propagated mainly among the middle classes, because they possess neither land nor house nor castle . . . By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. –we could point out to M. Mannoni that the displacement of the white proletariat’s aggression on to the black proletariat is fundamentally, a result of the economic structure of South Africa. (86-87)

Fanon points out the correlation between race and class discrimination and its crippling effect on individuals, groups or cultures. The differential or othered negative treatment is aimed at rendering the “othered” individual, group or culture inferior. By rendering the individual, group or culture inferior, the inflictor of the inferiority seeks to justify his or her actions. But Fanon points out that the middle or upper classes possess neither land nor house nor castle. In light of this, the oppressed proletariat is entitled to the land, houses and castles and capital splendor that the middle classes boast. Using Fanon’s logic, the proletariat masses of South Africa should be entitled to these economic sources of capital since, as he insinuates that the middle-class wealth and structures are part and parcel of their stolen legacy and capitalist displacement. Hence, the aggression of the black proletariat can be justified since the native proletariat has been both displaced and dispossessed. The latter’s aggression and need to struggle for the restoration of his or her natural as well as economic resources becomes imperative, since the middle and upper class interlopers have ruthlessly left the native proletariat bankrupt. Since “the middle classes own neither house or land,” displaced and dispossessed women and men of
color, who are regarded as inferiors by the middle classes should become awakened, aggressive, and seek to reclaim stolen and lost resources and spaces.

Freirian Liberatory Pedagogy

By the same token, Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* presents a similar decolonizing philosophy. Freire’s liberatory pedagogy recommends that oppressed peoples become humanized by resisting the dominant hegemonic systems. He suggests that oppressed peoples use their resistant abilities as transformative and emancipatory mechanisms:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and brings about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. . . The more radical the person, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, and to see the world unveiled. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (107-108)

Freire, like Fanon, advocates a critical analysis of the systemic educational structures that determine how our women and men exist. He propounds that women and men deal critically and creatively with reality and identify ways of arriving at the transformation of
their world. To be able to fully make sense of their world, the representations of the world society must be aligned with the lived realities and the experiences of the younger generation, for example. Freire also adds that the individual should “commit himself or herself, within history to fight at their side.” This final statement implies that the individual should look to monumental historical examples as evidence to help inform their liberatory struggle. Moreover, that Friere states as well, “One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasions, and good intentions” (108). It appears that he believes educational systems should mirror the experiential knowledge base of young women and men of society. In short, Freire advances the idea of a transformative educational system for young women and men. Since Freire’s pedagogy seems transformative, marginalized women of color can also use their experiential and historical knowledge to become liberated and empowered.

**Contemporary Feminist Critics**

**-bell hooks**

bell hooks, a Contemporary Feminist thinker and an educator who addresses the question of the women and men of color, and argues for a transformative educational system, believes that liberatory feminist and gender discussions should become an integral part of the cultural capital. In her book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* she notes that there is no one path to feminism. She maintains that people from diverse walks of life need feminist theory that speaks directly to their lives. She emphasizes that as a black woman feminist thinker, she finds it necessary to critically assess gender roles in black life to identify particular concerns and methods that must be
addressed so that the majority of women and men of color can begin to see the relevance of the feminist struggle in their lives.

Radical visionary feminism encourages all of us to courageously examine our lives from the standpoint of gender, race, and class so that we can accurately understand our position within the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. . . females and males of all ages, everywhere, continue to grapple with the issue of gender equality, continue to seek roles for themselves that will liberate rather than restrict and confine; and they continue to turn to feminism for answers. Visionary feminism offers hope for the future. By emphasizing an ethics of mutuality and interdependency, feminist thinking offers us a way to end male domination while simultaneously changing the impact of inequality. . . To ensure the continued relevance of feminist movement in our lives, visionary feminist theory must be constantly made and re-made so that it addresses us where we live in our present. (116-117)

hooks asserts that interdependent feminism promises a way forward to ending male domination and at the same time, change the effect of inequality. She also states that it is essential for gender analysis and feminist theory to be constantly under review across temporalities such that it includes where women and men of color are in their present. In a word or two, hooks advises that feminism be grounded within the socio-cultural and political contexts, for it to be considered realistic, differential and transformative feminism.
Similarly, Carole Boyce Davies, a Contemporary Caribbean scholar, points out in her work *Black Women, Writing and Identity Migrations of the Subject* that Black feminist politics has the potential of being oppositional and revolutionary, but still strives to become thus, owing to the dynamics of existing societal systemic structures.

Black feminist politics can only become transformational if it is sharper in its opposition and critique of systems of domination and able to activate its principles in more practical ways. It would therefore have to be more deliberately and practically located as sites of resistance to, and struggle against, multiple oppression: whiteness, maleness, bourgeois culture, Anglo-centeredness and so on. . . Feminist discourse has itself been a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women and in the society as a whole. These are the power relations which structure all areas of life: family, education, the household, political systems, leisure, culture, economics, sexual intercourse, sexuality, and so on. In short, feminism questions and seeks to transform what it is to be a woman in society, to understand how the categories woman and feminine are defined, structured and produced. (27-28)

Boyce Davies speaks to the institutionalized societal constructions that inform the value systems and social practices of women and men of society. She admits that Black feminism has the ability to become both revolutionary and transformative, but it must identify the dynamics of institutional structures such as the family, school, religious structures, culture, political and economic structures, the first of which, forms the basis of
society. Provided that a careful and thorough examination of the foregoing structures is done, it would more favorably increase the chances of promoting visionary and revolutionary Black feminism. As stated by bell hooks, visionary and revolutionary feminism should be based on the “time and places where women and men are at,” and perhaps here one can add that, it is an essential consideration as their respective societies redefine themselves.

-Ranjana Ash

Ranjana Ash, an Indian and postcolonial woman writer, in her article “The Search for Freedom in Indian Women’s Writing” explores the meaning of freedom for women in modern India. She also traces the evolution of modernization, urbanization and industrialization and their impact on life in modern Indian society. She shows how these systems of modernization, urbanization and industrialization have made it impossible to separate women’s freedom from Western systems of the same.

The freedom struggle received new power and impetus under the leadership of MK Gandhi, popularly called Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). His call to the masses of India brought thousands of men and women on to the streets in demonstrations, boycotts and other forms of non-violent non-cooperation with British rule. While the women’s movement today is in many respects critical of Gandhi’s views of women’s special capacity for suffering and their unique gift for the role of motherhood, and of his puritanical attitude towards chastity, Gandhi’s insistence on the fundamental equality of men and women, and the role women could play
in passive resistance against the colonial government, were decisive in radicalizing women’s sense of self-identity. (158-159)

Ranjana Ash brings to the table of discussion, the critical element of struggle which is a factor in the lives of women and men of color in India and other parts of the colonized world. She presents Gandhi’s anti-colonial stance and his value of equality between women and men. Despite his puritanical and relatively conservative values, he seems to espouse women. His insistence on the role women could play in the decolonizing process and in radicalization of their sense of identity exemplifies Gandhi’s interest in women’s welfare. His apparent optimism sounds promising. It also highlights the significant role that Indian women could have on reconstructing Indian feminism, and in fostering visionary and revolutionary politics in Indian Society.

Additionally, Joy James in her book *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* articulates anti-imperial and anti-racist feminism. She examines the inconsistencies and exclusions that exist within mainstream feminism as well as in the wider socio-political culture. She illustrates how women of color who seek election to political office are denied opportunities not only based on their gender, but on their race and socio-economic status. She informs how cultural policies differ from institutionalized state power and middle-class sensibilities. She also depicts how cultural stereotypes obscure the political agency of women of color. Likewise, she shows how black males are given preference over black women who seek election to political office. On the other hand, she demonstrates how Contemporary Feminism has attempted to redefine the negative cultural imagery about women of color.
Given the centrality of cultural criticism in Black feminist discourse, it is important to note the contributions of cultural black feminisms deconstructing fetish. In visual culture, fetish has been associated with blackness as primitivism and sexual license. The fetishized are seen as interlopers, limiting or contaminating a “civilized” citizenry. Critiquing or accommodating fetish with the ingenuity of subordinate cultures grappling with bad press, black women have produced diverse representations of black females and feminisms. (9)

James’ account observes how contemporary feminist thinkers of color attempt to deconstruct the racist representations of women of color not only in the formal political arena, but in media faucets. Owing to the fetishized media imagery that is presented about women of color, sadly, they are perceived as intruders or outsiders in a so-called “civilized” domain. However, James does not hesitate to indicate that there exists as well, more, various and one can suspect, positive images of women of color. Tersely, James’ summary is in essence a solid instance of revolutionary feminist thought.

Part II: Caribbean/Writers of Color on Identity, Gender and Justice

-Emilia Ippolito and Jamaica Kincaid

Emilia Ippolito in her book *Caribbean Women Writers: Identity and Gender* depicts how Caribbean women’s writings speak to a total lived experience that embodies the historical, cultural, political and lived experiences of the people of their region. Ippolito analyses how Caribbean writers address matters of hidden and fragmented or suppressed histories and cultural experiences. These hidden or suppressed histories and
cultural experiences have not been brought to the fore by the canonized writers. Ippolito also illustrates how the Caribbean writers in the likes of Jamaica Kincaid, for example, through works such as *Annie John* and *Lucy* echo difference and a revolutionary line of thinking. The latter idea seems pertinent, as I have also observed in other works by Kincaid, including *The Autobiography of My Mother*, her short fiction “Girl,” “Columbus in Chains,” and in her text “On Seeing England for the First Time,” that the heroines are not pro-status quo, they assert selfhood, and echo anti-ecolonial narratives. Perhaps more importantly, I have observed as well, that these narratives are mostly autobiographical. In “Girl,” for instance, Kincaid’s persona has a back-and-forth conversation with her mother, who attempts to culturally subordinate her. There is also a shift between the first to second persons in the narrative presented in *Girl*:

> Is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school? . . . Don’t sing benna in Sunday school; . . . But I do not sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school. . . . always squeeze the bread to make sure it’s fresh; but what if the baker won’t let me feel the bread? You mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won’t let near the bread? (769)

Here, one can assume that Kincaid seems to make good use of her feminist language, as a revisionist tool that could promote a decolonizing or anti-imperial stance. The dialogue between mother and daughter here, highlights the didactic of power versus powerless or silenced versus voiced. The voiced response that the persona echoes not only unsilences the unvoiced persona, but it challenges the mother’s authoritative voice. By the same token, Anh Hua, an Anti-imperial feminist thinker, submits that writing, language and the
spoken words are creative, political and intellectual weapons that Black diaspora women use to fight back against their assumed and constructed invisibility powerless or voicelessness (30). Accordingly, Emilia Ippolito writes the following as it relates to the conceptualization of voice and identity formation in Caribbean women’s writing.

Caribbean women writers seek to address the body of unwritten history and culture from the female standpoint. Both link the oral and written history, “collective story” and thematic quilting of stories are fundamental . . . the writers draw freely on richly allusive elements such as biblical narrative, proverbs, songs, fairy tales, reported speech dialogue, stream of consciousness, and monologue . . . the texts speak to the stifling variety of concerns, subject matter, social visions, linguistic ranges and formal experiment . . . The communal focus of Caribbean women’s narrative emphasizes the importance of the oral tradition. (8-9)

Here Ippolito tends to recognize a major difference that exists between the universal or linear maxim and established forms and structures of writing and the more circular and fluid forms. What she reveals here seems to be the more liberal forms that women writers utilize and what includes fuller and more complete representations of the historical, cultural and political experiences of women and men in Caribbean society. Canonized literary presentations have been traditionally sketchy, evasive and thus, have not portrayed a truthful and genuine picture of the various forms and ways of Caribbean life. The communal focus suggests that postcolonial Caribbean women writers attempt to capture a more realistic picture of the collective life experiences of people in
communities of color. To say the least, postcolonial women’s writing seems nothing short of visionary and revolutionary.

-Maryse Condé

At this point, I will briefly refer to the case of Maryse Condé, a postcolonial woman writer and nonnominee of the Nobel Peace Prize Alternate for Literature. Condé, the author of the novel _Heremakhonon_, (which will be detailed in Chapter Four of this dissertation) in which transformative and liberatory pedagogy is manifested. Condé has the following to say about _Heremakhonon_ in an interview that was conducted on Guadeloupe in March 1992, when she was a candidate running for the Regional Council:

The militants objected to Veronica, the central character, as a negative heroine, and some feminists hated her because she looked for her liberation through men. . . . However, it is now proven that this novel possesses sort of lasting appeal. Fifteen years after its publication, there is no colloquium or meeting or conference in this field without one or two papers on _Heremakhonon_. This means that although people challenge or criticize or even denigrate the novel, they cannot overlook it. (1992)

What this suggests is that by virtue of the novel causing a controversy (seemingly because Veronica, the heroine, does not match the traditional literary formula).

Therefore, _Heremakhonon_ becomes a work that is worthy of critical analysis. Probably more important, considering that even ‘feminists’ and one supposes these ‘feminists’ to be Mainstream Feminists who hated her work, it received a substantial amount of criticism. Furthermore, Condé points out in this interview that _Heremakhonon_’s protagonist Veronica, aligns herself with politically conscious and influential men as her
strategy for liberation. This also suggests that Condé is cognizant of where political power lies. So she echoes her sentiments regarding women’s liberation and societal change in the real-world setting.

Here, it could also be implied that Maryse Condé’s writing resembles Frantz Fanon’s resistant and decolonizing philosophy. For example, her liberated female heroines in various of her works including *Who Slashed Celanare’s Throat, I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, and *the Cannibal Woman*, leads one to suggest the same. In Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Mama Yaya tells Tituba: “Men do not love. They possess. They subjugate . . . There’s no end to the misfortunes of black folks” (164-165). Then in another instance, Hester tells Tituba:

I’d like to write a book, but alas, women don’t write books! Only men bore us with their prose. I make an exception for certain poets. Have you read Milton, Tituba? Oh, I forgot you do not read. *Paradise Lost*, Tituba, a marvel of its kind. . . . Yes, I’d like to write a book where I’d describe a model society governed and run by women! We would give our names to our children, we would raise them alone. (101)

Both Mama Yaya and Hester’s remarks are profound and echo positive changes for the roles of women of color. The idea of women giving their names to their children sounds promising. Women’s naming suggests a renewed identity for women. Of equal note, the *Paradise Lost* that Hester alludes to could be symbolically viewed as Tituba, the Caribbean heroine of color, who is physically displaced and placed in slave bondage in Salem, America, several thousands of miles away from her native home, in Barbados. Even more, Tituba’s displacement can be seen as symbolic of the collective displacement
of the race of women and men of color, who have historically been “untimely ripped from the womb” of Mama Africa, by European enslavers. To qualify the latter statement, Walter Rodney in his work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, presents arguments to depict this displacement of African peoples in the years of the Great Scramble for Africa in the 1800s that have led to the dispersal and ongoing civil wars and internal conflicts that have been waged on the African people, ever since this critical period in history. Moreover, to further support the view that Condé’s writing appears to bear Fanonian resistant and decolonizing contestations, in her work *Heremakhonon*, for example, she even cites Fanon’s landmark revolutionary work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, with her students.

Seemingly, in tandem with Maryse Condé’s liberatory fictional feminist expressions, is Patricia Gill’s novel *Buddhoe* that is set in St. Croix, Danish West Indies in the 1840’s and is actually based on a real-life story, in which Anna Haeggard, the young protagonist, a free woman of color, initially forms an association with the then governor of the Danish territory, Governor Peter Van Scholten. Anna’s association with the governor blossoms into a romantic relationship. Yet, this relationship means more than romance for Anna. Anna selflessly and altruistically considers her fellow enslaved Africans. She envisions freedom and a brighter day in the lives of her fellow enslaved Africans. She also works feverishly with Buddhoe, an enslaved African, who serves as the intermediary for the enslaved Africans and herself. Buddhoe is the character or middleman who is instrumental in the planning, orchestration, and execution of a slave rebellion, in which the estate houses and fields are set on fire. Because of Anna’s close association with Governor Van Scholten, she gains an opportunity to skillfully navigate a
powered space. She is likewise able to access resources by asserting selfhood. For instance, she insists on working closely with Governor Van Scholten, who likewise, gains some useful and meaningful insights from the brilliant and perceptive Anna. Anna functions both as a companion and an advisor to the governor. She complements him in the office of governor. The result of this association is the historic and symbolic freedom of the Africans on St.Croix, in 1848.

Anna’s wise counsel and defiance of societal norms serves a just cause. Perhaps more importantly, Anna is in control of her own sexuality. She represents more than the negative bodily images that are culturally perpetuated about women of color. She crosses an established boundary that the average woman of color does not. Moreover, Anna defies tradition and she attempts, it would seem, to reverse the images and roles for women of color through her defiant acts. Gill’s heroine Anna, works tirelessly to bring about socio-political changes for her fellow women and men of color in the Danish West Indies. The following excerpt from Gill’s novel, Buddhoe, exemplifies Anna’s effort to reverse the literary and real-life roles and the negative gendered typecasts about women of color.

Care about what? The estate houses? Not really. I am glad to see them gone. They may have been homes for your people, Peter, but for my people- we were slaves in those houses as well as in the fields. . . I am glad to see them burn, glad. It means the end of all that. It must go down in ashes, rubble, ruins, blood. I don’t care as long as it goes. . . Oh Peter, I could never leave St. Croix . . . Here I have been the Governor’s mistress, the people look up to me, my people do. I have achieved something for them. I cannot leave. It is my island. (135-137)
Therefore, Patricia Gill’s heroine Anna, like Maryse Condé’ heroine Veronica, strongly depicts these reversals in the narratives of their heroines. Furthermore, given that Gill’s heroine Anna, like Condé’s heroine, Veronica, asserts selfhood, sexual bodily freedom, and revolutionary thinking, it could be argued that their liberatory narratives could serve as harbingers of change for women of color in the real-world settings.

**The Objectification and Commodification of Black Women’s Bodies**

- Marlene Nourbese Phillips

Thinking along these same lines, Marlene Nourbese Phillips, a Contemporary Caribbean feminist thinker, in her analysis of “the Black Woman’s Body,” notes that it [the Black woman’s body] and space are the most precious resources. This space, Phillips places into two categories - the private and public space. The woman’s private space is the space between her legs and the public space is that social space that threatens and tries at all costs, to control the inner or private space. Phillips further points out that the Black enslaved woman was transplanted in the New World, with only her body. And this black body was used chiefly as chattel to sustain the production of the plantation economy. The three main ways in which the Black woman’s body was used to sustain this economy were as follows: first, as the “Black magic” of the White man’s pleasure, second, as the “Bag o’ sugar down dey” of the Black man’s release, and third, the space through which new slaves would be gotten (76-77).

From these observations, it would seem that enslaved Black women were seen chiefly for their market value and were not only subjects of sexual exploitation by their cruel slave masters, but they were also used to relieve and sexually satisfy male slaves.
Worse still, they were used continually for the lucrative gains of their inhumane slave masters, who mercilessly raped and “bred” them like they were beasts of burden to supply the labor force for the plantation economy. And that there was no redress for these atrocities that were done to the Black female bodies is disturbing. In light of the above statements, one might want to believe that it would have been only fair for enslaved women of color to have been granted some form of retribution, for the critical role that they played in sustaining the plantation economy. Although they provided “the most precious” forms of chattel to sustain the plantation economy, the enslaved women were never given a fair deal. To this day, women of color struggle for recognition, respect, and space in male-dominated public and private spaces.

Marlene Nourbese Phillips, likewise, maintains that if women of color were to make public, the private space, flaunting their own feminine goods could be liberating since the goods are their possession and property. Making public, the private space of the woman of color, could significantly reduce the degree of male control in private and public spaces, if not help to subvert female subordination. In reply to Nourbese Phillips posture here, it appears that if more colored women were to assert selfhood, they could potentially gain more access to resources and thus witness the differences they envision, in addition to, empowering experiences. In essence, it is patriarchal men who have historically been at the helm of the hegemony, and they seem to have been the chief oppressors of women. From these observations, women, particularly women of color, should be given an opportunity to lead. Hence, contemporary feminist thinkers including Marlene Nourbese Phillips urges women of color to seek relief from their commodified and subjected states, in the male governed private and public spheres through resistance.
Women of color can find relief from their oppression by resisting the very societal systems that limit them.

By the same token, Joan Cocks, author of the *Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critiques and Political Theory* posits that women disobey and not conform to the hegemonic bodily prescriptions. These dominant prescriptions she advises are ubiquitous and insidious. That is to say, the dominant societal images and prescriptions are found everywhere and they behave like tricksters. If women of color are not cautious, they could be easily trapped into conforming to these normative prescriptions of the capitalist tricksters and thus contribute to the perpetuation of their oppression. Cocks also adds that these hegemonic prescriptions are preserved inside the concepts of virgin, mistress, slut, and whore, animated movies of romance and marriage, sex and violence, in the plastic arts, and then reinterpreted in literary texts or on the printed page. Thus one notices that it can be difficult for one not to conform to these cultural value systems, as one is socialized and indoctrinated in the various named forms from infancy in the home environment, at school, at church, at play, in the media, and throughout one’s life.

Of equal importance, is Marilyn French’s commentary on the negative female objectification in art and the wider media. French notes that “women in Western art are the commodities designed to appeal to male buyers. The ultimate consumer is always presumed to be male, even in ads that are directed at women” (16). Just as the media portrays women in a negative light so, too, one can imagine that the literary presentations by canonical writers, more often than not, are essentially in the same negative and subordinating way. It is evident then that women seem to be targets for the blood-thirsty capitalist oppressors. It would seem that the longer women remain culturally, politically,
economically and spiritually marginalized, the more money the power-based societal institutions and corporations will accumulate. From these observations, creating an awareness of the subordination of women of color and resenting the institutionalized cultural and societal norms or orderings can be seen as an exit route from female marginalization within the confines of the patriarchal capitalist economy.

Accordingly, Antonio Benítez-Rojo cites Karl Marx who notes the following in his criticism of the German Capitalist Ideology in *Das Kapital*:

A new ruling class should represent its interests as the common interest of all members of society, put in an ideal form… it will give its idea the form of universality… the class making a revolution appears from the very start, merely because it is opposed to a class, not as a class but as the ruling class but as a representation of the whole society, it appears as the whole society confronting one ruling class. Every new ruling class achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the ruling class previously, in return for which the opposition of the ruling class against the new ruling class develops all the more sharply and profoundly. (Marx qtd. in Benítez-Rojo 379)

It appears here that Karl Marx advocates a new ruling class that is all-inclusive and represents all people of society. Although Antonio Benítez Rojo seems to revere Marx’s common interest of classes stream of thinking, he insists that “a civil society inhabiting a purely private space is a deeply flawed one, but such a notion is necessary to bourgeoisie rule, which thrives upon social individualization and fragmentation” (379). The issue that Benítez-Rojo seems to address here is the divisive gendered, racist, and class
systems that separate people. Although Marx advances the notion that “a new ruling class should represent its interest as the common interest of all people of society,” there still remain some limitations—The very idea of a “ruling class” suggests that one class is more important and superior to another. And one finds that such discourse could present more of the same marginalization and division that post-structural thinkers such as Mikhail Bahktin resent. Bahktin points out in *Rabelais and His World*, for example, that the carnivalesque by its unbridled and unrestrictive expressions could be used to taunt and subvert the standards of “highbrow” or upper-class culture (1984). Coupled with Mikhail Bahktin, Denise Riley argues that Karl Marx, in 1857, tried to effect a new historicisation of “man” across differing modes of production, because he wanted to save man as “the political animal from mutation into a timeless extra-economic figure, the Robinson Crusoe advanced by some political economies” (15). Clearly, Riley assumes that Orthodox Marxism tends to uphold and perpetuate patriarchal practices and value systems that seek to largely benefit men. In the same vein, Frankfurt Critical Theory maintains that Orthodox Marxism has tended to ignore or marginalize gender, preferring instead to concentrate on social class. The latter suggests, then, that women’s issues would not be given any consideration as social constructivists allow for girls and boys, women and men to conform to the already socially driven and normative masculine and feminine gender stereotypes.

**Muzigira Bonaventure on Ngũgĩ as a Prophetic Writer of Justice**

However, Muzigira Bonaventure calls to mind the pivotal issues of Orthodox Marxism, Communism, political and economic systems, and related ideologies, in
article “Devil on the Cross: Ngũgĩ’s Marxist Invitation.” He analyzes forms of race, class and gender struggle which are the divisive principles inherent in the Imperial Capitalist Project. He also examines the paralyzing effect of the social dualities or divisions such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat on the poor masses of individuals in African Society. Undoubtedly, Bonaventure perceives Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o as a prophetic writer of justice who considers it his responsibility and burden, to “tell out” the social evils that prevail in his Kenyan Society. Accordingly, Bonaventure writes:

Ngũgĩ takes courage to denounce the presence of the “devil” and invites the proletariat, including the exploited oppressed people and the masses of peasants for freeing themselves from imperialism and neo-colonialism. The layman’s image of Marxist critics is almost entirely shaped by the epoch we know as Stalinism, which is a movement supporting that the communist party should be the party and that the central government should control the whole political and economic system. The communists believe in an economic system in which the state controls the means of production for the people to create a society in which everyone is treated fairly. Once these prerogatives are not met, there is need to raise the proletariat’s awareness to claim for a fairer situation. This is according to the Marxist theory and one of the writer’s duties. (3)

Evidently, Bonaventure purports that Ngũgĩ resents classic or Orthodox Marxism. He also mentions that Ngũgĩ seeks to highlight the universal, divisive and linear ideologies of Imperial governments’ power and control, and simultaneously, to demand a balancing out of resources and access to those resources. He proposes that the means of production
and ownership of that production be accessible by the workers and producers of that production, who are the poor masses of Kenyan and other African women and men.

At the same time, Dr. Malik Sékou, a political scientist, at the University of the Virgin Islands, points out that a form of feminist critical theory has emerged that fuses elements of “standpoint feminism” with a broadly Marxist emphasis. “The fusion of Marxist elements with elements of standpoint feminism, allows for a more emancipatory potential operating as a force of resistance against the advance of global capitalism” (2016). Sékou’s account also seems reflective of Vladimir Lenin’s political ideology which promised to enable the poor workers and struggling classes to own the means of production themselves. Additionally, Marxist-Leninist ideology that is grounded in societal re-constructivism seeks to reverse the established social structures, as it proposes a classless system with common ownership of the means of production (Parson 91).

Seemingly, Orthodox Marxism on its own is not a welcome or desired practice by Caribbean Modernist thinkers. Moreover, Brian Meeks and Lindahl Folke submit that George Padmore, C.L.R James and Frantz Fanon appear to rework this Marxist-Leninist ideology from a Caribbean perspective. For example, Frantz Fanon’s Caribbean Marxism incorporates race theory, existentialism and psychoanalysis (327). Hence, theoretical constructs that examine race, and objectifying existentialist philosophy and which simultaneously promise a liberatory potential, appear to be worthy of consideration. Part of these societal re-constructivist and liberatory theoretical applications should more than likely include the struggles of poor classes of women and men of color whose experiences and general welfare, have been excluded from the discourse community of canonized literary presentations, and in real-world settings.
In answer to Meeks’ analysis, Richard D.E Burton cites Lisa Douglass who notes that Caribbean women and men inhabit distinct but complementary cultural spheres, each with a value system of its own. Douglass references the Jamaican street women or higglers who share public spaces with fellow Jamaican men.

These women are seen all over the country at any hour of the day or night, in markets and plazas, tending to their business on foot, usually unaccompanied. Like men, these women feel free to roam. They roam because their lives and their work require knowledge of the streets and freedom of mobility. . . . Nonetheless, a woman on the street is still, subject to stigmatization, and in part because she has trespassed on male cultural space that she is exposed to routine sexual harassment by men. Even the street woman who is not the prostitute, but the higgler (market woman) is regarded with ambivalence by the wider society: admired for her “manlike” autonomy and assertiveness, she is derided on account of her often invasive physical presence, her loud dress, and her even louder demeanor and language, which makes her a “comical character, a caricature of a woman, whose reputed strength of character contrasts to her lack of power,” a public woman, that is to say a man-woman, who serves as the absolute antithesis of what it means to be a “lady.” If the street-oriented woman disrupts the construction of social space, she is the negation of everything it is to be a “lady.” (164)

Undoubtedly, Douglass emphasizes the commonality that exists between Jamaican women and men which clearly are the race and class factors that limits their freedom in
public spaces. Likewise, the gender stereotyping of women, even the loud street woman or higgler clearly seems to be an example of the landmark dividing factors among Caribbean women and men, who could otherwise form altruistic alliances and benefit more financially, for example. Caribbean women and men could form alliances and unite both in public and private spaces, if they understood the complexity of their struggle for survival on the streets. Here one must point out that is ironic that the street woman like the street man, both work for an income, but the divisive gendered element of male over female power still manages to come into play. Gender conflict obscures their common goal to earn an income, and appears as the more important factor to them.

Although the higgler or street woman challenges society’s dictates by her loud dress, her loud speech and actions, she is still satirized and not taken seriously and so, not widely respected in Jamaican society. Considering that the behavior and actions of the higgler is closely monitored, this suggests that there leaves a lot to be desired where institutionalized male domination is concerned even in Contemporary Caribbean Society. What the latter statement “if the street-oriented woman disrupts the construction of social space, she is the negation of everything it is to be a lady,” infers, is that the struggle for Caribbean women’s liberation within the patriarchal societal context is real, disturbing, and indeed, should be taken with a revived and considerable degree of seriousness. However, the promising part about the street higgler and woman of color is that her very presence on the street, her behavior and voice can be potentially subversive to hegemony, since she is that voice, and has the very body that disrupts Mainstream Society and the status quo.
This is a blank text field.
ways” (2015). From these observations, “the woman problem” or “the woman question” becomes imperative and is critical for immediate attention. It also indicates that the underlying reason for women’s subordination should be explored in more detail both at the academic and social levels.

-Chikwene Ogumyemi

In this same vein, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, an African woman writer, puts forward the argument that black women writers face a double paradox. She raises the issue of race and the role race plays in the acceptance of their work and whether or not the work of black writers will get published. In addition, she states that as a woman writer she also has to deal with resentment by virtue of her being both black and female. Admittedly, the latter can be frustrating. Ogunyemi faces some major challenges it would seem, first and foremost, because the themes she presents are not consistent with those of Mainstream Imperial Feminism that helps to perpetuate the systems of the patriarchal power structure. Rather, the mainstream feminists address the issues of white privileged women and exclude the realities of marginalized women of color. The themes of her work reflect those of her ordinary people and their cultural realities. Ogunyemi’s themes voice the ideas and opinions of the marginalized people, their suppressed cultures and histories. She suggests reconstructing the narrative about black females as well.

Accordingly, Ogunyemi writes:

If the feminist literary movement desires the illumination of female experience in order to alter the status quo for the benefit of women, the African woman writer’s dilemma in a feminist context becomes immediately apparent. Black women are disadvantaged in several ways: as
blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture, as
women they are victimized by black men: and as black women they are
also victimized on racial, sexual, and class grounds by white men. (67)

Ogunyemi suggests a change in the status quo that divides people on grounds of race,
class and gender, as a way forward for women of color. She also notes that “black
women” are victimized by their own “black men” and the white male patriarchy. Now
while “black women” are “victimized” or oppressed by their own “black men” might be
ture, one deems that a greater emphasis should be placed on the fundamental reasons for
their oppression, in the first place. In the same vein, women of color should become
aware of the critical intersections of race, gender and class and how they contribute in
keeping them marginalized.

**The Role of Race and Economics in the Discrimination of Women and Men of Color**

The broader Contemporary Feminist Scholarship recognizes these holds of gender
race and class and they seek to move beyond these boundaries by refusing to accept the
label of “victim” and struggling for liberation from hegemonic oppressive systems. In
addition, C.L.R James, a Caribbean theorist, in his autobiographical work, *Beyond a
Boundary*, encourages marginalized individuals to reclaim lost identities and spaces by
taking on the challenge to become accepted by the other. James’ first person, male
narrator of color, masters his cricketing skills by observing other players coupled with
trial and error. He struggles to be accepted as a player of cricket by the elitist British
Colonial Cricket Association, which initially attracts middle and upper class players.
James’ narrator also crosses race, class and political boundaries. He is met with rejection
and insult from some of his fresh British team players, chiefly because he is a “Negro
boy," who wishes to excel and it is felt that socially underprivileged “Negro boys” are not smarter than British, white boys. Yet, James’ narrator perseveres and he excels.

Similarly, James’ narrator’s struggles for a space that racially and economically is denied to scores of women and men of color. Through his persistent struggle to be recognized and accepted by the so-called “privileged other and superior,” James’ narrator is able to move beyond the boundary lines of race and class that bar him from access to economic resources. James’ narrator’s struggles could be seen as an instrument for moving beyond the boundary of gender, race and access to economic resources. Equally important, Eric Williams, a Caribbean scholar and former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, in his work Capitalism and Slavery, provides an overview of the role of economics and race in the imperial capitalist system. Williams writes:

> Slavery in the Caribbean has been too narrowly identified with the Negro. A racial twist has thereby been given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery . . . The first slave trading and slave labor that developed in the New World involved, racially, was not with the Negro, but the Indian. (7)

In light of the above, Williams illustrates how money seems to be at the heart of slavery and slave torture during enslavement. He also shows how racism becomes a wile for the imperial colonizer’s or the capitalist oppressor’s economic plan to continue to work in today’s society. While race is used as a propeller in the process of slavery and in today’s society and enables the imperial capitalist oppressor an apparent justification for his unjust actions against oppressed people, the oppressor’s primary and ultimate goal is the
bullion he obtains from slave labor and the accompanying profits. These critical revelations behoove oppressed women and men of color to take stock of the historic societal holdovers and rethink their patronage of the imperial capitalist seizure and control of their limited resources. One reciprocal strategy that oppressed women and men of color can use to avenge the racial and economic injustice that is committed against them is the scaling back from supporting the racist, capitalist oppressors and their systems. It is with these considerations that women and men of color should become more frugal, self-reliant, and attempt to build a capacity which enables them to access more economic resources. Another strategy for oppressed people of color to help overcome the capitalist oppressor seems to be unity. Once they unite, strive to build their own economy and patronize their own people of color, their patronizing of the free market economy could be considerably reduced.

Moreover, Frantz Fanon in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* cites Ahmed Sékou Touré who expresses a similar sentiment. In his address to the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists that was held in Rome, Italy in 1959, Ahmed Sékou Touré asserts in his commentary on African liberation and African revolution, that revolution must be fashioned with the African people in mind.

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves. In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress,
and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the
artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and
completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of
suffering humanity. (206)

Accordingly, Touré suggests, it appears, that the African women and men and their
suffering on and off the African continent should be part and parcel of the broader
struggle for African and humanity’s liberation. Similarly, Thomas Sankara, an African
native of Burkina Faso and a male liberationist, sees women’s liberation as an essential
element to the total liberation of the African people and their continent. He believes if
women are not free, then, Burkina Faso also remains an un-free nation. He seems an
exceptional revolutionary leader. He gives priority to farming, tree planting and the
greening project. He believes that through enhancing the agricultural product, Burkina
Faso, could feed its own poor masses of women, men and children, sustain, and stabilize
the local economy. Sankara’s vision for Burkina Faso seems central to the uplift of
women of color and to maintaining traditional African agricultural and cultural practices.
To be more specific, he seems to see the liberation of Burkina Faso and its women as
central to the overall liberation of Africa (Britannica.com). Additionally, Kwame
Nkrumah, Ghana’s first post- independence president, during his lifetime, also sees the
liberation of Ghana as central to the liberation of the masses of women and men on the
African continent. Perhaps, if more men shared the same idea, there could be more
harmony between women and men.

Likewise, Olaudah Equiano, an enslaved African, in his autobiographical work
The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African
recounts the peace and harmony that existed between his mother and father and among people in his native Nigerian society, prior to his capture by the European interlopers.

I hope the readers will not think I have trespassed on their patience, in introducing myself to them with some account of the manners and customs of my country. They had been planted in me with great care, and made an impression on my mind, which time could not erase, and which all the adversity and variety of misfortune I have since experienced, served only to rivet and record; for, whether the love of country be real or imaginary, a lesson of reason or an instinct of nature, I still look back with pleasure on the first scenes of my life. . . My father, besides many slaves, had a numerous family, of which seven lived to grow up, including myself and a sister, who was the only daughter . . . my mother adorned me with emblems, after the manner of our greatest warriors . . . our women of distinction wear golden ornaments, which they dispose with some profusion on their arms and legs. When our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they afterwards dye, and make into garments. They also manufacture earthen vessels, of which we have many kinds . . . Our manner of living is entirely plain . . . (15-35)

Harmony, simplicity and resourcefulness seem to characterize Equiano’s traditional Nigerian society. Harmony, simplicity and resourcefulness seem to characterize the women and men’s relationships. Perhaps harmony, simplicity and resourcefulness should be central elements to the retrieval and liberation of marginalized women and men of
color, in the broader context of the colonized world. In like fashion, Karli Sherlita Robinson-Myers shows that the Sankofa bird, which is represented in fiction and teledrama, is the symbol of Africans’ not moving or drifting too far away from their past origins, in order to progress in the future. It also exemplifies the concept of African identity, struggle, retrieval and includes recognizing one’s roots and returning to one’s source for healing from suffering (2-3). As a case in point, Haile Gerima’s film Sankofa in which Mona, the main character, goes on a spiritual journey to Africa and uses the understandings that are generated from this spiritual journey of retrieval, to enable her to help cope with and eventually overcome her struggles, provides a solid example of the crucial role of Sankofa healing, in the struggles of women of color. From the foregoing observations, both the Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Caribbean scholars categorically tend to agree that resistant tendencies, unity and struggle and a return to origins are crucial to the freedom of an oppressed people. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, likewise, seems to think along these said lines in his work Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, as he suggests that oppressed people embrace “the language of life, the element basic to the whole notion of language, its origin and development; that is the relations people enter into with one another” (388). Hence, the struggle of oppressed women of color should be hinged to the struggle of oppressed people, in general who could collectively seek freedom by returning to their origins and discover survival strategies of their ancestors. By enlightening women and men of color on the root causes of their marginality and poverty, collectively they could begin to resist the systems and norms of the patriarchal power structures and cause them to crumble, one might add. To enable black women and women’s writers to recreate the narratives,
negative bodily images, and redefine the perceptions about women of color and men, they should not be seen as victims only. Their initial aim should be to struggle for recognition, respect and inevitable acceptance. Seemingly, one way to doing this is by returning to the times and spaces of their past struggles and finding their bearings for continuing their daily struggles. The ultimate aim would then be to lessen the impact of the oppressive patriarchy with its insidious systems of gender, race and class.
Chapter Two

Caribbean Women, the Significance of the Woman Writer’s Presence and Voice of Resistance

In comparison, Consuelo Lopez in her article “I am the Life the Strength, The Woman: Feminism in Julia de Burgos’ Autobiographical Poetry,” shows that the contributions of women are devalued. She also emphasizes how de Burgos, a Puerto Rican feminist, used her poetry to protest the status quo and the marginalized position of women. Lopez writes:

Although women have been involved in shaping political events . . . they have been underrepresented among playwrights, novelists, essayists, and poets. Diana Velez reminds us that in the 1960s, there had been little overtly feminist writing, with some important exceptions such as Luiza Capetillo’s work . . . The dearth of prominent women’s writers reflects not only the economic condition of the women but also, and equally important, their marginalization in social and literary circles. Nowhere, is this more evident than in the poetry of Julia de Burgos . . . it could also be argued that the word signifies the power of the conquering sword over the voiceless oppressed, de Burgos’ appropriation of the word challenges the subordination of the silent female to male authority. In fact her poetic vitality springs between her sensual needs, “the one congruent with feminine scripts of abasement and submission, the other a criticism of that structure of desire and that psychic career.” The social “script” can be
construed as an offering to social analysis what ideology offers to cultural analysis. In Julia de Burgos’ she ridicules conventional women. (57-59)

Lopez argues that de Burgos’ poetry articulates the need for difference, recognition and gender equality. The excerpt that follows from one of de Burgos’ poem illustrates her resentment to conventional practices and conventional women. Admittedly, it would seem that it is the “holier than thou art” and conventional women who either consciously or unconsciously contribute in the longevity of the oppressive patriarchy.

The voice that rises in my poems is not your voice; it is mine;
you are the covering and I the essence;
and between us lies the deepest abyss.
You are the cold doll of social lies,
and I the virile glimmer of human truth.(59)

Clearly, de Burgos seems to have little tolerance for the genteel culturally-subordinated female who does not challenge male domination. She urges her to wake up from her silent slumber and begin to question and challenge the patriarchal oppressor. The challenge becomes unsettling to the dominant oppressor, who soon realizes that his days of domination are numbered. Both Lopez and de Burgos suggest that a new day is on the horizon for women, particularly women of color, provided they continue to struggle for difference and change. It would seem then, that for women of color to potentially assume leadership positions, their asserting selfhood is crucial, as they exist in a heavily sexist and male-dominated culture that denies them agency.

Similarly, Harry Vanden and Gary Prevost demonstrate how women of color in Latin America constantly grapple with race, class and gender issues. They state that
although Afra-Latin American women have made significant contributions to the women’s movement in Latin America and continue to play key roles in the social transformation, they are still met with discrimination owing to their race. They mention the contributions of Vilma Espin, a Cuban woman of color, who was born on April 7, 1930 and died on June 18, 2007. Espin became known as the heroine of the Cuban Revolution. She fought alongside Fidel and his brother Raúl Castro, during the Cuban Revolution in 1959. She had much influence in the Castro administration. She held key positions in the Cuban Communist Party and becomes an influential member of the Cuban Council of the State. She was also an active member of the women’s rights and feminist organization in Cuba and advised both Fidel and Raul Castro. Vanden and Prevost also add that Black women, like the indigenous women, remain at the bottom of the social ladder in Latin America. As a result of their marginalized status, Afra-Latina women have resorted to form their own organizations as a form of solidarity to give voice to and address specific issues of concern such as gender inequity, race, ethnicity and difference.

Indeed, many black women in Latin America complain that mainstream white organizations do not understand the intersection of race and gender. For many black women’s organizations, this nexus provides a much needed framework of understanding. . . . There are also distinct forms of discrimination that occur against a person when gender, race or ethnicity intersects. That is, women who are black or indigenous are more apt to suffer discrimination than either a white woman or an indigenous woman.

(11)
Vanden and Prevost raise the critical issue of racial difference and socio-economic factors facing women of color in Latin America that mainstream feminist organizations do not address. They consider the different forms of discrimination that women of color receive. Moreover, when Vanden and Prevost stress that black and indigenous women, are more likely to suffer from discrimination than white women, this is upsetting. In light of this, it necessitates that more feminist organizations that seek to address differences in race and socio-economic factors, for example, come on stream and challenge the standards of White Mainstream or Imperial Feminism. Therefore, it would occur that women of color ought to strive to address their unique racial and gender issues themselves since White Mainstream Feminism does not promise to offer any viable solutions to their discrimination and struggles.

Carter G. Woodson, in his book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, posits that people of color participate in the struggle for their own freedom. By participating in the struggle, women and men of color, Woodson asserts, can make the difference of which they dream. Woodson urges the women and men of color to assert selfhood. Part of this struggle and the language of struggle, according to Woodson, means women and men of color having to come out of their comfort zones and starting to challenge the limiting conventions of their society.

The Negro, therefore, like all other oppressed people, must learn to do the so-called “impossible.” The “uneducated” Negro business man, however, is actually at work doing the very thing which the “mis-educated” Negro has been taught to believe cannot be done . . . The trouble is that they do not think for themselves. If the “highly educated” Negro would forget
most of the untried theories taught him in school, if he could see through
the propaganda which has been instilled into his mind under the pretext of
education, if he would fall in love with his own people and begin to
sacrifice for their uplift—if the “highly educated” Negro would do these
things, he could solve some of the problems now confronting the race . . .
the thought of the immediate reward, shortsightedness, and the lack of
vision and courage to struggle and win the fight made them failures to
begin with. They are unwilling to throw aside their coats and collars and
do the groundwork of Negro business and thus make opportunities for
themselves instead of begging for a chance. (44-47)
Woodson’s fiery message appears to contain some essential advice for oppressed women
and men of color. In addition to asserting selfhood, he calls on them to rethink the untried
educational theories that they have learnt since the beginning of their formal education. In
a word or two, he challenges women and men of color to be critical and visionary
thinkers. He encourages them to do the reverse of the dogmatic mindset that the
conventional practices of society espouse. Woodson also insists that women and men of
color become responsible for their own advancement. Equally important, he recommends
that they be creative and innovative. Hence, they would be better able to access resources
within the hegemonic power structure. Furthermore, realizing that the patriarchy does not
provide opportunities for the advancement of the masses of people, Woodson’s
suggestions appear to be worthwhile. And Woodson does not exclude any oppressed
group. His advice can be applicable to women of color whose presence and voices have
been historically absent and suppressed from the cultural patriarchal narrative.
Accordingly, women of color can strive for a presence and space to seek redress for gendered societal injustice. Woodson advances the view that colored women and men can precipitate relief from their oppression by embracing the elements of selfhood, critical thinking, incorporating new and revised or alternative ways of conducting business, and thus weakening the foundations of the status quo. Were marginalized women of color to view Woodson’s advice as a sound tool of enlightenment, more people of color might become equipped with the knowledge and skills that are required to navigate more spaces in their communities of color. Thus, they could lobby for gender equity and radical socio-political changes. In light of the preceding statements, education seems to be the tool for the empowerment and the uplift of socially underprivileged women and men of color.

Part I

Caribbean Women Writers, the Ancestral Mother Bond, Memory and Historical Consciousness as Forms of Resistance to Planter Class Oppression and Revolutionary Feminist Language

-Ryhaan Shah

Then too, Ryhaan Shah, a Postcolonial and Indo-Guyanese feminist writer and author of the novel *A Silent Life*, which will be detailed in Chapter Three, notes the following in an online interview:

The writer is always present. The writer has to have a point of view underlying, with what the characters go through, are saying and so on. Writers sometimes express disappointment with the structure. You are
supposed to become Little England. For instance, my first novel deals with women’s issues. The history, struggles within the colonial power structure… and successes of educated women. (2013)

Here again, Shah brings into focus the divisive societal structures such as gender, race, and class that limit the poor and working classes of women and men within the oppressive Postcolonial State. Simultaneously, one notices that Shah as a contemporary woman writer seems to be in sync with the societal impulses and has a similar lived reality to her heroines. The space that Shah creates to foreground her concerns regarding the struggles of women in her native Guyana, and in other parts of the Caribbean as well as in India, for instance, is through becoming an active participant of the literary discourse community. And Shah does not imitate the writing style of the established canon. Rather, she discusses themes that speak to the historical and cultural experiences and realities of Caribbean women. She also seeks to empower her female characters by recognition of their talents, skills and by emphasizing their educational successes. The latter which serves as a springboard to multiple other successes can be seen as the primary vehicle for women’s ascendency into positions of leadership.

**Joy Mahabir and Miriam Pirbhai**

Joy Mahabir and Mariam Pirbhai present an analysis of Indo-Caribbean identities, some of their gender struggles and their plantation history. Mahabir and Pirbhai indicate that Ryhaan Shah, author of *A Silent Life*, for example, is a strong voice and sounding board for Indo-Caribbean women, in her role as a postcolonial woman writer and activist
in Guyana. The following is an excerpt from Mahabir and Pirbhai’s critique of Shah’s novel, *A Silent Life*.

Among the Guyanese women writers, Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* stands out for its singular representation of Jahaj Bhain’s history of grass roots by a Guyanese woman writer to provide a Muslim female perspective, but also to focus on an older generation of women’s contributions to agricultural labour reform. Few, such experiences and forms of resistance [by Indo-Guyanese women] were recorded against planter oppression, as a fact which brings these figures of resistance to light. As *A Silent Life* demonstrates, the excavation of these women’s histories is a tentative process. For instance, Aleyah gradually discloses in partial fragments of memory or second hand accounts, of her maternal grandmother’s unacknowledged past as a community activist. (10)

Notably, Mahabir and Pirbhai stress the critical role that knowledge of one’s past history and ancestral heritage can have on people’s lives. They also depict the revolutionary and resistant acts of defiance to planter oppression that were exercised by the oppressed workers. They also reveal how the historical acts of resistance can become a tentative process. Similarly, Mahabir and Pirbhai demonstrate how instrumental the grandmother figure’s unacknowledged and historically suppressed past as a community activist, can be used to inform, inspire, enlighten, and simultaneously, empower the younger generation of women. Thinking along these same lines, Marcus Josiah Garvey’s (a Jamaican liberationist and Pan-African thinker) coins the following statement: “A people without knowledge of their past history and culture, are like a tree without roots” (Garvey).
In similar fashion, and in keeping with the roles of history and culture in the woman of color’s struggle for equality and in her challenge of male power in private and public spaces is the following. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, Feminist educators at the Institute of Gender Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Campus discussed their book *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments* in a joint online interview that was conducted on May 15, 2017, in which they referenced Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*. Gabrielle Hosein points out the following about the novel:

Shah’s *A Silent Life* is a work that makes us question our notion of women in our History. In 1917 when Indentureship was abolished, Indo-Caribbean women examine modernity and diversity. All women and men navigate patriarchy. Indo-Caribbean women resisted traditional roles, thus forgoing all kinds of relationships. They make choices under dire circumstances . . . Shah makes reference to the Marxist example of the Pundit which is profound. (2017)

On the other hand, Lisa Outar remarks that *A Silent Life* challenges the status quo, politicians, the Indo-Caribbean and the wider Caribbean community. “It is a visionary book for change in the Indo-Caribbean community and the broader Caribbean literary and real-world landscapes. Indo-Caribbean women for instance, have negotiated Christianity through education and created more spaces for themselves” (Outar 2017). It would occur then, that Hosein and Outar view historical awareness and the class issue that plagues Indo-Caribbean and other women of color in the Caribbean and in other parts of the colonized world as pivotal elements in their reinstatement of identity, their resistance to
gendered roles and in their reclaiming of socio-political spaces. For some additional landmark contemporary examples of women of color’s resistance to hegemonic societal oppression and their value of the ancestral bonds of their mother lands, Ann Morris’ article “The Bloodstream of our Inheritance: Female Identity and the Caribbean Mothers’- Land,” postulates that for the Caribbean woman, the notion of motherland is especially complex. She points out that it encompasses in its unique culture as well as the body of tropes, talismans and female bonding that is a woman’s heritage through her own and other mothers, then are conjoined. This suggests that the link between the Caribbean woman and her native homeland functions like an infant or foetus that is attached to his or her mother, by means of the umbilical chord. Morris adds that if a woman is able to claim a connection to both, she is well prepared for the journey toward self-identity and fulfillment. But if she has been denied a developmental bond with her own mother, then the “mother’s land” itself may provide a surrogate. (219) Basically, Morris’ mother land concept is reflective of Adrienne Rich’s mother bond, and how the mother bond serves as a unifying device for women and a potential agent that can deconstruct established oppressive patriarchal norms.

Furthermore, Barbara Omolade notes in her article “Black Feminism,” that motherhood had a more crucial role than fatherhood. “The mother is sacred and her authority is so to speak unlimited” (219). African women, she adds, did not belong to the husband’s family, but continued to belong to their own family after marriage and were only temporarily separated from it. She further states that African women in traditional societies had as equal a role as their male counterparts. For example, she claims that women participated in family councils, to have redress against mistreatment even by their
husbands, and to have the right to property, to accumulate personal wealth and goods from their labor. She continues by pointing out that African women are seen as valued citizens with politically equal rights and economic freedoms that differed largely from European women, who exist during the same era.

When comparing black women in traditional African society with women in Europe, a qualitative difference in world view emerges. In Europe between 1500 and 1700 millions of women were burned at the stakes as witches, ostensibly for communicating with God or practising medicine outside the male-dominated church. But the witch hunts were a systematic attempt to eradicate any “heretical” thinking as well as independent activity of women. In contrast, female organizations in Western African tribes flourished and were responsible for educating women about sexuality, obstetrics, and gynecology. Men were forbidden by tribal law to interfere. . . . There was no religiously reinforced system justifying male domination or male priesthood controlling knowledge and excluding women in Africa. African men never pondered whether women had “immortal souls” or were bestial in nature. The religious system in Africa included powerful female gods that often designated men and women as their god-children, requiring both to emulate and obey them. There was no economic system in Africa where women were appendages, household ornaments, or worthless drudges. African women were workers, encouraged to work and participate in the survival of the tribe and clan. Wealthy men were proud of their wives for working and managing market
stalls which traded goods and crafts. Their activities enhanced the family status and wealth. (248-249)

From the above observations, it would seem that women in pre-colonial West African society enjoyed a considerable amount of political, spiritual and economic freedom, while their European female contemporaries, are unjustly tortured and remained oppressed. Given that Omolade mentions women in traditional West-African society women met to hold family and tribal council meetings to challenge or seek redress for various forms of mistreatment against them or to question the injustice done to women even by their own husbands, to have the right to property, and to accumulate personal goods and wealth for their labor, this speaks volumes of the potential liberty that such a socio-political organization promises. Evidently, traditional West African women seem empowered and liberated as they resist various forms of oppression. Thus, they are able to secure a space and a voice in the political decision-making process of both their familial and societal affairs.

Knowledge of one’s history enables one to solve and better understand scores of mysteries that surround one. Through enlightening the younger generation of colored women with knowledge of their ancestral struggles, undoubtedly, they can become equipped with the underpinnings that are necessary to challenge the societal myths and untruths, unearth their hidden histories and suppressed cultures. Perhaps, more women of color can potentially assert selfhood and navigate pathways to liberation from societal trepidation and holds. Moreover, they can use this knowledge to reclaim socio-political spaces and positions of power.
On the other hand, Elvire Natalie Gaillot, although she reveres the sacred and ancestral mother bonds, presents another critical angle of the Mother Country/Colony dialectic of the colonized Creoles and their relationship with the so-called Mother Country or Mothering Nation. She analyses the negative representations of the Caribbean and Creole women and the hegemonic systemic limits that are associated with their colonial status and keeps them stagnant and tied to culturally marginalized spaces. Her work also shows how non-canonized writers or writers of the “Elogé Creolité” have glorified and reified the bastardization of the West Indian worlds into kaleidoscopic plurality. In addition, she illustrates how Feminist Thinkers like Maryse Condé, mentioned earlier, attempts to challenge the status quo in her novel Heremakhonon, for instance. Gaillot further states that Maryse Condé reveals how women’s relationships in their native lands reflect the historical fragmentation that constructed the colonized West Indies. And she expresses that Condé exposes a discrepancy that extended Antillian genealogy (traced back to Africa and Europe) and the incapacity of women as symbolic mothers to nurture the cultural family. In accordance with the latter statement, Gaillot adds:

Condé portrays Guadeloupe as a bastard nation whose dependency upon economic, and political reality of a global economy that is determined by the West, questions its survival. For example, Guadeloupe’s economy does not compete with that of world leader countries. Therefore, the global participation has been mediated through France . . . the visionary theories of Creolité are therefore, questioned not by the overwhelming presence of
“Tutelary monsters,” but also by real division between Caribbean men and women. (101)

Here again, Maryse Condé, a revolutionary and visionary thinker and writer, it would seem, seeks to challenge the institutionalized restrictive societal power structures wherein she and her fictional colonized subjects exist and operate. Condé seems to write in praise of the bastard nation, despite the presence of its “Tutelary monsters” in the colonizing power and neglectful, so-called mother country.

Furthermore, Asampash Rogers in her article “Heremakhonon and the Crisis of Representation and Historical Consciousness” provides a critique of Maryse Condé’s work Heremakhonon (which will be analyzed in Chapter Four) and the crisis of the colonial subject. According to Rogers, “the article is not merely about subjectivity or identity; rather it is about the subject Veronica’s representation and the historical consciousness or memory of the African continent” (39). It is through this encounter with the African continent, it seems, that could give the colonized world subjects the kind of experiential knowledge necessary to arrive at their personal conclusions about Africa, and so these subjects could adjust their lens about these continents. Perhaps Condé can be given some degree of credit since she spent twelve years of her life conducting independent research in Africa. Nevertheless, scholarly research on people’s origins as done by Condé, can only serve to enrich scholarship and understandings of African peoples and their culture. Contemporary Caribbean thinkers including George Lamming and Kenneth Ramchand, insist that the ancestral and mother bonds should be seriously considered, as people’s origins and historic sites of oppression are inextricably bound up
with each other. In brief, the ancestral and mother bonds seem to be connected like an umbilical cord connects an offspring to its mother.

Accordingly, Kenneth Ramchand, a Contemporary Caribbean theorist notes that:

> The Spirit of the African Negro civilization conscious of it or not:
>  
> animates the best Negro artists and writers of today, whether they come from Africa or America. So far, as they are conscious of African Negro culture and are inspired by it they are elevated in the international scale; so far as they turn their backs on Africa the mother they degenerate and become feeble. For Senghor, it is not necessary to hunt out survivals of African cultures in the usual senses. The survival of the descendants of Africans is the same as the survival of the Negro civilization. In the West Indies, the consciousness of Africa has been awakened by the movements of the preceding decades, and the nationalist spirit is stirring . . . Lamming’s vision of the inter-relationship of politics with other aspects of life allows his novels to run from political inertia to the theme of cultural loss. (134-137)

What Ramchand and Lamming appear to address here, is a number of critical issues that impact West Indians and their inward and outward struggles for survival in a historical and socio-cultural hegemonic context. For instance, they seem to speak to the “Terrified Consciousness” of the Creoles and their identity issues. As a case in point, Antoinette, the female protagonist in Jean Rhyss’ Wide Sargasso Sea is a classic example of the confused and terrified conscious Creole or West Indian woman who also struggles with an inferiority complex. Ramchand and Lamming also seem to attempt to finda
potentially feasible remedy or a solution to the identity problems, that Creoles both in the
fictional world and in real-life settings commonly grapple with, on a daily basis. To
accomplish a solution or at least lessen the endemic nature of the problem, they suggest
that the West Indian native or the Creole first return to his or her origins, and then,
identify and attempt to pattern the creative survival strategies that their African forbears
utilized during their times of oppression caused by their enslavers. George Lamming’s
following passage extracted from his novel *Season of Adventure* in which Fola, the
protagonist, has a noticeable awakening once she makes her spiritual journey or
pilgrimage to Africa, exemplifies his visionary, redemptive and revolutionary idea for
West Indians and women and men of color:

> It’s the same rhythm, he said. “And the music of the Steel Drums.” You
yourself have said no music makes you feel the same way . . . Fola felt a
sudden resentment towards him. Her triumph would have to be as large as
the families whom she was about to defend; for the civilized honour of the
whole republic, was now in danger. (160-161)

The spiritual pilgrimage to Africa, it appears, leads to the unusual and marked awakening
experienced in Lamming’s protagonist, Fola. It also causes a stir among the upper classes
of so-called civilized society. And it is Fola’s fictional return to her origins that sparks
the flame of redemption and change for the people of her native Caribbean Community.

**Cristina Cabral on Caribbean Women Crossing Borders, Memory and Resistance**

In comparison, Cristina Cabral points out in her article “Crossing
Borders/Memory and Resistance,” that oppressed women of color, return to the origins
of their oppression and retrace the steps of their ancestors and put into practice the methods of survival that they identified and utilized to enable them to overcome their current struggles. Cabral indicates that through memorializing the crossings of the past societal boundaries or borders, it is empowering in that memory of the struggle is what could be used to potentially fuel present struggle and help to subvert the repressive gendered systems of society’s establishment (400). Similar to Cristina Cabral, is Anh Hua, who states in her article “Black Diaspora Feminism and Writing: Memories, Storytelling, and the Narrative World as Sites of Resistance” that “Narrative strategies and storytelling are forms of resistance” to the male dominated sexist systems, which are designed to subordinate women of color (31). In concert with Anh Hua, is Carole Boyce Davies, who points out that Black women’s narratives and texts echo the changes that are evolving in the “black woman’s renaissance.” (29) Boyce Davies writes:

For the Black female writer, journey though at times touching the political and social, is basically a personal and psychological journey. The female character in the works of Black women is in a state of becoming part of an evolutionary spiral, moving from victimization to consciousness . . . because of restrictions placed on the black heroine’s physical movement, she must conduct her quest within close boundaries. . . It may be that this is where we are today, at that point of redefinition and a recognition of tentativeness. For the growing availability of a variety of narratives and texts, with new ones being produced all the time in the “black woman’s renaissance” . . . is changing and will continue to change the examinations of black female experience as it relates to mobility. . . . This will require
new and thorough examinations and retesting of a variety of hypotheses on the nature of Black (women’s) writing. . . Escape for Black women/men has necessarily involved the seeking out of protective spaces, or concealment at some points, as the logic of “underground railroad” implies and particularly the darkness of the night during which time freedom/flight was often undertaken. (132-133)

Here the ancestral and maternal lines appear as the embryonic and cohesive devices, which connect women of color today and their struggles to those of their forbears. Although their ancestral maternal figures fought against all the odds to navigate and secure safe spaces as a safeguard to their survival and that of their offspring during their time, it is heartrending today to observe that the women and men of color continue to be excluded, “othered,” and denied opportunities based on their race. Therefore, the state of women and men of color should be closely overhauled. If consciousness were to be raised, the chances of racist and sexist modes of discrimination can be reduced, if not halted. While both women and men of color stand out because of this othering, the bodies of black women stand out more often than those of black men because of the negative societal connotations and identity formations that are psychologically attached to black women’s bodies. The matrices of these mental associations seem to be plantocracy and servitude.

Hence, if the sufferings and torture of the sites of plantocracy and servitude are kept in focus and are treated as an ongoing cycle or process of sufferings, perhaps women of color who are perceived as victims by many who espouse the patriarchal mindset and patriarchal standards, would begin to see endless possibilities for themselves as they seek
to reverse the limiting patriarchal practices and increase their chances of physical and mental upward mobility. In short, what can be observed from the foregoing statements is the double of movement for women of color, which means that women of color would be moving through safe spaces socially and at the same time, they would be increasing their consciousness level to societal marginalization. Seemingly, Boyce Davies analyses how women of color have been historically moving and not just moving physically, but psychologically.

As perceived by Frantz Fanon, in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, there are times when the Black women and men cannot escape their bodies. And he artfully dubs the following statements:

There are times when the black man is locked into his body. Now, for a being who has acquired consciousness of himself and of his body, and who has attained to the dialectic of subject and object, the body is no longer a cause of the structure of consciousness, it has become an object of consciousness. (225)

Fanon calls for an awakening in black women and men. To fully understand their struggles and the root causes of their struggles, it seems incumbent on black women and men to become attentive to the traumatic historic past of their ancestors and use those understandings as benchmarks to chart their future course and discover avenues of relief or escape from their oppression. Making a conscious effort to memorialize the past journey and sites of contestation of their ancestral maternal figures, promises relief to women of color. This very remembrance or memorialization of these sites of contestation and the resistant tools used by their forbears can be deemed reasonably reliable, since
their forbears were able to outlive slave torture and identify creative routes of escape. Again, it would seem that the black body is the marker of discrimination or objectification and so, it becomes the core of the endless struggle for women and men of color. However, in addition to gender, race becomes a matter of concern for women of color. Black bodies often seem to be read negatively. Hence, women of color should be ever ready to challenge the negative interpretations of their bodies and gender discrimination on various fronts and in various spaces, as the source of their struggle, seems historically and culturally-embedded. Equally important, the consciousness level for women of color to oppressive structures should be from A to Z, and cover a broad variety of resistant modes or methods that include thoughts, actions and expressionisms.

**Revolutionary Feminist Language**

Perhaps Julia Kristeva’s analysis of feminist criticism in which she tackles issues such as feminist language, and shows that feminist writing challenges former canonical writings about women that suppress the woman’s body and sexual pleasure and denies a woman’s self-expression might be necessary. “Write yourself. Your body must be heard.” Kristeva believes that once women learn to write their bodies they will not only realize their sexuality, but they will enter history and move toward a future based on a “feminine’ economy of giving rather than the masculine economy of hoarding. Kristeva adds that one of the goals of the Third Wave Feminist Project is to redefine and rediscover women’s history and culture, particularly women’s communities that have nurtured female creativity. Likewise, she believes that neglected women’s writers should be considered so that an alternative literary tradition and canon that better represents
women can be forged. Moreover, one of her persuasions is that women should not be seen as merely sexual beings, but they should be defined as political beings as well. The societal language and imagery that sexualize women serve as major limitations to women’s progress and social uplift. If there were gendered language reversals through “women writing their own bodies and letting their bodies be heard,” it could help to redefine the negative sexualized perceptions of not only women of color, but women, in general. Potentially, women can be perceived in more political terms than merely sexual terms. Kristeva’s latter point appears to touch squarely on Marxist-Leninism, and suggests that women workers can potentially be owners of the means of production, and hopefully, become more socially and politically empowered beings (Kristeva qtd. in Murfin 174-175).

Furthermore, in her book *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History*, Denise Riley, a feminist writer, challenges the status quo and she strongly advocates women’s political ascendancy in her revolutionary language claims. She also cites Lou Andreas Salome and the Female Political Union of Newcastle, to their Fellow Country women in 1899, who propounded the following: “We have been told that the province of woman is her home, and that the field of politics should be left to men; this we deny . . . Woman runs a zigzag path between the feminine and the human” (67). Here the language which Salome challenges seems to be the societal inscriptions for women’s conduct, comportment, and character within the broader socio-historical and cultural contexts of Western Culture. Historically, women have sought redress for societal female marginalization across cultures. Given that Salome et al indicate they deny the idea that the field of politics should be left to men, and woman runs a zigzag path
between the feminine and the human, it is important to point out here that Salome et al suggest a revolutionary future of difference for women, in general. They also appear to see a connection between women’s spiritual and political selves. They appear to view the cosmology of the feminine, human and political spheres. They seem to accept them as a cohesive unit, whereas the socially engineered mindset within the patriarchal socio-political context aims for a separation of these feminine, human and political spheres. Hence one notices a discrepancy in the way the human and political spheres are perceived by Western thinkers and thinkers in more traditional world cultures. In traditional world cultures, the interconnectedness of all things in nature are emphasized while in the West there continues to be a separation of natural elements. Admittedly, this separation of natural elements seems to cause a major imbalance in the functionality of the same elements. Seemingly, the latter assumes that it might be time for a change in the streams of Western and Western-influenced thinking.

Likewise, Benjamin Ifeanyi Mmadike, a linguistics professor at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria, thinks along lines of difference for womanhood and societal transformation. He advocates reversals in gendered language. He also shows how societal stereotypes and sexist proverbs that are used in Igbo culture, helps to perpetuate the patriarchy. For example, Mmadike notes in his article “The Igbo Perception of Womanhood: Evidence from Sexist Proverbs:”

Sexism refers to any discriminatory use of language which is detrimental to any member of the opposite sex. This use of language tends to create gender inequality. Atanga et al (2013:1) refer to gender “as a set of ideas, ie. What is thought, said and written about women, men, girls and boys:
what they should be like and should do.” These ideas are often expressed through gendered discourses. Sexist proverbs are visualized as cultural vehicles by which expression is given to female domination by the male. (99-100)

Mmadike outlines how cultural constructions and formations of gender helps to maintain the dominant masculine images and perceptions about women and their roles in Igbo society and one can imagine, by extension, the wider African society, and the rest of the colonized world, where patriarchal standards have been culturally espoused. Considering that the tribulations of women of color in the Caribbean struggle with male domination, they experience gender conflicts and power issues owing to the men who impact their lives, one perceives that the woman question should be brought to the fore for critical and prompt evaluation. Worse still, while scores of women in the colonized world are equally as articulate as their male counterparts, they are denied a fair chance to voice their opinions on matters that are crucial to their own “sexualized bodies” and their families. The passage of the ERA or the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States in 1972, and now, the recent surge of the Me Too Movement in 2006 by founder Tarana Burke, are two forms of the various ways in which women’s marginalized voices have sought justice for the societal injustices that are waged on them. Then, it would seem that the bodies of women of color continue to be the symbols or signposts by which their assumed worth is read.

For a few prime examples that help to elucidate the former point, Mmadike lists the following proverbs about Igbo women. 1. “A woman is like a lemon, you squeeze her and you throw her away.” 2. “Women have long hair and short sense.” 3. “Nwaanyi si
na nwoke ha ya nyulie mamiri elu- If a woman claims equality with a man let her urinate upwards” (99-100). At this point, it might be necessary to draw the parallel between sexist language used in Nigerian Society and those used in various Caribbean societies, in which gendered proverbs and adages are also used to determine a woman’s place and simultaneously degrade them. For example, on the island of Anguilla, the following sayings about little girls serve to support the view that gendered proverbs are culturally limiting to girls and women of color. 1. Little girls should be seen and not heard. 2. A woman’s place is in the home. Likewise, on the island of St. Kitts, the following sexist proverbs are commonly used in reference to women. 1. If me man no bang me, he no love me. 2. She ain’t nuttin but a sore foot (Wrensford 2018). Similarly, on the island of St. Thomas the following proverbs are used in reference to women. 1. She barn wid her payment. 2. She working fuh di hairy bank (Benjamin 2018). From these observations, the sexist proverbs not only help to perpetuate the patriarchy, but they demoralize, injure and devalue the good that exists about Caribbean, Igbo, and other marginalized women of color. Consequently, the woman question becomes increasingly a matter of urgency, and one that requires a total scholarly and societal review.

For another example, Kevin Enrod Quashie, postulates that narratives are manifestations of authority. He shows how narrators help to negotiate the compact between author and reader. Additionally, he indicates that narrators function as bodies that signify what is imaginary and what might be real. Quashie states the following:

Black women’s engagement of this pragmatism, especially their refiguring of the rhetoric of the narrator in textual landscape, I will argue that, in attempting to make language more pliable, Black women writers disarm
the narrator as a site of objectivity, instead introducing a narrator who manifests as a subject and whose agency is in peril and on display as one of the text’s corporealties. The narratorial acquiescence to subjecthood constitutes a volatility that thrusts writer, narrator, and text into turmoil, revealing language as a girlfriend of the self, the an /other body that is tussle, surrender, and abandon and which demands and yields everything and nothing all at once. (149)

Hence, by the very act of narration, black women can be the very agents to give voice to their own concerns and frustrations by telling their own stories. As Julia Kristeva suggested earlier on, they will not only be writing their own stories. Through narration and narrative processes, they will be “writing their own bodies.” Thus, they will be re-telling the story, redirecting the play, resetting the stage, reversing the false narratives and negative perceptions about them, and recreating possibilities and spaces for themselves. Perhaps, what is even more important is that as Kevin Enrod Quashie purports, the act of narration serves as both an instructive and a corrective process.

In the same train of thought, Anh Huaffirms that writing, language, and spoken words are creative, political, and intellectual weapons that Black diaspora women use to fight back against their assumed and constructed invisibility, powerlessness and voicelessness. “I argue that far from silent, Black diaspora women, have spoken in tongue, drum and chant to create a reality that has yet to exist- a world of egalitarian possibilities” (31). So, here it seems that language is used as an instrument by women of color to fulminate the societal assumptions about them such as their being invisible, voiceless or even helpless. Simply, women of color use their resistant narratives and they
capitalize on their rich ancestral knowledge and practices as counter-narratives to limiting systemic constructions about them.

Similarly, Cora Richardson-Hodge, Minister of Education in the British colony of Anguilla, in a recent conference held in March 8, 2016, in honor of International Women’s Day, where the theme of the conference was entitled: “Women in the Arts: Healing Through Creative Expression,” acknowledges: there is a growing need in Anguilla for heightening the awareness of the Anguillian public on gender discrimination and gender disparity. Hodge advances the view that there is in addition, a need for Anguilla’s youth, particularly girls, to become a part of the gender conversation. She identifies the need for more programs such as the “Young Girls Chat” and “Story Hour” for Primary and Secondary School Girls. Hodge remarks what follows:

It is time to reflect on the remarkable impact that countless Black women have made in Anguilla and around the world. We have made strides in improving the life conditions of ourselves, our families and our nation-sometimes in the face of tremendous obstacles seeking to take us off track from fulfilling our purpose. Despite the challenges, we are transcending traditional gender roles and becoming entrepreneurs and government leaders. This week we specifically celebrate women who have made their mark in our country and in the Arts. Many are utilizing the arts as their creative outlet to help us manage the day to day stressors . . . Redefining what is considered Art and assisting us to learn the importance of creativity as a form of personal expression and healing. (Richardson-Hodge qtd. in Anguillian Newspaper March 2016)
Hodge brings into focus, a visionary and transformative plan for the future of Anguilla’s women and men. By reviewing the current practices and moving in a direction of artistic expressions, critical dialogues and storytelling, young women and men of color in Anguilla, and in other parts of the African and Brown diaspora can help to speak and write their realities and defy the stereotypical myths and images about them. In the case of the woman of color whose body has been the object of the so-called “noble gaze” and colonial interloper, their expressions in writing and in Art, can be potentially subversive. In short, they can help to recreate the oppressor’s sexist and bodily narratives. Kamau Brathwaite’s analysis of these subversive possibilities as presented in his work *The History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* supports the latter view. Accordingly, Brathwaite summons the descendants of the formerly enslaved African women and men to embrace the underground language and the codes of resistance they utilized to enable them to survive the oppression of the colonial oppressor’s empire:

It consisted of many languages but basically they had a common semantic and stylistic form. What these languages had to do, however, was to submerge themselves, because officially the conquering peoples- the Spaniards, the English, the French and the Dutch- insisted that the language of public discourse and conversation, of obedience and command, should be English, French, Spanish or Dutch . . . So there was a submergence of this imported language . . . Its status became one of “inferiority.” The status of the language was inferior because its speakers were inferior. They were slaves- “non-human in fact.” But this very
submergence served an interesting interculturative purpose, because although people continued to speak English . . . that English was nonetheless still being influenced by the underground language, the submerged language that the slaves had brought. And that underground language was itself constantly transforming itself into new forms. It was moving from a purely African form to a form which was African but which was adapted to the new environment and cultural imperative of the European languages. And it was also influencing the way in which the French, Dutch, English and Spaniards spoke their own languages. So, there was a very complex process taking place, which is now beginning to surface in our literature. (7-8)

Brathwaite speaks to the creativity, and echoes the numerous subtleties and resistance techniques and combined codes of contestation that were utilized by the enslaved African women and men of color, in opposition to the colonial oppressor’s inhumane culture of violence. Interestingly, these various modes and codes of communication and expression worked and continue to work in opposition to the established languages of empire during years of enslavement and, today, they have evolved to become the various Creoles and Pidgins that characterize our forms of speech and speech communities in the Caribbean society today. Perhaps more important, that these communication forms are “now beginning to surface in our literature,” could be seen as a positive sign for the descendants of the so-called inferior cultures. As stated, oppressed women of color could use their own vernacular or home language and narratives to reconfigure the negative and limiting images about their black or brown bodies, by engaging in critical dialogue and
several other forms of artistic and creative expressions. It would occur that, women of color, could not only rename and reshape or reconstruct the gendered representations, but they would begin to reclaim an identity, respect, recognition, and simultaneously, uplift themselves individually, culturally and politically.

Accordingly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o explains in his novel *Devil on the Cross*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation, that: “a nation that has cast away its literature is a nation that has sold its soul and has been left a mere shell (62).

Additionally, literary discourse occurs within historical, social and cultural contexts. Writers and other artists draw on the contexts in which they live to base their literary contestations. Writing and other artistic creations do not occur in a vacuum. The history culture and society informs literature. Hence, it might be safe to infer that women’s participation in reconstructing gendered stereotypes and representations along historical, social and cultural lines can be perceived substantially reliable.

Furthermore, Hester Eisenstein maintains in her book *The Future of Difference* that language forms the basis of political thought and practice. Accordingly, she cites the following ideas that have been advanced by Helene Cixous, a Parisian Feminist:

> Everything is a word, everything is only word . . . we must grab culture by the word, as it seizes us in its word, in its language. . . . Indeed, a soon as we are born into language and language speaks for us, language dictates its law, which is a law of death . . . you will thus understand why I believe that political thought cannot do without thought on language, work and on language. (73)
The language used to cultivate, construct or make women in Caribbean Society is fraught with gendered labels and signposts. Hence, the language and terms used to define women of color require close re-examination. Besides, both gender and political relationships operate on the linguistic domain and it becomes imperative for the element of language to come to the fore in any critical assessment of the woman of color’s question.

**Michelle Rowley and Reconceptualizing Voice**

Michelle Rowley, in her article “Reconceptualizing Voice: The Role of Matrifocality in Shaping Theories and Caribbean Voices,” highlights the view that women of color give voice to critical matters that hugely impact their lives. By her use of the term “voicing,” Rowley refers to the various levels of consciousness or classification of Caribbean women and their experiences. She explains that the term springs from a growing need to reflect women’s lived realities within theoretical frames and suggests that Caribbean women be allowed to speak for themselves.

The act of voicing is one that challenges the dichotomous representations in that it prompts the recognition that women’s voices are not locked within social, ethnic, classist or ideological groups but that there is a continuous pendulum between discord and harmony, exclusion and inclusion. Voicing as an act of naming and representation is also a distinctly political and agentive process. How does the interview process itself become a combined narrative of speech, whose silences, continuities and discontinuities are not only part of the interviewee’s ability to construct and present various versions of self, but simultaneously areaction to a number of impacting, normalizing and countervailing
discursive realities? . . . Do we merely examine the text of the talk? What do we do with the experience of the text? . . . I am exercising agency here, the location of agency and interpretations of representation is the point that brings the hierarchal dimension of research sharply into focus, despite claims that attest to egalitarianism and democratic interactions. (24-25)

Through the above statements, Rowley attempts to mirror the institutionalized gendered discourses of Caribbean women. She insists that by bringing Caribbean women’s narratives into the focus of feminist theory, it helps to shed new light on the gender contestations of women of color. Besides, Caribbean women’s voices will serve to echo their own definitions of gender and gender identity. Their daily struggles will not be told from the point of view of a male proxy or privileged other. Their stories will not be told by imperial prevaricators or equivocators. Their stories will be told based on their own experiences and lived realities. In addition, through the interview process or narrative strategy, it serves as an invitation to stage the stories of women of color at various levels, to voice their personal opinions, their persuasions and ideas liberally and potentially, subvert the ideologies of the dominant societal structures and the negative gender representations about them.

**Audrey Lorde and Women of Color Poetically Speaking Dreams and Writing Themselves into Reality**

In a similar train of thought, Audrey Lorde, a Contemporary Feminist, puts forward in her article “Poetry is Not a Luxury” the idea that experience, knowledge and understanding are fundamental elements and mean everything to individuals.
For each of us women, there is a dark place within where hidden and
growing our true spirit rises, Beautiful and tough as chestnuts/stanchions
against our nightmares of weakness” and of importance . . . For women,
then, Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms
the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams
toward survival and change, first made into more tangible action. Poetry is
the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The
farthest external horizons of our hopes and fear are cobbled by our poems,
carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. Within structures
defined by profit, bylinear power, by institutional dehumanization, our
feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts
or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to men. But our women
have survived. . . As women poets, there are no new pains. We have felt
them all already. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the
way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us
the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak and to dare. (125-127)

Here Audrey Lorde raises the critical element of language and the beauty of language in
understanding or interpreting the struggles of women of color. She admits that within the
institutionalized power structures that are designed to profit the privileged classes of men,
women, and perhaps one can add, particularly the women of color, were not meant to
survive. Moreover, seeing that Lorde further states, “As poets, there are no new pains, we
have felt them all already. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the
way to freedom,” it implies that women of color can help to redefine the negative images
and perceptions that have been historically and culturally perpetuated about them, through using the art of language and the beauty of poetry on a purely feminine plane and in feminine terms. Likewise, it seems that the woman of color’s chances of assuming leadership potential and access to economic resources within the linear institutionalized masculine political structures of power can become more feminine, circular, and evenly distributed among all classes of individuals. Thus, the zig zag path that Salome mentions in previous paragraphs seems sound, as the feminine or spiritual, the human and political worlds would potentially begin to intersect and also harmonize or balance each other.

**Audrey Lorde and Erotic Agency as a form of Resistance**

In response to the latter statement, the said Audrey Lorde, in her text *Sister Outsider*, also calls on women of color to capitalize on their erotic agency, spirituality, and to assert selfhood to grapple with their marginalized status. Lorde urges women to embrace the erotic that offers self-actualization, liberation, spiritual and potential political empowerment. By venturing on a path of self-hood, the woman of color could become able to adjust her individual lens of the world and perceive it in personal terms, and not chiefly in social terms. Lorde purports that women of color visualize the world cosmologically. To interpret the world from a cosmological standpoint, Lorde suggests a combination of the spiritual and the political and or a combination of the material and the ideological. On the contrary, the popular practice in Western Culture is to separate the spiritual and political and/ or the material from the ideological. Lorde’s presentation serves as a counter-narrative to the espoused standard of the West. By finding their place within the cosmological frame, Lorde submits that women of color can start the journey to experiencing the difference of which they dream:
The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. . . . When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. . . . The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic. . . . The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge . . . which can be the basis for understanding . . and lessens the threat of their difference. (53-57)

Here, Lorde speaks of the erotic as a cohesive device that connects women of color and puts forward the idea that they strive to understand themselves historically, culturally, emotionally, and spiritually. She implies that their physical selves are hinged on their immaterial or invisible selves and so both elements coalesce to form a deeper and total knowledge of selves. Thus, women could lessen the frequency of the various differentials they encounter in their lives.

Additionally, Lorde further asks women to discover “the black mother in each of themselves” and to rely on “intuitive” knowledge, rather than analysis, to see African culture’s emphasis upon the mother-bond, as an alternative to white patriarchal culture’s
way of thinking (Lorde qtd. in Willingham 209-210). She recommends female solidarity and unity as a means of grappling with cultural female subordination.

-Mimi Sheller on Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom

Likewise, Mimi Sheller a Haitian woman writer in her article “Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Queer Caribbean Freedom,” also asserts that Caribbean women resist the limits of “bio-political” patriarchy by use of the free perception and use of their “black body” as a source of empowerment rather than as “a site of pain or victimhood” (254). Sheller embraces bodily and spiritual agency as a means of reclaiming their maternal and feminine freedom.

Sisterhood as a form of Resistance against Hegemonic Oppression

-bell hooks

In tandem with Audrey Lorde and Mimi Sheller is bell hooks, another Contemporary Feminist thinker, who maintains that:

If we are to continue our progressive movements for change and to welcome diversity and multiculturalism, solidarity has to become a more central agenda. For me, sisterhood always has been a rubric for talking about feminist theoretical construction of solidarity, and it seems to me, that we need to return that discussion to our thinking…. I am thinking
particularly about work that has been very negative toward the idea of experience, the use of experience. (hooks qtd. in Olsen and Hirsh 122-123)

To hooks, sisterhood, solidarity, and unity are central to the idea of women’s progress and change in the context of patriarchal domination. In light of this, for women to become liberated individually and culturally, they should challenge the status quo as a united front. Moreover, there is strength in numbers. Hence, hooks’ rubric of sisterhood and solidarity might be a worthwhile liberatory tool and useful form of female empowerment. Besides, hooks states that she is thinking particularly about work that has been very negative to the idea of experience. The experience that she stresses here is the experience of women of color whose race, realities, age, and socio-economic factors have been often excluded from mainstream and imperial feminist articulations. In this regard, women of color seem to be given a bitter and poisonous pill to swallow that white women of privilege, do not have to swallow by virtue of their race and socio-economic status. In short, hooks suggests that women of color are denied access to both the potentially empowering material and ideological resources. To be more specific, women of color are deprived of the economic resources and the educational tools that could lead to their social uplift. For one instance, their race is one of the dividing factors. For another instance, their female bodies are a marker of objectification or dividing factor that bars them from easy access to material and ideological resources. Hence, women of color challenging the patriarchal hierarchy is urgent.

Of equal note, Cecelia Green postulates in her Third World Marxist Synthesis of the Caribbean Political Economy as it relates to gender, that the Branch Plant or Multinational subsidiary economy elides the interstitial functioning of domestic modes of
re/production and the vast number of human subjects who occupy or “people” those modes. And Green further notes that this invisibility is particularly harsh to women, who are not the workers in the mineral-export or major import substitution operations; who are not the principal entrepreneurs in the residiency sector; who are not the leading party, government and union officials; and who tend to specialize in the nurturing of the lowest paid, lowest prestige ‘mass’ professions. At the same time, they play critical roles in domestic and informal economies as well as in non-export sectors such as small scale food production and marketing, among others, of course (63). It can be observed here that Green emphasizes the key roles of women in the domestic economy and in other forms of labor in the Caribbean’s production lines where they [the workers] make the greatest impact, yet their financial rewards are miniscule. Caribbean women should begin to challenge their financial exploiters. Undoubtedly, sisterhood, solidarity and the search for individual liberty as advanced by bell hooks, are strong agents of experience and difference, and could serve to shake the pillars of established societal constructions

**Liberatory Discussions Against Hegemonic Oppression**

-Walter Rodney

In like fashion, Caribbean theorist Walter Rodney insinuates that the intellectual and academic should challenge the pillars of white cultural imperialism. And he advises that the intellectual attack the distortions that white imperialism has produced in all branches of scholarship. For instance, in answering the question of Black power and breaking away from what he describes as “Babylonian Captivity,” Walter Rodney recommends the following:
The black intellectual has to move beyond his own discipline to challenge the social myth, which exists in the society as a whole... the black intellectual must attach himself to the activity of the black masses.... Black power, that is one of the elements, a sitting down together to reason, to “ground” as the Brothers say, we have to ground together. (77-78)

Admittedly, both female and male scholars should move beyond their own disciplines to challenge the social myths about women and other individuals. In short, they should capitalize on their intellectual fortitude to address “the woman question” by their acts of defiance, by reaching out to the marginalized masses, and by reasoning and “grounding” with them. Rodney also adds that “Black power recognized both the reality of black oppression and self negation as well as the potential for revolt” (36). Rodney insinuates that oppressed women and men of color become empowered to revolt against their oppression. Perhaps the dialogue that is started through “grounding and revolt” could be an initial point of departure for women and men of color, in the heavily racist and sexist political economy.

Furthermore, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, cites the diminishing effect of European Imperialism in the Black/Brown Community and he suggests a shift from the divisive political and economic model of capitalism and class system.

Power does not concede without a struggle. It is important that the issues of economic injustice be kept in the forefront… It was Gramsci who had offered the wise counsel that the most effective way to proceed in the process of political struggle is for a class to succeed in elaborating and establishing its own organic intellectuals. The time has come for the real
organic intellectuals to emerge from among the folk within organizations dedicated to pursuing their interests. Space has to be created for ordinary men and women, who normally bear the brunt of the economic and political hardships. (190-191)

Here one notices that Benítez-Rojo’s reference appears consistent with Walter Rodney’s ideology on the black struggle for power, when he indicates that the black intellectual has to move beyond his discipline to challenge the myths that exist in the society as a whole. Rojo suggests the creation of safe spaces for ordinary marginalized women and men.

**Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Discussions of Resistance to Essentialist Enlightenment Feminist Discourses**

-Eudine Barriteau-Foster

Of equal note, V. Eudine Barriteau-Foster, a Caribbean scholar, not only challenges the social myths, but she also raises the idea of difference in her article “The Construct of a Postmodernist Feminist Theory for Caribbean Social Science Research.” Barriteau-Foster sees liberal and socialist-feminist analyses of limited relevance to the experiences of Caribbean women because of their grounding in assumptions of enlightenment. She argues that socialist analyses constructed women essentially as victims, and ignored the ways in which women daily resist and participate in activities that are aimed at changing their lives. In her proposal of a New Caribbean Theory, she advances the contours of such a theory as a space “filled by operationalising gender, class, race, sexual identity, and political action within the Caribbean context” (204). Notably, Barriteau-Foster signals a change in the status of women who have been seen
historically and culturally as “victims.” Instead, Barrieau-Foster advocates resistance as an avenue for change in the lives and status of women.

**Historic Examples of Black Enslaved Women’s, Civil Rights, and Resistant Stands by Women of Color Against Female Subordination and Hegemonic Oppression**

Seemingly, Barrieau-Foster thinks along revolutionary lines as she capitalizes on the historic revolutionary acts of Black and Brown women in the Caribbean region. Barrieau-Foster lists scores of revolutionary heroines, who have resisted the system of patriarchal plantocracy which exploited Black women’s bodies both in the form of the labor they provided for the upkeep of the plantations, as well as sexually since they were raped variously by their slave masters. These enslaved women worked under dire conditions and were the chief subjects of the plantation’s double paradox. First, they were female, and second, their Black bodies were the sites or markers of oppression, violence, and torture by their White slave masters. And scores of these enslaved Black women creatively and skillfully retaliated against this culture of violence in the form of rebellion, poisonings, abortions, runaways or maroonage, and subtleties in music, song, and dance. A long line of these colored revolutionary heroines in pre-emancipation and post-emancipation years, included Sojourner Truth who challenged the institution of slavery by walking away from the plantation in broad daylight and never returning and by publicly delivering her famous narrative and speech dubbed, “Ain’t I A Woman?” in which she claims that if the first woman that God made, turns the world upside down,
then all the other women out there ought to be able to turn it, right side up again. Then too, there was Harriet Tubman, the enslaved woman who is coined “The Moses of her people” and who led over 300 enslaved Africans to freedom, Margaret Garner, the slave mother who killed her child rather than see it taken back to slavery, Eliza Harris, the slave mother who crosses the Ohio River on the drifting ice with her child in her arms, Harriet Jacobs, the slave girl and protagonist of “Incidents in the Life of Harriet Jacobs: A Slave Girl,” who lived for seven years in her grandmother’s attic to escape slave masters, then there was Ann Hannah Moore, the woman and the character that is described in the text “Seeing a Ray of Hope She Availed Herself of the Opportunity to Secure Her Freedom,” Ida B. Wells, a journalist and writer of the text “Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells,” a Civil Rights activist and an advocate for black people’s liberty and a strong voice that valiantly spoke out against the injustice and the lynching of black people in the Southern United States. Then there was Mary Prince, an enslaved woman from Bermuda.

**Excerpt from the Autobiography of Mary Prince**

Mary Prince grew up in the Williams’ household, and decided not to give birth to any offspring of her own. Her narrative *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave*, provides an inside view of what it was like to be a slave girl and woman.

The black morning at length came; it came too soon for my mother and us. Whilst she was putting on us the new osnaburgs in which we were to be sold, she said, in a sorrowful voice, (I shall never forget it) “See I am shrouding my poor children; what a task for a mother!” . . . “I am going to
carry my little chickens to market” (these were her exact words) take your last look of them . . . Many of the negro women . . . are so very masculine in their voice, manners and appearance that it is at times a matter of doubt to say to which sex they belong. This may be attributed to the general system of treatment during slavery: they were required to work the same as the men; and when punishment was thought necessary, no regard was paid to their feeling, but their persons were equally exposed as those of the other sex. Of course, these proceedings in time rendered them callous, and in the end, divested them of all those principles of modesty which are so great an ornament to feminine character, whether in high or low condition of life . . . While employed in their daily avocations, it is customary to tie up their garments almost – if not quite – as high as their knees; and even when walking about the streets of the capital, if it is rather wet weather, the same degree of indelicacy is practised. All these causes combined, tend to lessen the omen in the eyes of strangers; although the creoles appear to see no decorum in their style of dress or manner. (43)

Here one observes a bittersweet picture that Prince paints of her experiences as an enslaved girl and woman. First, she recalls vividly the day on which she and her siblings are sold into slavery and her mother’s agony, which is exhibited as she prepares to part with her offspring. “See I am shrouding my poor children; what as task for a mother! . . . I am going to carry my little chickens to market . . . take your last look of them” (43). Can one imagine a mother’s bleeding heart? Can one imagine the endless piercing to depart eternally with one’s offspring? Yes. For Mary Prince’s mother, this becomes her
new reality. Second, Mary Prince outlines the strength, valiance, and subtle forms of resistance displayed by her fellow enslaved African women. Although the rolling up of their garments as high as their knees serves a practical purpose to avoid them mingling with the ground water, it could also be interpreted that these enslaved African women used their dress codes, voices, and mannerisms overall to undoubtedly irritate and challenge the bigoted and oppressive value systems, first of the planter class and second those of the Creole elite.

Formerly Enslaved Women and the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica

On the other hand, Swithin Wilmot identifies several ways in which formerly Jamaican enslaved women openly protested against the institution of slavery between 1838 and 1865. In her article “Females of Abandoned Character. Women and Protest in Jamaica, 1838 and 1865,” Wilmot depicts how formerly enslaved women in Morant Bay, Jamaica, struggled for economic justice and cultural freedom.

The drive for greater autonomy among the freed women presented serious problems for their former masters and potential employers who were determined to continue the command over labour that slavery had guaranteed them. The planters were abundantly aware that by the eve of emancipation, not only were the majority of Jamaican black women labourers in the field, but the majority of Jamaican labourers in the field were black women. Therefore, confronted by the women’s determination not to be tied down in the rigid demands of regular work on the plantations, the planters in the first three months of full freedom, initiated
a series of labour recruitment strategies, many of which were aimed at coercing women to perform state work, especially during crop time . . .

Golden Grove was one of the largest sugar estates in this area of Jamaica. On the property resided 279 effective agricultural workers, of which 137 were women. Up to 12 October 1838, only 19 of the women had resumed work on the estate whereas only 5 of the 142 men had withdrawn their services. While the men had responded to attractive offers for job work, most of the women had declared they were not again to work in the field, that is, the canfield, as they were busy in the provision grounds which belonged to the estate. (280)

From these symbolic acts of defiance to the ruling planter class, formerly enslaved Jamaican black women stand up to their former slave masters by striking and refusing to work, meanwhile more of the freed male ex-slaves remain on the plantations, to resume regular duties. When the majority of the 142 of the men remain to work with only 5 men withdrawing their services, a majority of the women seek to leave with only 19 of them remaining to work. Again, these active forms of resistance observed by the enslaved Jamaican black women suggest that these women appear to be more determined and valiant than their male counterparts and ready to confront their colonial oppressors, tête à tête. These formerly enslaved Jamaican women begin to “write their bodies” and so change the course of their own history. Rather than yield to the oppressive planters, these formerly enslaved brave and strong women breathe hope and rebirth in their subjugated states as oppressed women who worked under unjust conditions. Resultant to their monumental defiance to planter authority, a new day is born that marks the beginning of
the end of their bondage and a final release from the shackles of slavery. From these observations, it seems that women of color have always sought to resist colonial oppressors and obtain justice from the restrictions and limits of oppressive systems. Perhaps, the struggles of these freed women of color and the invectives they used to lessen their pressures, should be noted by marginalized women of color today, as a ray of hope as they brave the road to freedom and change.

**Excerpt from the Auobiography of Ann Mahasse**

Then too, in the autobiography of Anna Mahasse, the story is told of an East Indian young girl of color, whose mother makes a perilous and an unpopular journey to the Caribbean on her own. One observes that Anna’s mother, Rookabai, ran away from her new husband and emigrates from India in the 1880s as a twelve-year-old girl. Rookabai was born into a Hindu Brahmin or upper caste family. She was well educated in Hindu language and literature, and she married a much older man. Rookabai was distressed when she was handed over to her husband as is part of the Hindu custom and she was afraid of his wild and forest-like moustache. So she ran away from her in-laws and ended up in the emigrant depot in Calcutta and then in Trinidad. According to Brereton et al, Rookabai’s decision to run away from oppression independently and venture on a risky and perilous journey, defies the very fabric of Indian society.

This child has defied the whole social and gender structure of traditional India in her desperate escape to another world. Here she was placed as a domestic in an English family, and then came under the influence of an Indian Presbyterian Mission to the Trinidad Indians. Rookabai became Elizabeth Burns, a Christian, and was married off to the promising
Christian teacher George Chandisingh in 1891. But she remained a rebel. Strong-willed, “a born leader of women and children,” she clashed with her husband, the family split up, and she returned to India, which had always been her desire, leaving her husband and all her children except the youngest girl who went with her. Her daughter Anna had life chances that were never opened up to Rookabai, for all her courage: a fulfilling career as a teacher, and a marriage entered into freely as an adult. (82)

Here again, one notices that another valiant girl and a young woman of color chooses her freedom from an oppressive system. This time, the oppression is spawned by traditional Hindu custom. Rookabai, the mother of Anna Mahasse, is able to navigate her way around the gendered societal restrictions and gains her own freedom. Of course, this freedom is not automatically granted. It requires the decision to make an unpopular choice and the risk taking of a perilous journey that is clouded with uncertainties. Yet, for Rookabai, the ends appear to justify the means and so, she embarks on this journey to self-realization that leads to her inevitable freedom. In short, Rookabai can be seen as a freedom fighter, regardless of the obstacles she will have to face or the consequences with which, she has to deal. In a similar fashion, in her novel The Swinging Bridge Ramabai Espinet illustrates how Gainder Beharry, the grandmother figure of the protagonist, Mona, and other East Indian women of color also run away to escape the bondage of pre-arranged marriage. These Indian women take risks independently in the search of freedom. Once they decide to run away, women like Gainder Beharry, would cross the Kalpani Crossing alone and manage to hop aboard ships that are bound for Trinidad. In their new home, they would support each other morally and emotionally. By
the singing of Ramayana, they would keep the memories of their past alive. The singing of Ramayana also serves as a form of identity, solidarity, and of surviving their new life. And in the face of renewed opposition to their freedom, women like Baboonie, like my great-grandmother, Gainder, sang songs, stringing together with bawdy humor tenderness pain, and honesty, the scattered beads of their new lives. “Singing Ramayana,” they would get together to listen. Like the Vashnavite women of Bengal, they sang the words of love and loss, they sang moral tales and stories of surviving their new life. Gainder sang these songs, and Grandma Lil hid them for safe-keeping in the back of her shopbooks. Lily recorded them for her daughters, for my cousin Bess, for my sister Babsie, for me, for all the women to come, for my film that would tell Gainder’s story. (298)

These grandmother figures of Indo-Caribbean women seem to use what Anh Hua and Carole Boyce Davies coin the “Narrative Strategy,” to help survive their new lives and affirm their Indo-Caribbean woman identity. Their narratorial technique seems potentially enlightening for various women of color as the content and themes of their songs and storytelling work counter to the canonized male narratives about women. Here these maternal figures presented in Espinet’s work create a space for themselves and their future generations of women. One also realizes that a host of Indian women, like African women, have fought severally to unshackle the chains of various forms of bondage- by defying patriarchal authority and its institutionalized oppressive systems.

Lisabeth Paravisini Gerbert and the Mirabal Sisters of the Dominican Republic.
Furthermore, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, in her work “Decolonizing Feminism: The Homegrown Roots of Caribbean Women’s Movements,” examines, the chaotic post-feminist, postcolonial societies of the twentieth century that speak to the history, the literature, and the quality of feminism as a complete homogeneous block. She criticizes the Mainstream Feminism, even the Caribbean Women’s Movement, which she observes, is heavily rooted in the U.S and European theories that were developed to analyze imperial socio-political realities, and not Caribbean realities or the critical issues of women of color. What this suggests, is that the existing mainstream feminist community does not factor in the elements of Caribbean experience. She advocates a feminist scholarship that is rooted in the true knowledge of women’s realities and lived experiences, their historical and material conditions. She deems that the scholarship should reflect the historical and conditions that are responsible for the choices and strategies of women of color. She adds that the Caribbean Women’s Movement functions as a proto-feminist organization which fails to see the specificities that constitute feminisms for the women concerned. Additionally, Paravinski-Gerbert addresses the “body metaphor,” or subjection of women’s bodies. To illustrate her point, she draws on the monumental historic case of the Mirabal Sisters in the Dominican Republic, who were murderously raped and their bodies were ripped apart by Trujillo’s hench men in the absence of justice. Notably, cases such as the murderous rape and bodily torture of the Mirabal Sisters, and women of color, do not appear to be a major matter of concern to Imperialists or Imperial Feminism. Paravinski-Gerbert examines the “flesh and blood” bodily significance, the ruthless torture and loss of valuable lives of fellow Mirabal Sisters, and women of color, that seem secondary and inconsequential, if not
conveniently forgotten by many. Paravinsi-Gerbert further suggests that women of color reclaim spaces and experiences that were always there, but were usurped from them (7). In light of this, she postulates that by reclaiming spaces, women and “Sisters of color” could potentially subvert and transform the very oppressive systems that historically have kept them bodily objectified and mentally enslaved.

Moreover, Paulo Freire, a Postcolonial revolutionary thinker, points out that oppressed peoples could resist their oppressors and reap justice through their acts of defiance to the oppressive status quo, while also seems encouraging for women of color. Freire maintains that

It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. For this to happen, a total denouncement of fatalism is necessary. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation . . . Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression . . . Dialogue imposes itself as a way by which they achieve significance as humans.(87-88)

Freire posits that human beings are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation. For humans to sit back and expect changes to happen, it is fatalistic thinking. Freire suggests that human beings possess an innate or natural ability to bring about realistic and meaningful changes in their lives themselves. Thus the latter statement, “Dialogue imposes itself as a way by which they achieve significance as humans,” (88) suggests that through voicing their concerns, women of color can form an
identity and can take an active stand against societal female subordination and injustice in unprecedented and unpopular ways. Likewise, they could confront their dehumanizing oppressors and reclaim their own bodies and embrace their womanism. Perhaps, more women of color could lessen the instances of female marginalization, negative treatment, injustice, and denial to speak and access male-dominated resources they frequently encounter. By the same token, Martin Luther King Jr. posits that “Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere.” *(Letter from Birmingham Jail)* Perhaps more importantly, women’s acts of defiance could underscore their valiance and transformative abilities in their respective societies.

Christine Everingham also perceives the mother figure as a transformative being. She posits that

> If an emancipatory subjectivity needs to be actively constructed by a [m]other during the course of the nurturing activity, then nurturing can no longer be allocated to the “sphere of necessity,” where it can be taken for granted as a timeless and unchanging activity guided by natural laws. . . .

> the [m]other moves into focus as a subject, a creator of cultural meanings and human value systems, and her activity becomes a fundamental point of departure for social theories. (7)

Everingham’s assessment of the “culturally made,” “subjected” and “othered” beings of women, who are also cultural bearers- by virtue of their “maternal instincts” coupled with their nurturing capacities, at length, can very well be the potential agents of societal transformation and women’s emancipation or even their empowerment.
Part II: Women Rulers in Pre-Colonial Africa, Africana Womanism and Kemetic Feminine Knowledge

Ann Nzinga, Ruler of West and Central Africa

Women played a key role in pre-colonial African society. According to an account from the *Album of Female Revolutionary Leaders and Civil Rights Activists* presented in March 2018, Ann Nzingha was a great national hero of pre-colonial Africa. According to the said account, Nzingha was born in 1582 and was the greatest strategist, who ever confronted the armed forces of Portugal. Her brilliance and aggressive spirit was recognized very early. She grew increasingly determined in her desire to maintain the power and dignity of people of central Africa. Her military campaigns kept the Portuguese at bay for more than four decades. Her primary goal was to eradicate the capture and enslavement of African people. Nzingha strategically sent ambassadors and representatives throughout Western and Central Africa. In so doing, Nzingha’s goal was to build a massive coalition of Africans to eject the Portuguese. Nzingha fought for the liberty of her people up until her death in 1663 (*Album of Civil Rights Activists 2018*).

Queen Aminatu, Ruler of the Zazzaus/Zaria

In addition, Queen Aminatu of Zazzau/ Zaria (province in Nigeria) was a great Hausa warrior who inherited her mother’s warlike nature. Her mother Nikatau was a woman known to be as capable as a man. Queen Aminatau was 16 years old when her mother became a Queen and she then was bestowed the title of magajiya. Aminatu perfected her military skills and soon became one of the greatest warriors of Zazzau. She expanded the borders of Zazzau and her kingdom became the centre of the North-South
Saharan and East-West Sudanese trade. She was a warrior princess for over three decades. *(Africa.com)*

**Queen Makeda Ruler of Ethiopia**

Then too, there was Queen Makeda of Ethiopia. She is widely known as the unnamed Queen of Sheba, in the Holy Bible, and companion of King Solomon. Legend has it that Queen Makeda survived being sacrificed to a monstrous king, who caused major problems for the Northern Ethiopian Kingdom of Axum. It is also said that Makeda had a son with King Solomon and she and her son brought back the biblical Ark of the Covenant to the Kingdom of Axum. Through Makeda and her son, the lineage of the great East African and Nubian kings were born. In addition to Queens Nzinga and Makeda, there were several other African warrior queens, including Queen Nefertiti of Egypt, Queen Nandi of the Zulu kingdom, Queen Cleopatra of Kemet (Egypt) and Queen Ranavalona of Madagascar *(Africa.com)*. Here one might ask: Why was such an influential African Queen not given her rightful name by Westerners? Rather, she is presented as the famous bible Queen of Sheba.

Maria Rojas writes that women in pre-colonial African societies held a complementary position to men. She points out that Yoruban society provided the greatest opportunities for women to participate in economic activities such as manufacturing and trade. She also adds that the responsibility of Yoruban women included providing material resources for their families.

Women believed that providing material resources met their responsibility as women and citizens. Their society considered the work the women did complementary to the work of men, and some women achieved impressive
status in the economic and social realms of Yoruba life . . . According to
Carolyne Dennis, writer of *Women and State in Nigeria*, “The religions of
many Nigerian societies recognize the social importance of women by
emphasizing the place of female gods of fertility and social peace, but
women were also associated with witchcraft which appeared to symbolize
the potential social danger of women exercising power that is
uncontrolled by men.” (1)

From these observations, women in pre-colonial African society assumed a considerable
degree of power, and what seems liberating is their role in providing material resources
for manufacturing and trade and in influencing economic activities. Admittedly,
multitudes of women of color today in Western Society and in the broader colonized
world still do not have a major and active role in influencing either social or economic
activities and in exercising political or economic power that is uncontrolled by men.

**In Praise of the Struggles, Strength and Leadership Qualities of Women of Color**

-*W.E.B Du Bois*

W. E. B. Du Bois, a black male writer of the 1920s in the United States of
America, shows how women of color play a key role in influencing social and economic
activities. Still, their efforts are not recognized by Mainstream Society. He likewise
expresses an admiration for the strength, diligence and beauty of these African and other
women of color. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver in their analysis of W.E.B.
Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* indicate that Du Bois addresses the woman question
and his representations of women of color are nothing short of admirable. They maintain
that Du Bois’ representations of women of color are also visionary and he seems to commend their endless quest for a way forward out of black poverty and their unique qualities that made them morally superior to their male counterparts. Du Bois’ literary representations of women of color are those that he perceives to be at the heart of women’s relationships to the world. Gates and Oliver mention that Du Bois’ pronouncements of women’s oppression in the constraints of race and class in 1920 were similar to the ones still heard from social critics of patriarchy, today. They quote Du Bois as follows:

In a world where men have power over women, each woman must have a life work and economic independence. She must have the right to motherhood at her discretion. The uplift of women is, next to the problem of the color line . . . when, now two, of these movements—women and color combine in one, the combination has deep meaning. (267-278)

Here Du Bois seems to espouse the colored woman and advocates strongly her equal access to economic resource as her male counterparts. He also touches on the crucial aspect of women’s right to motherhood at their own discretion. The latter observation remains such a critical one considering the scores of women who are denied access to contraception in many parts of the colonized world today. Admittedly, denying women such a choice can be dehumanizing, especially in instances when male predators invade their private space in the form of rape for instance, and women become pregnant as a result of the rape and are forced into giving birth to an unwanted child. And therein seems to lie the problem with patriarchal control over women’s bodies! It would seem that it is the patriarchy that instills values of male domination in rapists and other men
and unquestionable subjection of the female. Du Bois also points out the double paradox for women of color, which are gender and race that work adversely against them in the imperial capitalist marketplace. Clearly, when these two movements, “women and color” combine, it is both deep and troubling. As a case in point, Alice Walker’s essay “Everyday Use” depicts the pivotal roles of the woman of color in the upkeep of Mainstream Society and the failure of Mainstream Society to recognize and value their contributions. Walker’s essay reveals some of the various ways in which the woman of color is denied opportunities to education and economic resources. Walker’s first person narrator appears to resent the limited space in which the woman of color finds herself and so, she echoes this sentiment as she relates the life story of Maggie, the protagonist.

Maggie is not given an opportunity to attend school beyond second grade and is perceived principally as a servant only to wash the linen, clean the houses and surroundings, and milk the cows for her white bosses. She also struggles with reading and is expected to marry John Thomas, who has mossy teeth. Likewise, she sings the church songs lustily from beginning to ending and ironically so, although she stumbles to read. Moreover, the narrator points out how Maggie is led to think that “she is not bright” and the latter one finds disturbing. One realizes here how gender, race and class intersect to influence Maggie’s thoughts and actions, but they limit and deny her an opportunity to capitalize on social and economic resources. Accordingly Walker writes:

I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don’t ask me why: in 1927 colored folk asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can’t see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks
and money, quickness passed her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face) and then I’ll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better than a man’s job. I used to milk till I was hooked in the side in ‘49. Cows are soothing and slow and don’t bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.

(384-385)

Clearly, Walker’s narrator expresses objection to Maggie’s marginalized and mentally enslaved states. Similarly, Nesta Robert Marley, in his prophetic piece “Redemption Song,” reminds the black survivors to emancipate themselves from mental slavery. (Marley 1980) Even more, Alice Walker’s narrator retorts that she “was always better than a man’s job” (385). This latter statement, assumes that the narrator is seemingly an independent thinker and a change agent and a voice for the silenced character and woman of color, like Maggie. Maggie conforms to the societal norms it seems, without questioning the status quo.

In light of the above, Alice Walker and W. E.B Du Bois, writers of color, exhibit both empathetic and revolutionary thinking for the status of women of color. Perhaps, the heartening part for women of color is that the presentations of women of color and the woman question by Du Bois and Walker are also sought-after female representations of scholars such as Henry Louis Gates Jr., Terri Hume Oliver, and Walter Rodney. Walter Rodney, for example, beckons to the intellectual to go beyond his discipline to challenge the social myths and “ground” with his or her brothers and he expresses contempt for the lecherous class issue (44). The Westernized hegemonic class and gender issues are real
and decadent. Considering that women in pre-colonial African society assumed leadership roles, women of color should struggle to reclaim their lost heritage from the so-called “free market economists” or self-serving and predatory masculine free loaders.

**African Priestesses, Goddesses, Leaders and Spirituality as Feminist Liberatory Tools**

Then too, Max Dashu informs that in pre-colonial African society, women were rulers and seeresses with spiritual powers and how these women ably led liberation movements. He adds that although they were rulers, the women did not oppress other people. So, it seems that their system of rule differed greatly from the Western patriarchy, which oppresses others and espouses conquest. Dashu provides the following details:

There is so much to say about women’s spiritual leadership. In this time of fragmented and toxic culture, we don’t even have words that are adequate enough to describe the breadth of heritages and practices. Most people would define a priestess as a woman who leads a ritual. But there are many names and culturally-defined meanings . . . It’s the question of accessing and exerting power that makes the spiritual political, and explains the importance of religion in instituting social controls. When the power hierarchies of men over women, conquerors over aboriginal peoples and rich over poor are at stake, priesthood has political ramifications. Priestesses often lead liberation movements. (1)
Dashu analyzes the fragmentation of Western society with its numerous binaries that focus primarily on the political interests of bureaucracy and detach the spiritual aspects of people’s lives from the political aspects. Dash also acknowledges that by virtue of women being seeresses or priestesses their roles are, in essence, political. Both the spiritual and the political elements coalesce with each other and allow for balance.

**Africana Womanism, Africana Women Leaders and African Female Kemetic Knowledge**

At the same time, Clenora Hudson-Weems and Pamela Reed Yaa Asante waa, Africana Feminist thinkers, in their analysis of Africana womanism and African Feminism shows how the spiritual is connected with the political. They focus on Africology or Kemetic African Knowledge. They also claim that their “feminist work is grounded in uniquely African considerations and African sensibilities.” In their analyses they focus on the philosophical and cosmological dialectic on the African family, for example. According to Hudson-Weems, Africana Womanism or Feminism is as follows:

Africana womanism as a theoretical concept and methodology defines a new paradigm, which offers an alternative terminology and a concept that considers both ethnicity (Africana) and gender (womanism), which I coined in the 1980s . . . It was later established so that the concept is neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism . . . Black feminism, Africana feminism or Walker’s womanism that some Africana men have come to embrace. (Hudson-Weems Global 1814)

Africana Womanism seems to be a cross-cultural approach to feminism and it seems to involve all women of the African ethnic or colored diaspora. It is interesting to note that
African men as well, have sought to embrace its concepts. Some of the tenets that Hudson-Weems further outlines in her text “Reclaiming Ourselves” follow. The following 18 tenets or descriptors which serve to guide the existence of the Africana and women of color seem worthy of accord.

The Africana woman is:

1. A self-namer
2. A self-definer
3. Family-centered
4. Genuine insisterhood
5. Strong
6. In concert with the Africana man in struggle
7. In concert with the whole struggle
8. Authentic
9. A Flexible role player
10. Respected
11. Recognized
12. Spiritual
13. Male compatible
14. Respectful
15. Adaptable
16. Ambitious
17. Mothering
From Hudson-Weems’ list, the Africana woman who practises and upholds these virtues stands out as a virtuous, stately and an admirable being. Notably, the Africana woman’s spiritual and political selves are interconnected and not considered as separate descriptors of Africana womanism. Simply, Africana womanism seems like a daily guide for women and women leaders of color with principles that could constantly inform and guide their thoughts and actions.

Likewise, Molara Ogundipe, an African female writer, also indicates that African women are still seen as goddesses and revered by various people of society. He explains how men regarded women as having exceptional powers owing to their menstrual blood and their ability to lactate and feed their young. Even today, menstrual blood is believed to disrupt, interfere or make things happen. Hence, women’s bodies instead of being hyper sexualized and commodified as often happens in Western patriarchy, are seen as sacred vessels by which life is passed on from one generation to the next. Ogundipe also notes that African fundamentalism should be seen as a worldwide movement.

The point to note is that religious fundamentalism in Africa and fundamentalism as a worldwide movement, are issues to be looked into as they affect women, and the struggle for progressive conditions for woman all over the world . . . when we say Africa, we mean the Yorubas, the Ibos, the Kikuyu, the Luo, the Toucoulour, the Serer, or the Fulani, and so forth. We generalize from the characteristics of our own ethnic groups to describe the whole of the continent. (214-215)
Ogundipe seems concerned about the struggle of women of color not just on the African content, but in various parts of the African (ethnic) diaspora. Ideologically-speaking, the struggle on the African continent and off the continent in places where people of color exist, is essential to African spiritual and political fundamentalism, it seems. Thus, knowledge of the African origins of women of color and their supreme roles should be known by people of color in diasporic spaces, around the globe.

Anika Daniels-Osaze also notes in a lecture at the Centre of the Restoration of Ma’at on the function of Feminine Presence in the Great Trinity of Ancient Kemet (Egypt) that the creator (Unta) is both male and female and has several names. Each name represents a different principle of the divine being. There is balance and balance allows you to become a divine being. The female is equal to the male. Daniels-Osaze also indicates that practising scholars of Ma’at also believe that the individual has to save her or himself. They also believe in the process of restoration or recreation. In describing the Ancient Kemetic Trinity of Aset, Asat and Heru, Daniels-Osaze tells the story of Aset, who supports her divine king, who is killed by the wicked Sephet. For Aset to recover and recreate her king, she has to find all his pieces that are dispersed by his brother, Sephet. She only finds 13 pieces and has to recreate the 14th piece to regenerate his seed. Her mother is Tefnuth, moisture. Daniels-Osaze also points out that Aset is held up by her father, Shu, the fire. Aset’s mate Giib, the earth, lies beneath her. The son that Aset creates is Heru. Here Daniels-Osaze also shows a connection between women and the four elements of land, water, fire and air.

Then too, Daniels-Osaze talks about Sachet, the master female scribe, who is a compliment of Tuhuti, and synonymous to the American Statue of Liberty. She describes
Sachet’s ability to recreate and give birth. For instance, she notes that Sachet would swallow the sun at night, and give birth to a son the following day. She also refers to the black woman as heaven. Heaven was defined by the black women in Ancient Kemet.

“Women ruled the land. Women had supreme abilities and legal rights. They could marry or divorce at will. They had their own bank accounts and ruled as judges. Men got rights from the bloodline of the woman” (Daniels-Osaze 2018). Additionally, there is evidence of commandment like principles such as “I will not lie” and “I will not do wrong.”

Likewise, there are 42 daily confessions of Ma’at. Lastly, Daniels-Osaze states that Ma’at is the ultimate balance. One must raise one’s lower consciousness to become a divine being. Admittedly, Daniels-Osaze’s account leaves a lot to be desired for the woman of color in the context of the limiting patriarchy. The Kemetic Feminine culture that espouses the female return to origins, retrieval and that allows for recreation through her interaction with the cosmos and natural environment appears as one to be emulated.

**Green Global Sisters as a Women’s Leadership Organization and Force against Political and Cultural Stagnation**

Moreover, Sharon Abercrombie, a member of the Green Global Sisters Organization, illustrates the interconnectedness of people and their natural environment as well as the spiritual and political aspects of their lives. She shows how heavily dependent the people of her culture are on the invisible forces in their lives for survival. It would occur that the blessings on their people and the lands depend largely on how well they appease or entice the higher power or the deities.
We want everyone to understand that our connection to the environment is crucial to our people. We want them to have food and shelter and life. We believe in fairness and equality. We understand our dependence on the environment . . . And we refute the idea that true power is acquired through money, position, physical beauty, strength, or political manipulation- even when we’re the ones doing it . . . We challenge longstanding cultural assumptions about power and authority and vice versa. At its best, politics serves to secure and protect innate rights; it stabilizes culture. (Abercrombie 7)

Abercrombie argues in favor of people’s capitalizing on their natural or innate abilities and powers. She seems to espouse the cosmology or oneness of things. The concept of deities is not seen as detached, farfetched and remote from humans. Instead, she considers power as an entity that is spawned by the influence and interaction of both physical or material and immaterial elements. Unlike Western patriarchal thinkers who seem to operate on a one-way street and do not place equal emphasis on the spiritual and political, Abercrombie appears to consider an all-inclusive method of existence. She seems to espouse the idea of people exerting and nurturing their spiritual selves which she admits has a political underbelly. The latter point suggests that Abercrombie’s philosophy might offer some indicators for change in the divisive Western political culture. Considering that Abercrombie mentions, “We want everyone to have food, shelter and life,” it seems to go without saying that the basic human needs of the critical mass of the people are seen as a priority. Any society or culture that promises to cater to the enhancement of the common good of its people strikes one as a thriving and
forward moving society, with rich and solid cultural and historical practices that will sustain its people and their resources for generations. And it is on these very premises that visionary and revolutionary Contemporary Feminist thinkers base their arguments. They examine difference, inclusion and experience as ways forward from the social, cultural and political stagnation that the masses of women and men of color grapple with in their respective communities. Wangari Maathai, leader of the Green Belt movement in Kenya between 1976 and 1987, who is one such humanitarian woman leader who values the land and resources of her homeland. She occurs to pay close attention to the human condition and understands “the language of life,” even as Ngũgĩ puts it.

Chris Klassen also suggests that the goddess concept represents female strength, independence and power. The female self that has been historically denied in Western Culture, would have an opportunity to surface and thrive using the tenets of the goddess realm that promises to promote female freedom for all women. Quite the contrary to hegemonic society that seems to stifle the progress and curtail the liberties of women, a feminine centered culture one deems, would be the popular choice of culturally-subordinated women of color cross-culturally. Klassen writes what follows:

The strong, independent woman figure may be found in all women, a natural part of the female self that has been denied and suppressed. The ideology of the Goddess within is illustrated here. As a sign, the Goddess represents a new set of criterion, and incorporated into the dominant construction of woman. This new criterion (strength, independence, and power) is viewed to have always been a part of the dominant woman identity. (107)
Klassen attempts to foster an epistemological Goddess-like culture for women and their female selves. She also seems to promote a classless and “raceless” method of securing an identity and space for women whose issues are oftentimes suppressed by the dominant structures of hegemonic society. She values the cosmology of things in nature and places women as central figures in relation to the circulating forces of spirituality, independence and power. Although she mentions that the Goddess sign is a “new set of criterion,” she points out as well that the elements of strength, independence, and power have always been a part of the dominant woman identity. What this suggests is that strong women cross-culturally have always exhibited these empowering traits. In reply to Klassen’s commentary, women of the present and future generations should see the Goddess that exists within themselves, assert selfhood, and reclaim the inner survival and revolutionary powers they innately possess.

Part III: Revolutionary Caribbean/Colored Women’s Leaders 1878 to 1970s

-Amy Jacques Garvey of Jamaica

Similarly, Amy Euphemia Jacques-Garvey, the wife of Marcus Garvey of Jamaica and one of the key female political leaders, activists, and interpreters of the Garvey movement, maintains in her article “Women as Leaders,” that the exigencies of this political age, require that women take their places beside their men. Jacques-Garvey goes on to add that white women are rallying all their forces and uniting regardless of national boundaries to save their race from destruction, and preserve its ideals for posterity. White men have begun to realize that as women are the backbone of the home they can participate effectively in guiding the destiny of their nation and race. The white
women can do this by their economic experience and aptitudes. On the other hand, Jacques Garvey also claims that women of the East, both Yellow (Brown) and Black, are slowly but surely, imitating the ways of the women of the Western world, even so women of the darker races are rallying forth to help their men establish a civilization according to their own standards, and to strive for world leadership.

Women of all races have as great a part to play in the development of their particular group as the men. Some readers may not agree with us on this issue. But do they not mould the mind of their children the future men and women? Even before birth a mother can so direct her thoughts and conduct as to bring into the world either a genius or an idiot. Imagine the early years of contact between mother and child, when she directs his form of speech, and is responsible for his conduct and deportment. Many a man has risen from the depths of poverty and obscurity and made his mark in life because of the advice and councils of a good mother whose influence guided his footsteps throughout his life. (251)

Here Jacques-Garvey points out the power of the maternal bond and influence in children’s lives. Thus, she insinuates the potentiality of women of color to make an even greater impact in people’s lives of their racial or ethnic group beyond the home environment and private space. Accordingly she states:

Women therefore are extending this holy influence outside the realms of the home softening the hills of the world by their gracious and kindly contact. . . . The doll-baby type of woman is a thing of the past, and the wide-awake woman is forging ahead prepared for all emergencies, and
ready to answer any call, even if it be to face the cannons on the battlefield. . . . Be not discouraged Black women of the world, but push forward, regardless of the lack of appreciation shown you. A race must be saved, a country must be redeemed . . . We are tired of hearing Negro men say, “There is a better day coming,” while they do nothing to usher in the day. We are becoming so impatient that we are getting in front ranks, and serve notice on the world that we will brush aside the halting, cowardly Negro men, and with prayer on our lips and arms prepared for any fray, we will press on until victory is over. (251-252)

In no uncertain terms, Jacques-Garvey calls on her fellow women of the Black and Yellow (Brown) race and community to rise up, challenge the status quo, and move beyond the societal boundaries, even their own Black men, and lead the charge to redeem themselves and by extension, their country or Black nation of Africa and African peoples. The sentence, “We are becoming impatient . . . with prayer on her lips and arms prepared for any fray, we will press on until victory is over,” implies that Black and Brown women must be prepared to fill spaces on the battlefield, if freedom warrants it.

-Daisy “Wong” Richardson of Anguilla

Indeed, Jacques-Garvey’s sentiment, seems consistent with Daisy “Wong” Richardson’s stance on freedom. Daisy “Wong” Richardson, a heroine of the Anguilla Revolution, was instrumental in leading the charge to eject the off-island leadership of the neighboring island of St.Kitts, in 1967. According to the revolutionary heroine, Anguillians lived in a very poor state. They were neglected by the St.Kitts government under the leadership of Robert Llewelyn Bradshaw (Papa Bradshaw), who declared that
he would put pepper in the Anguillians’ tea and bones in their soup. Here, one might ask: How much worse than that can it get? Vividly, Richardson, despite her ripe old age of 95 years, recalled the morning in question, when the revolution was started, as she left her young children at home locked up in the house and warned them to remain indoors. Her parting words to them as she mentioned, were as follows: “If I do not return, tell John that I died fighting for my country.” Richardson and some fellow Anguillians set sail for St. Kitts and challenged the Bradshaw administration. While they were dealing with the administration, other determined Anguillians guarded the beaches and harbors with rifles. St. Kitts policemen were put aboard an airplane and sent out of Anguilla. Then, the airport was barricaded with bottles, sticks, barbed wire, drums and big stones so that no incoming aircraft could land. When Richardson returned to Anguilla, she indicated that the atmosphere was filled with rage and she jumped right in and was ready to fight. Richardson has remarked: “That day, the spirit of God had left us. We were ready, willing and fixed to handle the worst of circumstances. We had suffered far too long” (Richardson 2018). Of course, Daisy “Wong,” (as she is affectionately called) was not only valiant during the Anguilla Revolution, but she was prepared to fight against all odds for the liberty of her country. Admittedly, Richardson used what seems to be the Amy Jacques-Garvey revolutionary formula. A country had to be redeemed at all costs.

Moreover, Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, the former wife of poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, purports that women of color seek the political kingdom and powered spaces for themselves, since they have long been subjected merely to bodily objectification, empty promises, and have lost faith in male-dominated systems. The following further illustrates her views on the Black woman, suffrage, and leadership.
To those colored women who worked, fought, spoke, sacrificed, traveled, pleaded, wept, cajoled, all but died for the right of suffrage for themselves and with their peers, it seemed as if the ballot would be the great objective of life. That with its granting, all the economic, political, and social problems to which the race had been subject would be solved. They did not hesitate to say—those militantly gentle workers for the vote—that with the granting of the ballot the women would step into the dominant place, politically, of the race. That all the mistakes which men have made, would be rectified. The men have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, said the women. Cheap political office and little political preferment had dazzled their eyes so that they could not see the great issues affecting the race. They had been fooled by specious lies, fair promises and large sounding works. . . . And thus on and on during all the bitter campaign of the votes for women, one of the strange phases of the situation, was the rather violent objection of the Negro Man to the Negro woman’s having the vote. Just what his objection was racially, he did not say, preferring to hide behind the grandiloquent platitude of his white political boss. (265)

Clearly, Dunbar-Nelson resents the failure of male representation and leadership. She also emphasizes the ongoing struggle of women for voting rights that worked as a counter-force to male supremacy. What is problematic about Dunbar-Nelson’s account is that even the “Negro” or Black male leadership had failed the Negro people. Hence, it becomes more evident that change and difference are vital and missing ingredients in the
divisive masculine standards in which men, particularly White men, literally were the ones calling the shots, even with Black political representatives. Dunbar-Nelson’s account highlights the intersections of gender, race, and class. Given that patriarchal hegemonic systems are class-based systems, it would seem that women of color inevitably could continue being subjected by the established boundaries of the system. Consequently, it necessitates a shift from masculine rule to feminine rule. This shift will allow for women of the darker races and poor classes to experience liberation since their bodies stand out as the markers or sites of oppression.

Marlene Nourbese Phillips, mentioned earlier, and Barbara Christian of the U. S. Virgin Islands, in tandem acknowledge that Black women’s bodies have historically been labeled as “markers and sites of oppression.” Nourbese Phillips urges Black women to reclaim the “private space between their legs,” as their Black bodies have been used to sustain the plantation economy in years of plantocracy, meanwhile today, they continue to be the sexual capital that sustains the capitalist political economy. Christian, on the other hand, discusses the “Black Mammy” societal images in which Black women are portrayed as merely subjects of servitude and menial tasks. What this Black Mammy imagery proposes is the idea that Black women are somehow deformed, unable, deficient, and incapable of performing creatively and intellectually, for example. Lorraine Hansberry’s heroine, Lena Younger (Mamma), the strong, respectable and resilient family matriarch in *A Raisin in the Sun*, who challenges her white, male antagonists including Mr. Lindner and his home ownership team, as they seek to deny her family access to home ownership and property rights, defies this myth. Besides, Barbara Christian resents the debased essentialist ideology on Black women as being merely the
“Black Mammy” figures and subjects of servitude, and of possessing menial abilities only. Christian does so, by making noteworthy mention of the revolutionary acts of defiance to the oppressive imperial powers, performed by a list of Black revolutionary women in the Caribbean region, such as Queens Mary, Mathilda and Agnes of the U.S Virgin Islands, who spearheaded slave rebellions, Mary Prince of Bermuda, Nanny, the Maroon leader, and Mary Mathurin Mair of Jamaica, who fought for female women’s suffrage and became the first elected female to the Jamaican parliament, just to name a few (Christian qtd. in Collins 267).

**Three Revolutionary Queens of the U.S Virgin Islands: Queens Mary, Agnes and Mathilda**

The combined revolutionary acts of the Rebel Queens Mary, Agnes and Mathilda of the U.S Virgin Islands were among some of the most eventful ones of the Caribbean region and perhaps worthy of mention. In 1848, for example, on the island of St. Croix, the Danish government did little to put an end to the harsh and inhumane treatment of the enslaved Africans. Despite endless protests regarding their working conditions, the Danish government gave no satisfaction. So the enslaved Africans become increasingly angry and finally decided to organize a rebellion. Moreover, in 1878, a landmark event that actually ignited the first major strike was word of the brutal murder of one of their fellow enslaved Africans. Queen Mary, the notorious senior queen with fire in her eyes, moved her people into action. She ordered that any fellow African who expressed a desire not to rebel be decapitated. To participate in this rebellion, Queen Mathilda left behind her baby girl of only four months to participate in the rebellion. With “The Three Warrior Queens” Mary, Agnes and Mathilda in the lead, the enslaved Africans took to the
streets and threw stones at the Danish soldiers who retaliated with gunfire. The violence then got out of hand. The petrified Danish soldiers despite their gunfire, ran for cover in a nearby fort. The rebels aimed for the fort, but once they discovered that they could not enter, they turned on the town and plantations. They burned down over 900 acres of plantation land, homes and businesses. And the gigantic sugar mills were set ablaze! These defiant and revolutionary acts became known as the Great Fireburn of the U.S Virgin Islands, whereby “The Three Warrior Queens,” Mary, Agnes and Mathilda were instrumental. (Millin-Young 2018).

Evidently, the line of Black visionary and revolutionary heroines who struggled for justice, fairness, and equality enabled them to make considerable liberatory gains. And their efforts should be lauded. However, the noteworthy gains made by Black female liberationists should be used to help enlighten and inspire future generations of women of color to participate in the struggle for liberation. A serious and meaningful remembrance of these gains could also be taken to the next level in the liberatory struggle. Possibly, this next level could entail two major goals: first, the women of color’s struggle could be used to help reverse the negative and racist images and socially-driven perceptions about women of their race, and second, for women of color to struggle for ascendency to positions of power and leadership themselves.

Another classic example of the racist and negative, twisted, and falsified perceptions about Black bodies is Tracey Reynolds’ article, “(Mis)representing the Black (Super)woman.” In this article, Reynolds discusses the essentialist biological and gendered construction of the Black woman and presents the inconsistencies between the popular media discourse and the sociological facts about Black women in British society.
such as their race, age, experience, class and socio-economic factors (97-98). Reynolds challenges the falsified and negative views of Black women both as the “Super (woman).” For Reynolds, considering that there has been no study to provide empirical evidence on the status of Black women in Britain, the negative and racist claims about them are found wanting. Mainstream Feminism overlooks the critical issues of Black women’s lives such as age differences and socio-economic factors. In short, both Reynolds and Christian attempt to confront the negative bodily images about women of color. These negative images are intended to bar and exclude them from access to financial and educational resources. These images also bars them from political and cultural freedom.

Part IV Caribbean Women and Leadership 1980s to the present

-Caribbean Women and Their Fictional Representations of Leadership

In the same vein, Merle Hodge, a contemporary Caribbean female writer, literary critic, and novelist of Crick Crack, Monkey highlights the complexities of race and class in her Trinadian community. In Crick Crack, Monkey, the adolescent heroine, Tee, is socialized by three influential maternal figures in the persons of Ma, her grandmother, Tantie and Aunt Beatrice. All three women, play a crucial role in Tee’s development and help enable her to come of age to some of the socio-political realities and complexities of race and class in her native Trinadian community. Then, in Hodge’s other novel For the life of Laetitia (1993), Laetitia, a young girl, goes on a life changing journey and is forced to choose between her family and an education. Likewise, Hodge illustrates in her 1990 article, “Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World
versus Writing Stories,” that Caribbean women’s struggle for liberation is part and parcel of the larger social issue of Caribbean liberation which is the struggle of the Caribbean women and men to finally inherit the Caribbean and its resources, along with the ongoing struggle of the Caribbean people for political power.

In this struggle, cultural sovereignty is both a means to an end: we can neither achieve the liberation of the Caribbean without affirming and enthroning our culture, nor affirm and enthrone our culture in any real sense until we have won full political sovereignty. . . . If we agree that Caribbean literature can contribute to the political process of empowering Caribbean people, then we must set about solving another problem: how we deliver Caribbean literature to the Caribbean people . . . . One of the reasons Caribbean literature has not yet fully invaded the school curriculum is that there is not a sufficient body of good fiction suitable for all age groups. (203)

Hodge taps into the lived socio-political and cultural realities that inform the experiences of Caribbean women, men and children. If they are overlooked, as is the common practice in many Caribbean schools, whose curricula strongly reflect the curricula and experiences of the metropolitan cultures, and neglect the true and lived realities of Caribbean students. Then, there remains a socio-political, and cultural gap or disconnect in the students’ learning experiences since the materials that are presented to them are about foreign people and foreign cultures. Here Hodge examines the differences that exist in Caribbean educational and political systems. The imperial mainstream systems of education remain largely disjointed and segmented. Neither do they examine
“exceptions,” (alternative groups of people) or subalterns and their lived realities. Hodge argues in favor of utilizing a holistic socio-political, educational and cultural paradigm that will include exceptions and differences in age, culture, race and gender, for instance. She does not end here. She further claims that as a child, she admired women who did not seem to know their place.

As a child, I admired women who did not know their place—women who did not seem to pattern their lives after the rules laid down by nice Trinidadian society, by the church or by storybooks. These were self-possessed women who seemed to be operating by a different set of norms with regard to work, their understanding of their own physical being, their sexuality, their relations with men, their family relations—women like the grandmother and aunt with whom I spent long periods of my childhood. It is Caribbean women such as these who will continue to inhabit the world of my stories. Our struggle for Caribbean liberation, will include putting ourselves fully in touch with these everyday models of sovereignty. (208)

Hodge voices her opinions regarding the subjugation and cultural subordination of Caribbean women. Her belief is grounded in the view that the cultural and spiritual aspects of Caribbean women’s lives should not be separated from their political aspects. Thinking from the standpoint of Amy Jacques-Garvey, Ann Moore Dunbar-Nelson, and Daisy “Wong” Richardson, unity appears to be a defense mechanism against Black, Yellow and or Brown women’s oppression. Furthermore, like Audrey Lorde, bell hooks and Adrienne Rich aforementioned, Hodge seems to see value in the “Sisterhood” and the “Mother bond,” as transformative agents against cultural female marginalization. Perhaps
more important, is the fact that Hodge stresses that if we agree that Caribbean literature can assist with “the political process of empowering people, we must attempt to solve the other problem: how we deliver Caribbean literature to the Caribbean people.” Certainly, the delivery of Caribbean literature can go a long way in empowering Caribbean people and in influencing revolutionary gender attitudes, once it is informed by the cultural space Caribbean women and men employ. The gender issues facing Caribbean women and men, such as gender inequity, can possibly be tackled at the academic level, and can in turn be promulgated to address race, class, and gender issues in the wider Caribbean society.

As a case in point, Heather Smyth’s analysis of Zee Edgell, a Caribbean woman writer and Belizean politician in her work *Beka Lamb*, shows the connection between the Caribbean woman’s role in society and her overall struggle for recognition, space and equality. Smyth notes in her article entitled “She Had Made a Beginning Too:” *Beka Lamb* and the Caribbean Feminist Bildungsroman Genre,” that although Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* is a woman centred Bildungsroman, it also looks at the collective struggles of Caribbean peoples or Creoles (Caribbean women and men) and the Creolization process. It looks at Creoles and the process of identity formation, critical aspects of their rhizomatic ethnic and cultural makeup, their suppressed histories, origins and roots of their history. Smyth indicates that creolization in Caribbean thought, seeks to reclaim the cultural identities, suppressed histories and origins, rather than merely being defined as Creole. She also adds that as a bildungsroman genre, *Beka Lamb* looks backward and forward, but it is obsessed with origins. In light of this, it would seem that Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* can be seen as a novel that epitomizes many of the literary contestations and
postcolonial or neocolonial arguments of scholars, both women and men, not only in the Caribbean region, but in other diasporic spaces with people of color. One can surmise the former, since the Caribbean’s ethnic, social dimension comprises cultures from Africa, India and other formerly colonized parts of the globe. And the collective struggle of colonized peoples has been the result of hegemonic pressures. Smyth also maintains that “Women writers have used the bildungsroman genre to dramatize female development in contradictory ways to show “the feminine” as a site of ideological confession, struggle and possibility” (184).

In concert with Heather Smyth and Merle Hodge, Lynn Bolles, a Contemporary Feminist thinker, presents in her article “Making it Work in the English-Speaking Caribbean: Women as Mothers, Providers and Leaders,” a historical overview of the gender struggle. She mentions some of the concerns and the contributions of four key women leaders/political figures to political leadership on various Caribbean islands. Some of these women political figures include Phyllis Shand Allfrey of Dominica, a writer and minister of the West Indies Federation; Jane Phillips Gay of Guyana, a champion for the Guyana Industrial Workers Union. Two other outstanding Caribbean women leaders which Bolles identifies include Calypso Rose, and Marvelous Marva of Trinidad and Tobago. Calypso Rose and Marvelous Marva are female calypsonians and protestors against female denigration. Bolles details some of the struggles that were faced by the aforementioned women leaders/political figures and the strategies they utilized to secure their liberation and assert positions of power in their respective Caribbean Communities. Bolles also addresses issues such as gender disparity, class struggle, and
problems facing the poor and working classes in the islands named. For instance, she cites Jane Phillips Gay of Guyana, who indicates that the following concerns her.

. . . My anxiety is to understand the problems of the sugar workers. As a young girl, my parents used to look forward to the various shootings of the industry. There was some uprising of the estate, but they could not give me any type of knowledge what was really responsible for this. So, when the opportunity presented itself to me, shortly after the 1940 Emerald shooting, I took office of the president of the GIWU and that’s how I began to gain knowledge which I was about to attend at the Plantation Providence; and we sat and I listened to the workers, what they discussed with him. I became more interested then; and asked him if I could go to the plantation Highblock on Sunday where he was scheduled to have a meeting. I went, and there again my interest grew. And then he asked me if I would like to see some of the workers personally from other estates. They generally visited his office every Monday. And so, I went on Monday, and there is where I became actually involved in the problems of the sugar workers. (Phillips Gay qtd. in Bolles 1996)

Here one finds a landmark example of the potential that female leaders, can bring to the gender and class discussion. Gay demonstrates transparency, a town-hall-type forum that could enable the poor and working class struggles to be voiced. Gay’s practice can be identified as a much-needed and a liberatory practice for the sugar workers in Guyana. Besides, Gay’s approach of open-house to listen to the concerns of the workers is not commonplace in the arena of politics, which is a relatively one-way path. The general
tendency is that once male political leaders assume office. They seem to conveniently forget to carry out the mandate of the very poor and working-class masses, who made it possible for the said leaders to acquire positions of power and influence, in the first place. In short, Gay seems to embrace the element of difference and to use critical dialogue as a transformative device. Her unpopular practice also seems consistent with Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of “Dialogistics,” mentioned above, whereby he recommends that oppressed peoples can engage in critical dialogue. Thus, they could give voice to their silent struggles and disrupt the oppressor’s violent and dehumanizing systems (Freire 88).

**Leading Women’s Organizations in Guyana and their Aim to Uplift Women of Color**

Notwithstanding, Linda Peake cited in Momsen 1993 notes in her summary of political organizations in Guyana that working class women of both African and Indian racial groups played a critical role in the labor struggles at the turn of the twentieth century. It was their involvement in this unpaid charity work that allowed Guyanese women to make forays into the public world and see themselves as the moral guardians of colonial society. Peake continues that many of the earlier women’s organizations in Guyana, such as the Social and Welfare Children’s Protection Agency, Girl Guide Movement and Women’s League of Social Services led to the later more militant and political women’s organizations that included the WPEO in 1946, the Women’s Auxiliary of the PNC in 1957, the WAB in 1980, the Women’s Section WPA in 1982, the Women’s Revolutionary Socialist Movement in 1985, and the Red Thread in 1986 (111-113). The Red Thread Movement, for instance, was set up to support women who were used in the human trafficking market. It provided employment opportunities,
education, and shelters for them. The creation of the Red Thread bracelets for instance, served as one of the forms of revenue generation for the women. Peake also references one Guyanese woman who states the following:

Let all women participate in this social uplift. Prove yourself day by day in everything you say and do, a good Christian and worthy citizen. . . Organize societies and clubs that will help stem the tide of temptation. Remember that there is no sphere into which your activities cannot climb; no mass of sordidity which your influence cannot permeate: no depth, but your sympathy can reach to cleanse and purify. (111)

Peake admits that the unnamed Guyanese female citizen beckons all women to join the leagues of Guyanese women and others who strive for equality, space, and recognition. She seemingly advocates a classless method of grappling with the marginal and exclusionary woman’s cause. She challenges her fellow Guyanese sisters of color to “remember that there is no sphere into which their activities cannot climb.” Thus, she insinuates that there is no limitation to the woman of color’s potential, but her presence must be felt and made known. By the same token, Peake suggests that the deep and culturally-entrenched values of a vast majority of societal factions maintain their reservations towards women’s political ascendancy. And she writes:

A number of factors have limited the impact of women’s political organizations in Guyana on women’s liberation. First, the issue is closely associated with national liberation and this has been hampered by unemployment, national debt and high levels of out-migration, all of which have acted as material and ideological constraints on the
emancipation of women. But even more detrimental has been the nature of the regime itself . . . until quite recently there has been a tendency to deny that there is a need for autonomous women’s organizations to campaign for feminist objectives. . . Feminist representation on the PNC Executive Committee, however, is minimal . . . women’s representation at higher levels of economic decision-making remains low. (119)

Obviously, Peake points out the view that women’s issues do not seem to be a priority in mainstream Guyanese society and women are largely underrepresented, especially at higher levels of economic decision-making. The latter statement is unsettling. Perhaps the question one can ask here is: why are women denied access so that they can represent at the higher economic levels, where the most power is wielded? This phenomenon and inconsistency is indeed interesting to note. Hence, a relentless effort to challenge the established male-governed and limiting societal systems seem obvious and necessary, here. One way of challenging such established institutions is to ensure that women’s activities be reflected in more public and leading spaces. Additionally, women leaders should struggle to help open the eyes of the oppressed people in their respective communities to vote for difference and acceptance.

**Two Cases of Societal Resistance to Women as Political Leaders**

Strong evidence of societal resistance to women leaders was seen in two instances of President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, and Senator Janette Millin-Young of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. First, in the recent 2017 news story of President Dilma Rousseff, who was elected as the first female president to the Brazilian Congress in 2011.
Rousseff fought for equal rights and equal representation for Brazilian women of color. She joined the Brazilian Workers Union in 2010 and since, was a strong advocate for women. Despite her unwavering efforts, she was met with open resentment chiefly from male colleagues in the Brazilian Congress. For instance, they voted in opposition to her motions for radical changes to the political system, oftentimes filibustering. Then, at last, they sought to involve her in a corruption scandal, the likes of which their male colleagues had been either conveniently overlooked or forgiven. The surge of this scandal they claim was grounds for impeachment. Clearly, the differential that one notices here, is the fact that President Rousseff is a woman and worse, it seems, at the Congressional and Senate level, she is openly met with resentment from male colleagues, since she had now risen to occupy a less private and instead, a more public and powered space. Members of the Brazilian Congress stop at nothing until President Rousseff was finally impeached and had to step down from public office. From these observations, one can state that the gender issue is deep and disturbing.

The second case that exemplifies my point is that of Senator Janette Millin-Young, a sitting U.S Virgin Islands senator, who was recently in the 2018 gubernatorial race. In an interview with her, Senator Millin-Young revealed that her bid for governor has been a long and hard race. She also maintained that she has the welfare of Virgin Islanders at heart. Being born and bred in the U.S territory has afforded her a rich and intimate cultural island experience. She fully understands the dynamics of Virgin Islands culture and life. Perhaps one of the most important things she understands about the Virgin Island, are the people for whom she expresses a deep love and concern. Millin-Young indicated that it is owing to the day-to-day challenges and frustrations she faces
from male colleagues on the Senate floor, and her burning desire to pass legislation that would afford the Virgin Islands’ people a better quality of life, which fuels her with the energy to fight even harder for changes. She admitted that her decision to run for the highest office in the Virgin Islands is to access a space where she could make a greater impact and enable her islands’ people more opportunities to succeed with their local economies and trade. She admitted that she is a voice for the voiceless women of her community. She stressed the need for there to be more female representation in the territory. One of the ways in which she has attempted to network with women in her community is through the founding of the woman’s organization, Women Striving for Success. She also pointed out that if elected as governor, she wished to invest handsomely in education, agriculture and the development of the local arts and crafts. She also envisions a world class varsity and recreational centre for the Virgin Islands youth by the expansion of sporting activities. When asked what she would consider to be her greatest challenge as a senator, she does not hesitate to indicate resentment from some bigoted and disrespectful male colleagues. Some male colleagues she claims, complain that she is too angry and aggressive. She even remarked that she was referred to as a “setty fowl” by a male colleague when she took a separatist stand for justice and voted to bring economic relief to the suffering Virgin Islands people.

Also, when asked what her response to the namecalling was, Senator Millin-Young chuckled as she stated: “African setty fowls are made of black gold and stone.” I thought the name-calling and personal attacks on a woman senator, who deserves respect to be profound. Even more, the use of animal names to describe her was nothing short of demoralizing. Besides, it would occur that restrictive societal and cultural gender
retentions still influence attitudes towards women leaders. Yet, she was optimistic and determined to win. She moved beyond the societal limits and anxiously looked forward to: “Let’s make it happen” as her campaign slogan promised to engender history in the U.S Virgin Islands, during the impending November 2018 elections. If she were elected, Senator Janette Millin-Young would have been the first-ever elected woman and governor of color of the U.S Virgin Islands and by extension, the first African-American governor in the United States. Unfortunately, the recent November 6, 2018, election results proved that Senator Millin-Young like several other Virgin Islands’ women, who have sought election before her in the gubernatorial race, did not manage to prevail.

Here, it can be observed that societal reservations and negative attitudes about women holding the highest elected office in the U.S Virgin Islands Community, still remain largely unchanged. Next, I will present a trajectory of 6 real-life women leaders of color from India, Africa, Pakistan and the Caribbean and illustrate how they are similar to characters in the fictional world.

**A Trajectory of Contemporary Women Leaders and Freedom Fighters of Color from India, Africa, Pakistan and the Caribbean and how They Mirror the Tribulations, Challenges and Triumphs of Fictional Women’s Leaders**

**Indira Gandhi of India**

Indira Gandhi, was the daughter of Pundit Jawaharl Nehru, a moderate socialist leader of the National Indian Congress. She was born on November 19, 1917 and died on October 31, 1984. She married Feroze Gandhi in 1942 and he died leaving her a young
widow in 1960. She was later elected as Prime Minister of India for two terms as the leader of the Indian National Congress. Her first term was from 1966-1977 and, again, from 1980 to 1984. However, in 1971, her defeated opponent charged that she violated the election laws in the race. In June of 1975, the High Court of Allahbad ruled against her, which meant that Gandhi was required to remain out of politics for six years. She appealed the case with the Supreme Court, but she did not receive a satisfactory response. She then took matters into her own hands by declaring a state of emergency throughout India. She was also imprisoned her political opponents and assumed emergency powers to rule India. This state of emergency rule lasted for two years. Gandhi also implemented various unpopular policies such as large-scale sterilization as a form of birth control. In 1977 she and her party was defeated. But Ghandi would not stop there. She re-contested elections in 1980 and won. She remained in office for another four years implementing unpopular policies and causing major changes on the political landscape of India. During this second term in office, Gandhi was under much pressure and opposition as several Indian states began to seek independence from the central government (Britannica.com).

In response to the above, one notices that Gandhi became a young widow. According to Indian custom, she got more recognition than married and unmarried Indian women. For one example, she seemed free to bid for public office. For another example, she seemed free from male domination, owing to her husband’s loss. Moreover, she was the daughter of the former leader of India, Mahatma Gandhi whose political legacy, one can imagine, afforded her some political gains. Similarly, Indira Gandhi seemed militant and dauntless in her resolve to bring about social changes in India. The idea that she assumed emergency power throughout India, it seemed like a testament to herrare
valiance and unique strength of character. Equally important, given that Gandhi implemented various unpopular policies, particularly, widespread sterilization and the use of birth control, highlights her defiance of Indian tradition and totalistic cultural purity. Then too, Gandhi’s life and leadership examples would not go by unnoticed; they would serve to inspire and move other like-minded women of color to follow suite. Gandhi’s revolutionary leadership style and apparent militancy appear similar to those of Ryhaan Shah’s literary heroine, Aleyah Hassan, in her work A Silent Life, whose character will be analyzed in the following chapter of this dissertation. Finally, Indira Gandhi can be seen as an Indian heroine of sorts, much like the traditional Matrikas of the Indian ancestral mother line, who has returned to reclaim a leadership space. By reclaiming this leadership space, and thinking from the perspective of the maternal ancestral realm, Gandhi might also be seen as a prophetic, visionary, and revolutionary woman leader who was given a chance to purge or help to bring about a societal catharsis on the Indian continent, which has been heavily influenced by Western patriarchy, and dominated by men since the colonization of India

Winnie Mandela of South Africa

Winnie Mandela was born in South Africa in 1936 and died on April 2, 2018. She was the wife of Nelson Mandela, the leader of the ANC Movement which sought to end apartheid in South Africa. Winnie led a life of social activism. After her husband was imprisoned in 1964, she continued the struggle for equality, justice, and for the return of one of South Africa’s most important resources -the ownership of their ancestral lands. In addition to her role as a public activist, Winnie Mandela was a mother. She had two
daughters, Zenani and Zindiswa, whom she raised independently as her husband Nelson Mandela, was imprisoned for 27 years of his life. Additionally, she was accused of corruption and fraudulent practices. Her home was bombed as a result of her activism in Soweto. Mandela was constantly under government scrutiny and even ended up in prison. She was kept in solitary confinement for well over one year. Then, upon her release from prison Winnie still continued to struggle and voice her opinions and to call out people of influence for the injustices in South Africa. Again, Winnie ended up in prison several times, after. Yet, she continued to stand up for justice. Here one might ask: Were the corruption and fraudulent charges, and the bombings based on the premise that Winnie Mandela was a woman with a hard-to-silence voice? Winnie was also well known for her deadly retaliation against black citizens. In 1985, she was bestowed the title of “Mother of the Nation” of South Africa (Biography.com).

Winnie Mandela’s story has even become a topic of concern among African poets and writers. Dannabang Kuwabong, a Ghanian writer, pens the following lines in an excerpt of his 1995 poem, “Mandela Escapes Winnie:”

111 =W

Loose Winnie for wind

Winnie daughter of Action

Winie daughter of Sorrow

Winnie sits alone on ruins

Fingers that nurtured in pain

Womb that nourished in silence . . .

Winnie the dream weaned lean . . .
but there you stood tall . . . (84-115)

What one realizes is that Winnie Mandela was a strong, radical and relentless freedom fighter. She seemed like a woman of steel and substance. She stood up and fought alone, in spite of the endless personal attacks. She seemed to have had the welfare of her fellow South African women and men at heart. She appeared very ready to fight and even at a moment’s notice. She was as brave as a lioness and unstoppable. Considering that Mandela was constantly under government scrutiny and spent a considerable amount of time in prison, it is a testament to her conviction that active resistance sometimes became necessary, for justice to be served. Like the heroine Waringa, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s novel *Devil on the Cross*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, Winnie Mandela’s determination, coupled with her resistant and revolutionary acts were characteristic of her strong character and resilient nature.

**Eugenia Charles of Dominica**

Dame Eugenia Charles was born on May 15, 1919 in the village of Pointe Michel in the parish of St. Luke, in the British colony of Dominica, and died on September 5, 2005. Dame Eugenia Charles commenced public life in the arena of politics in 1968. She claimed she entered the world of politics after what she described to be mistakes made by her predecessor, Edward Oliver Leblanc, the leader of the Dominica Labour Party. Dame Eugenia Charles contested the general elections in 1968 and won her seat. She was then installed as the new leader of the New Dominica Labour Party. Dame Charles served as Dominica’s Foreign Minister from 1980 to 1990. She addressed the humanitarian cause in Dominica and is an ever-present force in supporting humanitarian and disaster relief
efforts in Dominica, and neighboring islands. In 1981, she faced two attempted coups d’etat. Charles remained in office until 1995, when she announced her retirement from public service. After her retirement announcement, the DLP eventually lost the general elections (Christian 4).

From the above observations, it would occur, that Dame Eugenia Charles, exhibited compassion for the women and men of Dominica and in other islands and countries, where a critical mass of poor women and men of color exist. She can be deemed an exceptional female leader as she saw about the welfare of the women and men of her community, despite a backlash from members of the opposition party, on grounds that she became a puppet for the United States that was led at the time, by President Ronald Reagan. Additionally, she remained in office between 1968 and 1995, and did not lose an election since her installment as Prime Minister of Dominica. What Dame Charles’ longstanding service as Prime Minister shows is that she managed to capture the respect and spirit of the Dominican people. It would seem that she maintained their faith and trust. She seemingly carried out their mandate, by keeping the promises she made to them at times of election. Thus, it could be inferred that Dame Eugenia Charles did not allow her assumption of leadership to cause her to lose her soul as oftentimes happens, with scores of male leaders throughout the Caribbean region and in other parts of the colonized world. As Dame Eugenia Charles decided to leave public office, it seems that she did so honorably and with dignity, Charles’ humanitarian efforts strongly resemble those of Ryhan Shah’s heroine Aleyah, analyzed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.
Albena Lake-Hodge of Anguilla

Albena Lake-Hodge was born on the island of Anguilla in 1920 and died on October 22, 1985. Albena can first be described as an educator par excellence, and second as a politician. She was a dominant force in Anguilla’s Revolutionary years. She was also the principal of the Valley Girls School between the late 1960s and 1970s amidst Anguilla’s political quagmires with St. Kitts. Anguilla initially became a part of the Federation of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla in the late 1800s. It was during the 1960s and 1970s that stalwart educators like Teacher Albena, as she was more commonly known, took on the challenge to help reform education in Anguilla and to open up new opportunities for Anguillian children. As a result of the influence of concerned Anguillian educators like Teacher Albena, the expulsion of various figure heads appointed by the St. Kitts Government head, Robert Llewelyn Bradshaw, to serve on Anguilla, were seen. Superintendents and police constables were expelled as an embryonic step in a series of revolutionary acts that marked the beginning of the Anguilla Revolution in 1967. Subsequently, several Kittitian policemen holding high ranking posts in Anguilla were put on a plane and sent out of the island. It seemed clear to logical thinking Anguillians such as Teacher Albena, that Kittitians were territorial, and did not have any respect for them. Hence, ejection seemed inevitable. Prior to her assuming the role of principal at the Valley Girls School which later became the Valley Secondary School, Teacher Albena Lake-Hodge wore several hats in Anguillian education. Notably, she was instrumental in the merger of the Valley Girls School with the Valley Boys School in 1970. Thus, both schools were renamed the Valley Secondary School. Teacher Albena Lake-Hodge would not only bring about changes in Anguillian education, but she
then ran for public office and won. She assumed leadership in public office between 1980 and 1984. Teacher Albena continued to work tirelessly to support the Anguillian cause during the years of immense tension and tumult with St. Kitts, under the iron-fisted dictatorial, masculine and oppressive leadership of Robert Llewelyn Bradshaw, who gave Anguillians an unfair deal, and boasted that he would “put pepper in the Anguillians’ tea and bones in their soup.” Of course, the inevitable result of oppression from the Bradshaw administration was the start of the Anguilla Revolution, which led to the ejection of St. Kitts policemen and other officials upon demand of the local women and men, out of Anguilla. Consequently, the Anguillians could hold such posts themselves and move their country forward (Hughes 2018). By the same token, Marlon Halley of the Morris Vanterpool Primary School, Anguilla, in his 2018 Calypso hit, *The People’s Power* eloquently retold these said symbolic acts that underscored Anguilla’s revolutionary history.

It seems that Teacher Albena was a real-life heroine, who fought with every moral fibre in her “body” to defend the rights and freedoms of Anguillian children, women and men. Realizing that she took a big step forward to merge the Valley Girls School and the Valley Boys School, it was indicative of visionary and revolutionary thought processing. Perhaps, Teacher Albena Lake-Hodge during her time envisioned a freer Anguilla with a generation of young women and men who are not sexist. Rather may have envisioned one which reflected inclusive education. It would seem that Teacher Albena examined the elements of difference and experience as vehicles for a gender neutral Anguillian society, and she sounded the alarm through her marked and unpopular organizational structure in Aguillian education and classrooms, during moments of great
socio-political unrest. Perhaps what can be considered quite a feat for Teacher Albena, was her instrumental role in helping to disarm the arm of the law—the St.Kitts policemen, and in ensuring their ejection out of Anguilla. Besides, it would appear that Teacher Albena Lake-Hodge was a selfless thinker, as Hughes points out that “Teacher Albena Lake-Hodge did not have any offspring of her own, but she was the mother figure and teacher to Anguilla’s children— all and sundry” (Hughes 2018). Lake-Hodge also seemed to think about systemic review and of incorporating best practices in the Anguillian education system. Her track history strongly resembled Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga, who will be detailed in Chapter Five, and who envisions transformative education. For instance, Ngũgĩ’s heroine elects to become a confident and sought-after woman engineer. In a word or two, Teacher Albena Lake-Hodge can be seen as an Anguillian real-world heroine, who not only moved, but she shook.

**Mia Mottley of Barbados**

Mia Mottley of Barbados was born in 1965. She is a graduate of the University of the West Indies at Cave hill, Barbados. She was also trained as an attorney and has worked in this capacity for a number of years. She has also served as an elected member of the opposition in the Barbadian parliament for several years. Mia has been an advocate for the woman’s cause and has served on a number of committees involving women and children in Barbados and in various Caribbean islands. Mia is a determined feminist and observing that she first gains a spot in the Barbadian parliament as a member of the opposition party and has never given up her struggle for women’s equality and women’s ascendancy to positions of leadership, it speaks volumes of the kind of
leader she can potentially be. Mia contests general elections in 2018 and she wins in a landslide victory on May 24, 2018. Thus, she becomes the first-ever woman, to be elected as Prime Minister, on the island of Barbados. Within hours of her victory, Mia forms a cabinet and is officially sworn into office as the new and first female Prime Minister of Barbados. Mia gets to work immediately after the swearing in ceremony and addresses the issues of homelessness, sewage disposal that runs like a midtown stream in Bridgetown, Barbados’ capital city, public transportation issues, workers’ unions, the pensioners’ loss of pensions and she has lobbied with the private sector and the local banks to help in the crucial emergency recovery measures on the island. She also expresses a desire to invest in a Women’s Scholarship Program to enable more Barbadian young women an opportunity to have easier access to higher education.

Mia campaigns using the non-traditional method by raising funds locally and online. She claims she does not accept bribes. She calls on other Barbadian women of influence for financial assistance such as Rihanna, the singer and Barbadian native, who has migrated and comes from humble beginnings, like herself. Mia also targets the younger generation. She ensures that her campaign committee exhibits no signs of gender inequality. She employs an equal number of women and men. Her newly formed cabinet also comprises women and men and so is balanced gender wise. From these observations, it would seem that Mia is not only the first elected Prime Minister on the island of Barbados, but she comes across as a female leader with visionary and revolutionary indications for gender identity and gender relationships in Barbados and perhaps in the wider Caribbean region. Here one observes that history has just been made in the Barbadian Parliament, in Barbados and in the Caribbean. Mia’s landslide victory now
changes the shape of the political culture and landscape in Barbados and in the Caribbean (Mottley 2018). Mia’s willingness to address the issues of homelessness, sewage disposal and workers unions for instance, strongly reflect those day-to-day struggles of the ordinary women and men in Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*, which will all be detailed in Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively.

**Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan**

Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani native, who continues to fight for women’s access to education in Pakistan and in other parts of the world where women are marginalized and denied an opportunity to education. She won the Pakistani National Youth Peace Prize in 2011 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 for her valiance and activism in support of the cause of Pakistani women. In 2012, at the age of fifteen, Malala was shot three times and received a bullet in the head on her way home from school aboard a school bus by the Taliban, a political pressure group in Pakistan. Malala is a resident of the Swat region where she was shot and had to be airlifted by helicopter to the nearest hospital in Peshawar. Malala sustained serious head injuries. Fortunately, the bullet that she received in the head, miraculously did not reach her brain. With the assistance of quick emergency and medical responders and her determined and prayerful parents, coupled with Malala’s fighting spirit and her will to live, she survived the attack.

Malala comes from a Pashtun family in Swat, Pakistan and is named after Malala of Maiwand, the greatest heroine of Afghanistan. According to Malala in her book *I Am Malala*, Pashtuns are a proud people of many tribes split between Pakistan and Afghanistan. She claims they live as they have for centuries by a code called
*Pashtunwali*, which obliges them to give hospitality to all guests. “The most value is *nang*, or honor. The worst thing that can happen to a Pashtun is the loss of face. Shame is a very terrible thing for a Pashtun man. We have a saying, without honor, the world counts for nothing” (14). Malala’s family is also pro-education and she is greatly inspired by her father who is an advocate and an activist for educational freedom in Pakistan, particularly for women and girls. Malala follows very closely in her father’s footsteps. She dreams of educational opportunities and more cultural freedom for her people.

Malala includes in her book a conversation between herself and Judy Clain about her attack by the Taliban and on educational opportunities for girls and women in Swat. When Malala is asked to describe what it is like for her when she is on the Syrian Border, Malala’s reply is as follows:

I was not expecting that there would be women without shoes, that there would be children without shoes, with no coats, with no idea of where they were going and no idea if they would have shelter or not, or if they would get home or not. They had no idea if they would get anything to drink or eat. And when I arrived at the border, I saw this with my own eyes - children, women, men, homeless - who did not know where they were going. They did not know if there would be anyone there to help them. All they wanted was to eat and to feel safe. And I was just thinking that people who are safe and who aren’t in need should be paying for this, because these refugees do not want luxury, they do not want a big modern house. All they want is peace. They just want a place where they are treated with equality, where they are fed, where there is no war, where
people are not scared every day, where no bombs dropped. (*I Am Malala*

Reading Group Guide 9)

Malala demonstrates compassion and community mindedness as she works to gain ideological and material support for the humanitarian cause. She is astounded as she witnesses, firsthand, the desperation of the Syrian refugees as they go about their quest for relief from political oppression, the ravages of a war zone, and displacement. She observes that an exodus of them do not have any real sense of direction. However, what she does realize is that they are hungry, homeless and cold. Here, Malala’s account seems equivalent to, or a serial, to George Orwell’s novel *Animal Farm* in which he uses the pig characters to illustrate human foibles and the sufferings of the poor masses of people, who are hungry, homeless and cold at the hands of selfish and greedy leaders in the real world setting. In the fictional setting, Mr. Jones, the thoughtless and selfish owner of the Manor Farm, who has Old Major and his fellow pigs and other farm animals work without pay or compensation and causes them to suffer horribly. The pigs’ remaining hungry, cold and unhappy, exemplifies this. Malala’s emphasis on “I saw this with my own eyes- children, women, men, homeless- who did not know where they were going,” implies that she is both deeply disturbed emotionally and shocked out of her wits. It is like saying she cannot believe the horrendous and depressing sites and the grimaces and desperate looks on the faces of the poor women and men who now have no place in which to turn. In many a community people might chance upon a homeless or physically displaced and emotionally and mentally disturbed person, but to behold so many desperate and hungry - children, women and men, it can be a heart-wrenching encounter.
Likewise, when asked what her hope is for the immediate future and what she would like to accomplish, Malala’s response is as follows:

Well, I have many hopes and many big dreams. I am hoping that through the Malala Fund, we will be doing more projects and reaching more suffering countries where children have no access to education. We want to do work on the ground and we want to spread the importance of education to people in communities, to help them realize how important education is for their generation. Also doing work on the ground, like building schools and making sure that there are qualified teachers in those schools, that there are facilities for the students. So these are the big things we can hope will come true. And we want to do work in India and in other Middle Eastern countries and in Pakistan as well. We have a lot of plans for next year. (I Am Malala Reading Group Guide 11)

Like her predecessors in the struggle for justice and equality, Malala has great plans for Pakistan, the rest of the Middle East, and for displaced masses of women and men in the colored parts of the world. She hopes that the Malala Fund can be used to assist children to have access to education and to recognize the importance of them acquiring an education. Her aim is also to see the erection of schools with facilities and resources and qualified teachers. Perhaps, what is a striking realization about Malala’s revolutionary vision for education (particularly women’s education, since scores of women in Swat, Pakistan, are denied access to education and their voices are essentially silent) is that it is not elitist. She seems as well to be interested in having the masses of children, women and men in the communities become aware of the empowering potentials that having a
sound education can afford them. Literally, Malala is thinking about promoting a 
communal approach towards educating the children, the future women and men of 
Pakistan, in addition to other parts of the world or spaces where people of color are 
found. Malala’s educational dreams as presented in the above interview and her 
autobiographical novel *I Am Malala* seems consistent with those of Ryhaan Shah’s 
heroine Aleyah and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s heroine Wariinga, for the women and men of 
their respective native communities. The fictional representations of the revolutionary 
women leaders in works by Ryhaan Shah, Maryse Condé and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, with 
Contemporary Caribbean Feminist applications will presently be discussed.
Chapter Three: Aleyah, the Reclaimer

Ryhaan Shah, author of *A Silent Life*, is an Indo-guyanese writer. Her literary themes span Guyanese life and environmental affairs. In 2009, she was selected as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world in a publication Al-Waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding of Georgetown University. *(Biography.com)*

In Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, Aleyah Hassan, the protagonist, can be seen as a visionary and revolutionary female leader of sorts. She is an Indo-Caribbean and Muslim woman of color and an agent of political and societal change. Aleyah moves beyond the Indian and Muslim cultural boundaries. Religious dogma and cultural prescriptivism, for example, do not bar Aleyah from accomplishing her personal and career goals. From an early age, Aleyah exhibits a curiosity of the status quo and she begins to question why people in her native land of Guyana are not equal. She questions, for example, why some people have wealth and others do not. She questions the conditions of the poor masses with whom she comes into contact, on a daily basis. Aleyah demonstrates critical thinking and the inward goings on of a child with a highly perceptive mind. She is very close to her grandmother who is also a visionary and revolutionary thinker. Aleyah, it could be said, takes a page or two out of her strong and valiant grandmother’s book. In her Grandmother’s household, Baby or Nani as she is affectionately called, wears the pants. Her husband, Pa Nazeer, seems to be the shadow of his strong and domineering wife Baby. Baby is the woman from whom Aleyah receives much of her early influences.

Still, despite Baby’s influences, Aleyah like many a child, could opt to not duplicate her grandma’s revolutionary spirit. But Aleyah seems to do just the opposite, and she starts to
pattern her grandmother’s practices. She looks deep into her past family history. It is these understandings that seem to guide her thoughts and actions.

Now, whenever I look into the mirror and see my breasts and hips rounding into woman-hood, I am aware of the past looking with me. It is more than just a curious tale now; it is the world from where my journey began and I have such ideas for that journey . . . “People here are poor, Nani. When I grow up, I’m going to change all that” . . . I say that one morning, sitting at her knee, spinning out my words lazily, building bright imaginings on the flat fields of the countryside, transforming them into rich acres of land where people work happily and reap hills of golden paddy much taller than themselves. I sometimes write these imaginings into reports for my Economics class and the teacher, Mr. Moriah, jokes that my ideas are better than the prime minister’s. “I like his class, Nani. He makes us look at our own homes and how we live and work and spend our money and so on. He makes the textbooks live with real people. I like that you can make whole, big plans that you can set things up so that everyone can have a better life. Isn’t that good, Nani? I like to think up ways to do this . . . Mr. Moriah says he has to keep reading and studying all the time just to keep up with me and all my ideas. He likes it that I have so many questions and that I think of all kinds of ways to change things so that” . . . My words fall away when Nani’s rocking chair comes to a stop . . . I am afraid of the silence. (21-22)
Here, Aleyah appears to be largely concerned with the welfare of the poor. So she examines the underlying reasons for their impoverished states. Her ideas are insightful and transformative. Aleyah gains the admiration and respect of Mr. Moriah, her Economics teacher, for example, who claims that she has him constantly reading and studying in order to keep up with her. Aleyah’s traits are characteristic of a gifted and exceptional student with a divergent and futuristic thinking skill set. When Mr. Moriah insinuates that Aleyah has “better ideas than the prime minister,” it suggests that the current system of leadership is not working for the Guyanese populace. Hence, they experience poverty and stagnation. However, Aleyah, who seems very cognizant of the political climate in her country, seems to have plans, to offer a better solution for her country’s people, in the future. Furthermore, Aleyah’s statement seemingly foreshadows the bigger role - she will play in helping to improve the living conditions for people in her country of Guyana. Moreover, the following statement, “I say, it’s about time this house get a light so big that it just chases out the darkness for good and all” (41), appears to have symbolic significance. The house described in this statement can be a symbol of the clouds of desperation, social unrest and despair that loom over the troubled country of Guyana, at the time in which this novel is set between the 1940s-1960s. Aleyah also recollects a conversation with her grandmother, when her father enters the kitchen and remarks:

They’re trying, they’re trying, but there’s so much to do, he says, commenting on the government’s plans to resurface the roads, fix bridges, refurbish the hospitals, train more teachers. “It all costs money and there’s
not much of that going on around here. Those damn people stuffed up their pockets with it good and proper, stole the country’s money.”

. . . “I am thinking of applying for a job with the Finance Ministry,” I say. “Good, Alli, that’s good.” My father laughs. “They need the help, god knows” . . . I wonder if the rest of Victorine’s residents have lost their apathy towards politics too. During the Dictatorship, everyone had to find ways to survive. Politics forced its way into their homes and it seems, to have stayed there. (145-146)

From these realizations, Aleyah’s native Guyana and its people seem to be in serious political trouble. Clearly, Aleyah is moved to assist in remedying some of this trouble. And she dreams of applying for a job with the Finance Ministry, since those who have oversight for managing the finances have mismanaged and stolen the resources, thus leaving the country “financially broke.”

One of the tools that enables Aleyah to access resources, and later onto assist her people, is the landing of a scholarship, to study Economics in England. And it should be pointed out that in the elitist British educational system only the best prepared students win scholarships. Clearly, Aeyah who comes from a very poor family, has to put in the time and effort that is necessary to secure one of the few country scholarships.

Hear what it says in the newspaper, Ma? “Miss Aleyah Hassan, aged 18, has won a scholarship to study Economics at the University of London, England. The four-year scholarship is being made available through grants by the Government of Guyana and the British Overseas Development Office. Miss Hassan is a former student of the West Demerara Secondary
School, and won the scholarship from a field of six contenders from schools around the country. In announcing her win, the judging panel stated that, in her interview, Miss Hassan brought an intelligence and enthusiasm to her subject and displayed genuine concern for the development of her country, and the future of the world. (39)

Aleyah is an erudite student and so wins a country scholarship, but perhaps the most interesting part is that she is enthusiastic and displays a keen interest to return to Guyana and aid in the country’s development, as well as she thinks about the lives of people around the globe. One can surmise here, that her focus would be poor women and men of color like herself. Furthermore, she notes that she expects everyone to challenge her, as this is generally the norm in the country of Guyana and in various small island communities.

I expect everyone to challenge me, but they accept my claim, as it is a matter of course, that a schoolgirl from their town should set about to save the world. I can only suppose that the full import has escaped them. Their world is defined by the boundaries of this small country town and the nearby rice fields and sugar plantations. They accept everything that comes their way with a minimum of fuss: births, deaths, newcomers, new laws, higher taxes. Everything is tacked on, accommodated, absorbed. The occasional unrest of the sugar workers on the neighbouring estates is seen as something foreign; they never care to participate in protests or strikes. It is not their way. All that happens is God’s will and they thank the heavens for life and everything that goes with it. My scholarship is
now listed in their prayers and many raise their eyes to the shop’s ceiling in praise of His blessings. “To God above we give all thanks and praise,” one of the customers says. “Amen. And Aleyah looks so pretty in the papers. To think a little girl from our own town making such big news, eh,” another adds, her eyebrows raised above a smile.

And go away to England, to see the world.”

“We’re too, proud!”

“She’ll come back a star.”

“I’ll say it is about time this house get a light so big that it just chases out the darkness for good and all.” (40-41)

The statement “I’ll say it is about time this house get a light so big that it just chases out the darkness for good and all,” is profound and foreshadows a change for Aleyah, and her fellowwomen of color. Aleyah suggests in this excerpt as well, that it is the mentality and the oppressed state of the Demerarans that could be contributing factors to their economic and societal stagnation. Despite their colonial mentality of the Demeraran public, and considering that their response when they receive word of her landing a country scholarship is favorable, and highly approved, it shows that as a people with shared historic experiences and cultural ties- they collectively seem to know, when to criticize, “bad mouth,” scold, correct and, certainly, when to unite, embrace and celebrate the successes and victories of their own kind, when it is for their overall good. The latter observation can be a useful strategy for women and men of color to be conscious of when they embark on effecting radical societal changes, in any given capacity. In short, Aleyah demonstrates a consciousness of the innate cultural knowledge and dynamic of her
fellow Demerarans and by extension, the people of Guyana. Such cultural knowledge is necessary for individuals who strive to lead their people out of economic hardships, suffering and bondage. Unity seems to be at the heart of their success, since it works counter to the dichotomous societal structures of the oppressors. As a case in point, Wilma Espin, a Cuban revolutionary woman leader who helped to eject the oppressive Batista regime from Cuba, also helped her people to overcome some of their struggles. She ensured that they did not starve to death, their basic human needs were catered to, and that they got access to educational resources. She worked alongside Fidel and Raul Castro as they advanced their mission to expand agriculture and develop a world-class education system for Cubans. As a visionary and revolutionary woman leader, Wilma Espin wore several hats in Cuban politics and she attempted to unify the country. Wilma created a safe space first, for herself and then, the Cuban people. Here one discovers that Wilma Espin resembles Shah’s heroine, Aleyah in her resolve to help lessen the people’s sufferings, by asserting selfhood and attempting to “un/become the subject” even as Kevin Enrod Quashie suggests, taking an independent initiative and becoming the difference of which she dreams.

Additionally, Aleyah’s receiving a scholarship is a historic moment for her people. Now, Aleyah is not the child of the bourgeois class. She is an ordinary Demeraran poor girl who wins a scholarship, and one should realize that for her people it is a major breakthrough. Her recognized and measured success is the first in the history of her Demeraran people. So, the entire country and town celebrate with her. Perhaps what should also be noted is that just as Aleyah is enthusiastic about returning to her homeland to aid in its development, her native homeland seems willing to receive her
with open arms. It is on her return to Guyana that Aleyah will begin to continue the journey that leads her and her fellow people to reclaim their native lands and spaces as well as their lost identities.

Aleyah seems to draw on her ancestral knowledge and history to inform her present undertakings. She uses some of the same ideas her grandmother uses to inspire and move scores of plantation workers to action, several years earlier. Baby’s kitchen is the place where the suffering and desperate unpaid plantation workers assembled for sound advice and moral support. The workers relied heavily on Baby’s strength and trusted her judgment and her conviction for change in their working conditions, through resistance. The following missive provides some insight into the stresses and frustrations of the oppressed workers as they deliberate on their inhumane working conditions:

Every class struggle is a political struggle. “Working class people Arise.”

And “Workers of the World unite.” They were my grandmother’s, these bright slogans. They were written to the poor who pressed themselves into her small kitchen. Their voices reach clear into my rose-covered room…

Out of the clamor, individual voices speak. Sister Baby, I’ve been working on this plantation since I was born and I can’t get even one lil piece of land to make a home for my family.

They keep us poor and powerless.

Bullies!

I want to get some land, something to give my children.

We not asking for charity.

They keep us weak.
They keep us beggars
So they can stay masters. (69-70)

Evidently, it is the suffering and dire circumstances that bring the poor and working-class people together. It is such dire conditions that bring people in the real world together, as well. The workers rely heavily on Baby’s support and advice as she urges them to resist their dire working conditions and form a workers’ union and so challenge their oppressors. It is this resistant drive that Aleyah inherits from her grandmother Baby. Aleyah becomes enlightened and politically conscious to the marginalized state of herself as a young female, and the masses of her poor fellow Guyanese and other poor people, in the capitalist marketplace. Aleyah even examines Marxist-Leninism and Engels’ political critiques that address the marginalized classes of exploited workers.

I pick up the communist manifesto and settle down to read. I push the letter back into the drawer and try to lose myself in Marx’s and Engels’ stirring rhetoric: The lumpenproletariat, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society... but the arguments, for all their insistence, give way to my mother’s soft words about Nani’s big cry. (69)

As indicated before, Shah’s heroine Aleyah is inspired by her grandmother, Baby/Nani’s valiant and revolutionary ideology. So, she too, develops a resistant line of thinking as her grandmother does, puts it into practice, and assumes leadership and powerful positions. bell hooks,’ identification of sisterhood as a “rubric” for what one can consider a coping strategy against female marginalization. Joy Mahabir and Miriam Pirbhai’s account of the ancestral mother bond and memory as forms of Indo-Caribbean women’s resistance to Planter class oppression in the Caribbean are also solid examples
that reflect Aleyah Hassan’s resistance to societal female subordination. Likewise, bell hooks’ analysis of gender discrimination and the “parasitic class issue” seems to parallel Walter Rodney’s endless arguments on black power, race and class in Guyanese politics in his classic work *The Groundings with my Brothers*. Even more, Cristina Cabral’s article on Memory, Borders and Resistance mirror women’s Caribbean and African women’s oppression and suggest asserting selfhood, memorializing past sites of oppression and struggle as ways forward from cultural female subordination. Thus, the character traits and behavioral tendencies of Shah’s heroine Aleyah can be considered instructive for characters both in the fictional and real-world settings. As a case in point, to relate the political stagnation in Guyana to a recent real-world incident, the strike that has led to the indefinite suspension of classes and all other university operations at UPR in Spring 2017, is just one of the various real-life instances in which Aleyah’s reservations about socio-political change in Guyana becomes a matter of Caribbean relevance, and by extension, the broader colonized world. For example, for Puerto Ricans to overcome the hurdle of the economic injustice that has been waged on the island, an analysis of the existing government system and its present ways of being, seems critical. For another case in point, the current contamination and displacement of the Native Indians in the United States from their ancestral lands by the Dakota Line Corporate Investors is very symptomatic of or exemplifies the arguments surrounding the various political conflicts, and the dispossession of native powers and the loss of native lands to outsiders, that Shah’s heroine Aleyah attempts to address in *A Silent Life*.

As a case in point, Aleyah writes from England to Alli, her cousin, one day when she has a break from her studies. She relates the most recent media stories on the violence
that has been waged on Guyanese locals by the colonial government in the 1960s. She also highlights the media bias and records what follows:

The newspaper reports of the violence are brief and sterile. I know when my father tells it, I’ll hear all the noise and fury. He does not disappoint. He states that all the people that came from abroad to watch the elections were left with their mouths hanging wide open watching the brutes. They don’t know how hard those people worked to build their little businesses, so it’s easy for them to break them down and burn them down. . . . That’s what they went about the streets chanting: “Bun dem down and bruk dem down” and smashing into people’s shops and taking everything. And they laughed all the time. They laughed with their mouths open, big like jungle cats ready to eat you alive. These people will not let us breathe, I tell you. The government better have a plan ready to deal with them or else they will always strangle us. (110)

Here Aleyah speaks to the social unrest that is occurring in Guyana in the 1960s. She draws on the burning down of businesses and shops that are politically-motivated actions. The perpetrators seem bent on crippling the small economies of the poor woman and man who attempt to engage in trade as a means of survival. Aleyah’s observation coupled with her father’s report shows how the poor and ordinary woman and man suffer at the hands of colonial brute forces who show no consideration only apathy for the poor locals. Additionally, Aleyah’s mention of the reactions of the people who come from abroad to watch the elections observing the brutes in action and stand with their mouths wide open, strongly resembles the recent situation in Venezuela, whereby the United States
Government polices the Venezuelan general elections, it would seem, with an aim to influence the public opinion and one can suspect help determine the election outcome. However, the Venezuelans should have complete sovereignty in their own country, and Imperial powers like the United States, should allow the poor masses of women and men to speak at the election poles peaceably and “without let or hindrance.” Yet, the United States, the world’s hegemony, is an ever present force in not just global political issues and control, but it seems to help propagate capitalist values that perpetuate racism and gender discrimination, particularly discrimination against women of color. Therefore, an overhaul of the socio-political systems that govern colored peoples, the world over, seems imperative. If women and men of color do not open their eyes and seek to address their own issues, then after more than two centuries and they still seem to be bound by chains, one might ask: when will they be truly free and who else will free them?

Aleyah observes that life does not change in her native Guyanese community, despite changes of government administrations. Hence she believes that it is her responsibility, as a visionary young woman of the new generation, to help lessen the incidence of poverty and homelessness among other social problems in Demerara, Guyana, Calcutta, in Africa, and in other parts of the world where she travels and witnesses firsthand, and with her own two eyes, the sufferings of poor marginalized women and men of color. Her initial driving force, it seems, is the dark cloud of despair that looms over her own country and in those other parts of the world that she travels to, and thousands of poor people’s faces are grim and their bodies are malnourished and they struggle daily, while being paid a mere pittance. Aleyah realizes that the issue of the poor masses is mere survival and butter-and-bread issues. It is with these considerations
that Aleyah wishes to help bring about change and make the world a better place. For instance, Aleyah notes:

- Life has not changed much in a century and successive governments have brought no new vision. They fret over sugar and rice, prices on the world market, without having any clout in the global arena. Prices fail, more competitive countries elbow on us, and our poverty sprawls and turns squalid. With little to go around, we scrap with each other, finding ready reasons to do so. I saw it in all other countries I visited. Everyone wants the little for themselves, do the seams of race, religion, and culture run red with battles for the spoils. Here, it is race, and our battle does nothing to improve our lot. The global financial institutions do no more than support us in our poverty, because they never insist on bold and creative solutions.

Here, Aleyah analyzes the high degree of government’s political apathy on her native Guyana and she evaluates its place in the global arena. Clearly, what one gathers from Aleyah’s analysis is that things have remained the same in the county for over a century. She also indicates that the element of poverty continues since the global regulatory financial institutions constantly take away from the formerly colonized country and they give nothing in return. For example, scores of the best resources of the Caribbean region are transported to respective metropoles centers. Likewise, the human resource is left displaced. Oftentimes a person can find herself or himself in exile, owing to push-and-pull factors. Thus, the Caribbean region suffers from a brain drain, as its best human resources are forced to navigate spaces in Metropolitan centers. Notably, Guyana is not
alone in this poverty struggle. A majority of other colonized and formerly colonized countries remain poor and grapple daily with butter and bread issues. Shah’s heroine Aleyah is an enlightened female and she envisions and examines difference and societal inconsistencies. She wishes to experience societal changes. Aleyah not only identifies the problem with the regulatory financial institutions, but she suggests that the poor start to think along lines of self-determination, since the so-called First World countries have no plans or solutions for them. The sentence “they never insist on creative solutions” is indicative of a summons and a call to the poor and marginalized masses to find answers to their own problems. They could find potential solutions by cutting financial ties with the financial regulatory institutions that only continue to fill their own coffers, and turn their backs on them. Perhaps what can be the most ridiculous part about these regulatory institutions is that they do not allow the poor woman and man, who decide to start a business, for instance, to thrive. Instead, the regulatory institutions pressure them with premium government taxes and the poor woman or man of color, more often than not, has no choice but to close down his or her business. Hence, it would seem that it is high time these regulatory boards that are fraught with capitalist oppressors who leave the islands in a lurch to govern their own affairs. These are the real-life issues that Ryhaan Shah’s hero in Aleyah mirrors and brings into focus, through her fictional contestations.

Furthermore, Aleyah’s fictional contestations are reflective of those that are presented in Paule Marshall’s work *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, which shows government oppression of the local people caused by political apathy. For example, Marshall’s protagonist, Merle comes to the rescue of the natives in her homestead of Bourneville, when the government literally seems to turn its back on them.
When Merle, a Bourneville native, returns to her homeland, she suddenly realizes the mass government nonchalance and her people’s grave economic hardships and suffering staring her dead in the eye. Merle is moved to action. She takes the initiative to seek redress for injustice done to the people in the form of losses they suffer from land sales, loss of property, and in other deals involving money. Not only do they suffer economic hardships, but the very roads that their tax dollars are used to pay to build and help repair, are caving in and disappearing owing to mass flooding and mudslides. Perhaps the worst observation is that the government authorities do not seem to care one bit about the structural and cultural erosion that is caused by government interference and the Imperial American project execution on the island, in the first place. Merle recalls one of her various meetings with the locals and keenly listens to their varying complaints and endless cries:

And all the rain we had last night and it’s supposed to be dry season! I tell you, even nature has turned against us in this place. And I hear they’re talking about closing down Cane Vale Sugar Factory . . . They forget all about a small island like this. They want the big time, the big lights . . .

Every time the least little rain fall these days the Westminster Low Road’s got to pick up itself and walk away . . . Everything’s going down to grass. We’re seeing the last days now . . . Ruthlessly spurring the flagging car up the last winding stretch of road to the top, . . . It was the largest of buildings, and served not only as a refuge for the poor and indigent of the area, but as a local clinic, hospital, orphanage, old-age home and mental asylum for less violent cases . . . A huge silk-cotton tree, whose roots had
reached up out of the earth over the centuries to snake around its trunk and out along its thick branches, . . . and a woman pulled up under this . . .
telling them all what had happened to the road at the foot of the hill. (8-10)

Luckily, it does not take the people long to realize Merle’s leadership potential, and so they pour out their hearts’ contents of sufferings to her. She soon becomes an advocate for them and a voice to help address their concerns. She helps to expose the corruption of the government and the so-called American Research Team and its Research Project on the island. The Research Team like the government comes and literally does nothing to help change the situation for the people.

As a result, Merle constantly makes telephone calls in an effort to assist her people. Likewise, she can be found on coastal and other sites with a broken down car, observing the damages done to them in natural disasters and the lack of government concern and assistance to help restore the said sites. Merle works closely with the people and she advises them to work cooperatively and create their own financial networks or safety nets to help each other. She urges them to work together, in whatever small ways they possibly can, since she does not receive any government support, despite her efforts to lobby with the authorities to help them. She also urges them to use their power to protest in an attempt to get more government attention. Her aim, it appears is to help lessen the sufferings of the poor caused by government and its bureaucratic systems. She sees through the so-called American Research Project and Review Team that works in cahoots with the government officials to help oppress the people. Once their coffers are full, they would soon make their exit or take a sudden leave of absence. Then, the Research Project, like many others of its kind, falls flat. Hence, it is with these
considerations that Marshall’s protagonist Merle, like Shah’s protagonist Aleyah, strives for societal changes. Marshall’s protagonist, Merle identifies feasible counter-measures that could potentially enable the natives of Bourneville to exercise their combined or “people’s power,” and eventually overcome government oppression. Likewise, Shah’s heroine, Aleyah is a voice for the masses of people whose voices have been silenced in the face of government oppression.

In comparison, Zee Edgell, a Contemporary Belizean woman writer and former Director of the Women’s Bureau in the Belizean government in 1981, and a Director of Women’s Affairs in 1996, illustrates the latter point in her bildungsroman Beka Lamb. Edgell shows how the gender, race, and class issue can be extremely impactful in the lives of colonized people. For example, Beka, the protagonist, is born into a working class mixed-race household. Beka’s father, Bill Lamb, is Afro-Belizean, while her mother, Lilla, is Indo-Belizean, and her maternal grandmother, Granny Ivy, is Afro-Belizean. It is families such as Beka’s that stand out in Belizean society because of race and class issues. Beka comes of age to the differential of race, gender, and class at a relatively early age. In addition to Beka possessing a naturally perceptive mind, her father Bill Lamb, who is politically-conscious tries to cultivate culture of attentiveness to local politics and how it impacts the people of his native community. Beka always listens to the local news and she always reads the local newspaper. Likewise, she is abreast of all the local political and social developments in her country. Beka is but an adolescent age wise, but she acts precociously in terms of her advanced social sense. Equally important, Beka develops a very close bond with Granny Ivy, the family mentor, who schools her on the country’s colonial history and her ancestral knowledge. She also accompanies Granny
Ivy, a cultural bearer, and what one can describe as a matriarch of sorts, to the local political meetings. Granny Ivy is a strong advocate of Belizean independence from Great Britain and a staunch member of the People’s Independence Party.

Hence, one gets some sense here of the pre-conditions that are necessary and of the underlying reasons for Beka’s motivation to become an enlightened, politically-conscious and inspired female. The ubiquitous and critical issues of gender, race, and class are what stare Beka dead in the eye. Thus, she is determined to witness socio-political change and an improvement in the quality of life for her fellow Belizeans. She also dreams of one day becoming a female politician. One avenue forward for Beka is her securing a country scholarship. She then ventures abroad to study and hopes to return to Belize, in an attempt to serve in a more public space that could help to benefit the poor masses of her island’s people, who remain under the political chains and shackles of colonial interlopers. Zee Edgell pens the following statements in a conversation that Granny has with Beka:

I remember because we were very depressed. Things had broken down. My gentleman couldn’t get work cutting wood because nobody overseas was buying much, even what we had to sell. And the Governor Company was living at Government House, and all the big merchants and so on were mostly paid bad wages and were in league. We didn’t go for sweet rice the government finally decided to give the poor people. And some men had to break stones in the big sun-hot for five cents a day. . . For a while he followed the unemployed brigade but finally the Governor with all the
powers he had, clamped down on them, and the brigade broke down. (28-29)

One notices that the cries of the poor Belizean masses of people described in Zee Edgell’s novel *Beka Lamb* are familiar to many a people in the Caribbean region and in many other parts of the colonized world culture. Clearly, the poor masses focus on “bread and butter” issues while the powers that beselfishly and conveniently ignore their economic hardships and sufferings. Imperial exploitation of the people is at the heart of the critical “butter and bread” issues that Edgell raises. The people suffer owing to the chronic socio-political binary and intersecting issues of race and class. The Governor Company living at Government House while the poor Black and Brown masses struggle daily for survival exemplifies the overarching binary and divisive practices of race and class, and the marginal and diminishing effect on them. It would occur that Zee Edgell attempts to tackle the social problem, at its source.

Of equal note, Shah’s protagonist, Aleyah, has a conversation with her father one day, on her way home from the airport, and he notes the following:

Poor people do not threaten, make war, cause trouble. We can safely be ignored. The truth is that we have nothing that the rich wants, and now the Cold War has ended even our ideological quarrels have no strategic significance. Maybe the late dictator had a point. His bold plan to feed, clothe and house the nation, to make us independent of shackling aid, had resounded through the Guyanese community even in Britain. But it was a vision that was nothing but empty bravura, grand oratory that fed theatrics to a hungry people, told them of imperialism and neo-colonialism, told
them why they were poor but did nothing to relieve their deepbellied pain.

(143)

The above remarks of Aleyah’s father have some very sharp edges, but they serve as a form of awakening to oppressed people both in Guyana and in the rest of the colonized world. Clearly, the imperialists have come to the Caribbean region and raped it of its best human and non-human natural resources. Then, they leave after they build up their European empires and the people remain oppressed and continue to languish for survival, space and recognition. The imperial powers not only leave, but their indelible imprints remain in the Caribbean as well as in formerly colonized systems of government, religion, law, politics and education. What one can also gather from this summary is that it is high time women and men of color in the colonized world seek ways of redemption. If they do not resort to redeem themselves, the colonial oppressors will manage to control them from thousands of miles across the ocean and make no effort whatsoever to come to their aid even in moments of greatest peril and natural disaster, for example. The socio-political earthquakes and hurricanes that constantly plague the Caribbean region are perhaps just as destructive as the natural disasters. One prime example of the foregoing statement is the non-chalant posture of the U.S government towards its Caribbean possessions in the wake of the recent catastrophic Category 5 hurricanes Irma and Maria, which sweep through the region and not only caused major damages to the infrastructure, but they claim hundreds of lives across the region, and thousands on the island of Puerto Rico alone. What these statistics indicate, is the cultural or societal erosion that is occasioned by poor people of color, who die as a result of a lack of basic supplies such as water, food and medical supplies. Thus, one
evidences the humanitarian disaster that political apathy from hegemony causes an oppressed poor people who are governed by a Metropole that seems to care less about their existence. Here Frantz Fanon’s Dependency Complex discussed earlier, seems relevant. It is within this frame of reference that Shah’s heroine Aleyah Hassan appears to articulate difference, especially as it relates to the urgency of the global humanitarian cause.

Moreover, Aleyah’s father, who enlightens her on such a solid and significant history of the Guyanese political climate, might be rated a messenger whose primary mission is to help keep Aleyah’s eyes and ears open and enable her to be more attentive to the critical issues that impact her country’s people, even long after he is gone. Potentially, his echoes will resound, once Aleyah continues the struggle and race for freedom and justice of the masses of Guyana and abroad. Equally important, Aleyah’s father seems to share Frantz Fanon’s revolutionary philosophy as expressed in *The Wretched of the Earth* and sees it fit, to eject the settler culture from his native land so that the people can reclaim spaces, resources and lost identities. Likewise, Frantz Fanon’s account of violence seems synonymous to the violence and social unrest as Aleyah describes it. In a similar fashion, to how Aleyah references the brute nature of the imperial powers in Guyana, Fanon writes that he has witnessed this brute nature both in his native homeland of Martinique, and in its fiercest form, in Algeria, as the Algerians are displaced and tortured by military agents of the French colonial powers during the Algerian War.

Aleyah becomes increasingly more politically conscious and motivated to help in the general struggle to improve the human condition from a number of sources, and the
more she comes into contact with the average woman and man in her community, she learns of their displacement, their oppression, and related problems. Aleyah seems to learn what it means to empathize with others, and she tries to fit her feet into their shoes. For instance, she visits her Great Aunt Shamroon’s house after the passing of Aunt Shamroon’s husband, Great Uncle Rayman. What Aleyah notices is heartening! She realizes the sudden change and spark of liveliness that overcomes her aunt. Great Aunt Shamroon is relieved and happier her husband is dead. She even starts a little business, and marketing her peppers and tomatoes. And Aleyah writes to Alli, her cousin.

Great Aunt Shamroon had turned her small kitchen into a little business, was selling peppers and tomatoes in the market every day, and dressing up herself nice, and even putting on some weight. She is not a dry stick of a woman any more. She’s bursting out all over like a barrel! And we don’t know where she got her new voice from, but it stands up real strong and pitches itself out loud all around her. If you come home you’ll find so much changed, Alli.” (108)

The description of Great Aunt Shamroon that Aleyah presents above, reveals another powerful strategy that Aleyah could encourage her fellow Guyanese people to utilize and enable them to survive and generate additional family income. Although the money from the sale of vegetables is small, it certainly can help to purchase flour, rice, potatoes, sugar or milk, pay their bus fares, or even be set aside as a savings. Thus, Aleyah observes an apparent awakening in Aunt Shamroon, which leads her to practise entrepreneurship, and at the same time, opens up an opportunity for her to become liberated. It would seem that Great Aunt Shamroon always possesses an “erotic” ability
that Audrey Lorde purports as a form of female liberation, but her agency is stifled and obscure by her now deceased husband, Great Uncle Rayman. So, Great Aunt Shamroon gets the better of two worlds by his death. First, she is able to assert selfhood. Second, she is able to gain her independence while she accesses some additional financial resources. In essence, the female “body metaphor” comes into play here again, as one realizes that Great Aunt Shamroon, an Indo-Guyanese woman, is silenced by her husband, who upholds tradition, and who bars or blocks her from being bodily liberated. Here one might argue that Great Aunt Shamroon has a choice either to stay with or leave Great Uncle Rayman. However, during this period in Guyanese history in which this novel is set, a majority of Indo-Guyanese women espouse their cultural purity and so they remain with their spouses “until death us do part,” it would seem, much to their own detriment and suffering. Hence, one notices how the protagonist Aleyah in Shah’s novel becomes a voice for the voiceless and the mouthpiece for the Demerarans, and the wider Guyanese community.

To help qualify the preceding statement, and for purposes of the broader contextualizaton of Shah’s novel with the arguments for change, an assessment of difference and experience in gender analysis that are put forward by other postcolonial Caribbean women’s writers, I will now refer briefly to Gloria, the protagonist, in Kerry Young’s novel *Gloria*. Gloria exhibits entrepreneurial skills, but in a socially unacceptable way. Gloria starts a prostitution business to survive when she is hard up and times are really tough. Here one might argue that there are other choices Gloria could make. But when an economy is bleeding severely and jobs are few and poor people like Gloria who has no roof over her head or food to eat what else could she resort to? Might
she steal and go behind bars? Gloria makes a brave choice knowing full well what the consequences could be in a heavily Orthodox society. She knows that at a moment’s notice her establishment could be shut down by law enforcement. She also knows that she is automatically subjected to scandal given society’s gendered stereotypes. Yet, Gloria takes the risks nonetheless. She cares less what people think about her. Gloria’s attitude seems very similar to and likewise bears characteristics of the feminist manifesto, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche suggests in her book *Dear Ijewale or the Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. “The shame we attach to female sexuality is about control of women’s bodies in one way or another” (67). Then, later on as things get better with Gloria, she upgrades to educating herself and becoming her own CEO. In a similar vein, in Maryse Condé’s novel *The Story of the Cannibal Woman*, Roselie, the protagonist practices prostitution for survival when jobs are few, people like herself are hungry and cold, and have but few options. Hence, she too, resorts to prostitution for a while until conditions prove to be more favorable in her domicile. At length, Roselie becomes the manager of her own studio. Again, the choices that these female protagonists make are unorthodox, but they become a necessary evil when people are cold and their stomachs are empty. Arguably, Young and Condé’s protagonists assert selfhood and do what they deem necessary to independently realize their visions and goals. It also comes down to a question of basic survival; and the very ideas mentioned above are at the core of issues that Ryhaan Shah’s protagonist Aleyah attempts to address.

Although Aleyah is a hybrid of Indo-Caribbean and Muslim, she does not allow her religious persuasions to deter her from realizing her academic goals and pursuing her
leadership potential. This is an interesting observation since many Muslim and Indo-Caribbean women of color hold fast to their cultural purity, but Aleyah, fearlessly crosses these boundaries and carves out her own independent identity and career path. When the average Muslim woman of color is veiled under the burka, niqab or hijab and governed by the edicts of the Koran, Aleyah is free to roam the earth and do things at will. Furthermore, she leaves her husband Dean, behind in England and travels variously, to serve the greater good and cause of the public. It could be said that Aleyah trades the private space for the public, when it becomes absolutely necessary. In this regard, she can be seen as a free-spirited intercessor and a proxy to help engender change for the poor and suffering masses of women and men of color who have not as yet seen that the “dark house” in which they live needs a “big light.” For instance, Aleyah offers her services to the humanitarian cause not just in Calcutta and Africa, but across the Caribbean region and in her native Guyana. To be more specific, Aleyah oftentimes sacrifices her own family time and her meagre finances to feed scores of poor and hungry people, the grimaces of whose faces remain signature on her memory. Although Aleyah is not elected to political office like many a self-serving politician, she can be considered to have made a major difference in the lives of the people who matter the most - the poor, destitute, and humbled struggling masses of women and men of color.

Perhaps what is of prime importance is that Aleyah’s literary course of action echoes with women dreamers in the real world. The writer’s presence and voice is empowering. Furthermore, Ryhaan Shah, the writer of A Silent Life, is not only a writer who expresses the importance of the writer’s presence in her online interview, but her writer’s voice also serves as a form of resistance to hegemonic oppression. Michelle
Rowley’s ideas on “The Reconceptualization of the Female Voice” gives value to societally-marginalized voices. In comparison, Mimi Sheller’s article entitled “Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and a Queer Caribbean Freedom” which speaks to the relationship of colonial subjugation, the erotic and the subordinated subject or woman’s potential to acquire freedom by using her silenced voice and erotic or bodily agency and selfhood as a way forward from societal oppression, also seems to be aligned with the view that the writer’s voice can be resistant, empowering and potentially transformative. Similarly, Audrey Lorde’s Erotic Agency as expressed in her work *Sister Outsider* and her poetry on “women speaking dreams into reality” and, by extension, literally writing themselves into existence, also seems pertinent. In tandem with the societally suppressed voices, Shah’s heroine works in opposition to the dominant patriarchal culture of subjugation and oppression. Aleyah attempts to liberate herself, by navigating and seeking to reclaim ancestral women’s powered social spaces.

Finally, Aleyah Hassan as a visionary and revolutionary woman leader struggles not only to realize her vision, but she attempts to address the concerns of the group of socially disadvantaged women and men of color. Hence, can one imagine if there were real-life visionary and altruistic female leaders like Aleyah actually elected to political office? Chances are there could be a significant increase in the number and percentage of women and men of color who could access resources for their survival. In light of the above, socio-political change seems necessary to help lessen the incidence of female subordination and increase the chances of women of color to assume leadership positions. Therefore, Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* promises to be a reasonably reliable source for enlightening individuals, particularly women of color, on the women’s liberatory
struggle. In the chapter that follows, the revolutionary struggles of Maryse Condé’s heroine Veronica, in the novel *Heremakhonon*, will be analyzed
Chapter Four: Veronica, the Returner

Maryse Condé, author of *Heremakhonon*, is a feminist writer of color from the island of Guadeloupe. Her feminist narratives work in opposition to other mainstream feminist narratives that form part of the cultural capital. Condé who is referred by some as “the slut of prose” by some critics was nominated the Nobel Peace Prize Alternate in October 2018. (*Biography.com*) In Condé’s novel *Heremahkonon*, Veronica, the protagonist, can be considered a visionary, revolutionary and liberated leader in her own right. Although she initially grapples with an inferiority complex, Veronica is eventually able to overcome this. Being the darker sister in her family, Veronica not only suffers from an inferiority complex, but she also grapples with class and gender struggle. She is treated differently, yet she manages to become the difference she dreams of seeing by becoming the very difference herself. For instance, Veronica is pressured by the frequent comparison between her and her sisters whose skin complexion is lighter than hers. Not only is Veronica’s dark skin complexion an issue, but her two vain sisters treat her differently. They imitate middle-class family values and even marry upper-class men and act like they are the “sisters superior,” and Veronica the “sister inferior.” Undoubtedly, Veronica’s dark body and skin serve as a marker or site of discrimination. Even at church, members of the clergy show a lack of deference to Veronica owing to her skin color. The excerpt that follows elucidates this differential treatment:

The clergy do good works, everyone knows that. So they flatter their patrons. The local parish priest became friends with the Mandingo marabout and Marthe, my mother, who invited him round one afternoon for a glass of porto. My sisters’ gift for the piano was unveiled . . . And
then in his Christian soul he must have thought he was working to bring
niggers and mulattoes together, born enemies. I was the little girl with no
talent for society, was put in a three flounce dress; my curly hair was
vigorously brushed with a pink silk bow on top. Thus, decked out I took
my seat in the room and looked around me. They were not my people; I
could feel it. Pretending to ignore me they despised me worth all their
might. Why? Because their black blood was so diluted, even nonexistent,
whereas mine swelled in my veins and circulated underground . . . All the
women seemed more beautiful than my mother, who was just as well
dressed . . . They seemed more attractive because they were light-skinned
possessing therefore what my mother lacked to be perfectly beautiful and
to be worthy of appearing in this light, square room with its pastel colors.

. . . A little girl recited a poem on the stage. Her light-brown ringlets
glinted in the sun and I desperately wanted to resemble her . . . And yet I
was ashamed. Ashamed of this desire that my whole education claimed to
demolish. We have nothing to envy them, I was repeatedly told. Nothing?
Then why imitate them? Imitate them up to a certain point? Imitate them,
rival them, except on this point? It was beyond understanding. I was lost.

In the midst of these gracious and despising faces. Gracious and hateful.

To whom I was attracted, yet forced to hate. (123-124)

From an early age, Veronica like many little girls of color come to terms with the
element of difference and differential treatment. She struggles internally with her dark
appearance while her light-skinned sisters think and behave as if they are superior to
her. Hence, she develops both an inferiority complex and a love-hate relationship with her siblings. Clearly, Veronica resents the different and negative treatment and so her decision is to move away from them and become separated, it seems. Veronica further recalls:

I was fed up. I was living in Paris. With a white man.” . . .

Yes, yes. Let me go on. I wanted to escape from the family, the Mandingo marabout, my mother, the black bourgeoisie that made me, with its talk of glorifying the race and its terrified conviction of its inferiority. And then gradually I came round to thinking that this form of escape was not valid that it was hiding something else. I could have escaped in the other direction. Make up for the distance they had lost. Put down roots within myself. Do you understand?

In other words you have an identity problem . . .

There was a young black American girl here who had the same sort of problem, I believe. She ended up having her hair plaited like our women and having herself renamed Salamita . . . I can imagine this poor Shirley alienated by poor white America and trying to cure herself (48-49).

Here one evidences the socially driven mindset of black inferiority. And perhaps one should ask: what is so inferior about being black? What makes Shirley, the black girl any less valuable a human being? What makes Shirley believe that she is so inferior that she has to change her natural hair style and imitate the plaits of white women? The latter phenomenon is highly perturbing. In an attempt to contextualize the perceived phenomenon of black inferiority within the wider framework of related ongoing
discussions for difference, I will now succinctly show how the concept of imitation that is presented in Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon* is comparably interpreted and mirrored in Walter Rodney and Frantz Fanon’s scholarly analyses that depict resistance to hegemony. Likewise, V.S Naipaul’s novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* will also be analogously referenced for juxtaposition purposes. To begin with, Walter Rodney, for instance, stresses, that blacks should help in their own racial uplift by grounding with their brothers and revolting against the oppressive capitalist system. He also notes that even the blacks became convinced of their own inferiority and sadly have internalized the divisive racist tendencies.

Even the blacks became convinced of their own inferiority, though fortunately we are capable of the most intense expressions when we recognize that we have been duped by the white men. Black power recognizes both the reality of black oppression and self negation as well as the potential for revolt. (35-36)

Walter Rodney’s acknowledgement of black oppression, self-negation and the potential for black revolt suggests if blacks were to assert their power as a race, black inferiority could be stamped out. The inverse could be recognition by the oppressor who renders them inferior and access to economic resources that increases their chances of people of color becoming empowered. Similarly, Veronica’s inferiority complex and identity problem is characteristic of Frantz Fanon’s “The So-called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples,” as presented in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, which is defined in the first chapter of this dissertation and in which the colonized native seems jealous of the settler’s comforts and his pomp and circumstance. Fanon also shows how this
inferior mindset is propagated, but also points out that this mindset is only propagated as
the settler or colonizer’s justification for attempting to place the native in an inferior
position, since he, the colonial interloper, owns “neither land nor house nor castle” (87).
Veronica is born into a tradition whereby her colonized and oppressed family imitates the
ways of the colonizer or settler. Since her family and the de Roseval family, cannot be
like the settler, then they resort to imitate him since they feel so inferior and lowly about
themselves. The result is to mask their inferiority by imitating the settler’s lifestyle.
Indistinguishably, evidence of this masking or imitation concept of the colonized and his
or her imitation of the settler’s culture and ways is also seen in V. S Naipaul’s novel A
House for Mr. Biswas, in which the Tulsi Family strongly resembles the family structure
and house setup of the Royal Family of England, with the Queen of England as the
Head of State of all of England’s possessions, both in Europe and in its Overseas Territories. Mohun Biswas,’ the protagonist’s satirizing of the Tulsi Family with Mrs.
Tulsi as the “Old Queen,” and head of “Hanuman House with its splendor,” exemplifies
the practice of imitation. She marries off their daughter Sharma to Mr. Biswas simply
because he is of the Brahmin Hindu caste. Mr. Biswas is then perceived merely as a
space filler in the Tulsi household. He has no genuine rapport with them. He is
emasculated and trapped by the Tulsi imposition of marriage and forced living
arrangement on him. He is ignored and feels out of place. Literally, he is displaced both
physically and mentally. Worse, he is rendered an inferior to the influential Tulsis who
wield their power throughout Arwacas, Port of Spain. Hence, Mr. Biswas resorts to
rebel. “Mr. Biswas had no money or position. He was expected to become a Tulsi. At
once he rebelled” (93). Mr. Biswas’ invective is to satirization of the Tulsis and name
calling. He calls the majestic Hanuman House “a blasted fowl run and a Mad House.”

Clearly, Naipaul’s notorious and rebellious character, Mohun Biswas, not only challenges the so-called Tulsi superiority, but works in opposition to the affluent and paternalistic hierarchy.

Mrs. Tulsi and Seth didn’t see that there were any problems to discuss. The organization of the Tulsi household was simple. Mrs. Tulsi had only one servant, a Negro woman who was called Blackie by Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, and Miss Blackie by everyone else. Miss Blackie’s duties were vague. The daughters and their children swept and washed and cooked and served in the store. The husbands, under Seth’s supervision, worked on the Tulsi land, looked after the Tulsi animals, and served in the store. In return, they were given food, shelter and a little money; their children were looked after, and they were treated with respect by people outside because they were connected with the Tulsi family. Their names were forgotten; they became Tulsis. (92)

Mr. Biswas questions the role of Blackie, the Negro female servant, who is called Blackie by Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, but Miss Blackie by everyone else. Again, one realizes how the degradation and inferiority of the black female body continues to be perpetuated by individuals, regardless of their rank, class or creed. The questionable role of Blackie suggests that she can be placed in any vacant spot at will by the Tulsis, and worse, one supposes that Blackie is hired merely to scrub the dirty walls, wash the dirty dishes and clean the lavatory. Admittedly, Blackie’s perceived inferiority stares one in dead centre
of the eye. Black female characters like Maryse Condé’s protagonist, Vernonica, one imagines, can readily identify with Blackie’s inferior treatment.

Ironically however, the same Mrs. Tulsi, who imitates and upholds practices that resemble the paternalistic and bigoted imperial colonizer, simultaneously mirrors the indomitable strength of character of a strong Indo-Caribbean mother figure, who still manages to keep her family together at all costs, despite her territorial stance. Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence that the Tulsi family, a bigoted, petite bourgeois class of Indo-Caribbean people, strongly reflects Prospero’s territorial stance as presented in William Shakespeare’s work, *The Tempest*. What one also notices here is an interplay of the dialectic of Colonizer/Colonized and the Inferiority Complex versus the Prospero Complex that is inherent in both novels: *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *Heremakhonon*. Naipaul’s protagonist, Mohun Biswas, finds himself smack between both extremes, once he arrives in the Tulsi household. His decision is to resent the Tulsi’s negative treatment, and to be physically removed from the space which stifles and stagnates him. In comparison, one can add, that Maryse Condé’s protagonist Veronica, finds herself a colonized subject that operates between the two historical and socio-cultural spaces or extremes of colonizer versus colonized. Simultaneously, she grapples with the Inferior versus the Superior identity complexes. Consequently, like Mr. Biswas, Veronica’s decision it would seem, is to be detached from the familiar environment, and venture out to the unknown in hopes of an escape to a better way of life.

Although Veronica marries Monsieur de Roseval in an effort to satisfy her family’s expectations prior to leaving for Paris, she is still not happy. The marriage of convenience and for the upkeep of appearances this does not work for Veronica. “They’re
right, a woman’s place is in the kitchen. . . she knew in her heart that she wanted a husband, children, car, all the good things in life” (5). Yes, Veronica, like many a young woman, wants to enjoy the socially driven comforts such as a husband, a home, children, a car, and all the good things in life,” but she is not willing or prepared to contend with the culturally subordinating position that she assumes in the marriage institution. The marriage does not bring Veronica the kind of joy and freedom she seeks. And she realizes that it will not work since she feels trapped. Escape becomes the inevitable for Veronica. Shortly afterwards, Veronica leaves Monsieur de Roseval, whose upper class refined taste and mannerisms do not match her down-to-earth, simple style. She does not love him and so explores other lovers such as Jean Michel and Ibrahima Sory, who are more in line with her own unique value systems. Scores of women would remain in the marriage owing to the fame and financial stability of the de Roseval family. However, Veronica opts to exit the scene. By embarking on such an unpopular course of action, Veronica is able to explore her own sexuality and commence her initial path to personal liberation. Still independently struggling as the sister outsider, Veronica decides to venture out from her native homeland of Guadeloupe, and travel to Europe, partially to acquire an opportunity to higher education and to commence her quest for self-discovery. It is on this journey away from her homeland and the known territory that Veronica comes to terms with her own sexuality, confronts her identity crisis, and begins to dream of and develops a keen interest in her liberation.

However, in Europe, Veronica is even further displaced and develops a strong desire to travel to Africa, in an attempt to connect with her African roots. The empowering experience that her education affords Veronica, in fact, enables her to fulfill
her vision of connecting with the African homeland of her ancestors. Likewise, Veronica is able to make some choices that not only benefit her, but scores of other women folk such as Hafsa, who does not have the freedom to choose birth control and claim control over her own body. And one is reminded here of what Marlene Nourbese Phillips has to say about Black women’s bodies and “the space between.” In marginalized instances such as Hafsa’s, Phillips advocates that women reclaim the private space between their legs, by making public, their sexual goods that patriarchal society attempts to privatize. By making public, their own private space, colored women can assume control of their own bodies. Veronica controls “the space between” her own “two legs.”

Then too, Veronica also forms an association with Birame III and Ibrahima Sory. Her association with Birame III and Ibrahima Sory causes Veronica to become increasingly politically conscious. This association provides Veronica with some key information on the socio-political climate in Africa, an on how that social and political environment affects the natives. For one example, Veronica, a teacher by profession, wishes to instill critical thinking and revolutionary attitudes in her students as she discovers that they recite verses from the Koran that are designed to indoctrinate and keep them marginalized culturally. Veronica leads the charge to correct or reconstruct forms of religious subjectivity in her students. Hence, she elects to have them recite Fanonian quotes in lieu of the Koranic verses in her classes. The students are extremely motivated such that they wish to drag her into a discussion on The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon, a book that she has not read as yet. The sentence, “We must make increasing efforts to find our own paths of development if we want to achieve our revolution without altering our personality” (30), depicts Veronica’s struggle to experience a change
in the status quo. Here one notices how Veronica works against the current and tide of society. Her choice to examine difference in her society and in her ways of being can be considered an attempt at awakening or mobilizing the people in her society to action for change. Her approach to teaching using the non-traditional style, her decision to escape the marriage trap, and her association with men who are influential political male figures exemplify Veronica’s awakening. Despite her awakening which leads her to instill revolutionary thinking attitudes in her students, and her association with men of influence, she is on the receiving end of attack by some people of society both in France and Africa. Even her students, whose respect she eventually gains are initially ambivalent about her, “the teacher,” being encased in a “black body.” Perhaps the students see her as a French woman who confuses them with her blackness. Veronica’s role as a teacher does not fit the student’s expectations for a woman of color. Thus, the students experience cognitive dissonance as traditionally women of color have been subjected to servitude or lowly societal positions. The following statements that illustrate the negative bodily perceptions of Veronica’s black body and depict some of the personal attacks and name calling that are directed at her, exemplify this ambivalence:

The students are dragging their heels around the room . . . Some of them are ostentatiously smoking. It is forbidden to smoke inside the institute . . . Into class. I give them the example. On the blackboard in red chalk spelled out in capitals: WE SHALL DESTROY THE MINISTERS, THEIR MERCEDES AND THEIR WHORES. Is that me? I turn around no doubt about it, that’s me. They are at the entrance to the room, their hands in the pockets of their brand-new Mao tunics. They are looking at me. Hostility,
contempt. Contempt yet again. Contempt flowers under my feet. What am I to do? They watch me.

First, feelings of hostility. Turn around and thunder: “Who wrote that?” and make for the Director’s office. Make a case for order, discipline and respect for the teacher… They know that I won’t do anything. That I’m a down-and-out traveler. That they can make a surprise attack. Leave me covered in blood in the streets. I’m not going to burst into tears. They’re watching me. An adult should never lose face. That I guessed from childhood. The sponge is big, square, and green like an unwholesome piece of seaweed. It wets my hand. I wipe off the board. Minister’s whore? What right have they to judge me? Are they going to shave my head? Will they hang me from the branches of a tree? My body will rot amid the blossoms of the flame tree. What right? If I understand correctly, making love in this country comes down to making a political choice . . . I turn around . . . I start my class with a steady voice. There’s no doubt about it, I’ve got a level head now. Not like the first time or even the second . . . Those young things would have lynched me if they could . . . Yes, I’m more level headed now. I don’t back out. I give my class. Right to the end . . . The silent majority only emerges from their silence once the bombardment is over. The country is in ruins. And the orphaned children running in the ditches. Then they say they have had enough of all this blood as well. (64-65)
Regardless of the personal attacks, scandals, name calling and the various other challenges Veronica encounters, she does not give up. Relentlessly, she manages to get her students to begin to see the light and to realize how oppressed they are and to consider becoming a part of the struggle to help lessen the incidence of homelessness, orphaned children running in the ditches, and the bleeding as well. Veronica works in opposition to patriarchal systems.

In addition, Condé’s protagonist Veronica, like Ryhaan Shah’s heroine Aleyah, develops a growing concern for the causes of the poor masses in villages of color in Heremakhonon. She offers to support their cause in her own modest way. She gives of her small earnings to help with food and medical supplies. Although Veronica’s contributions are modest, they could mean the difference between a poor child going to bed hungry on an empty stomach and one having received a meal.

Even so what living conditions! Poverty and filth are nothing new to me. I’ve been looking at them ever since I was born, gazing through the half-open window of my father’s car. They used to thrive in their huts built out of cardboard boxes. We didn’t have dried mud at home. The children would come running after the Peugeot with their oversized tattered coats, their sex hanging out front. The old women would puff on their pipes and shake their heads. I am looking . . . What am I looking for in this land of Africa? (8-9)

Although she seems ambivalent about certain observations she makes and impressions she creates about Africa, Veronica is moved to help stamp out some of the poverty she observes there. In the above account, Veronica paints a picture of a poverty scene she
encounters in the fictional town of Heremakhonon. She also acknowledges that poverty is nothing new to her as she claims she has been looking at the poor since she was born, and she gazes through the glass of her father’s car. She refers to the poverty she recalls in her native Guadeloupe. Poverty is ubiquitous, yet the wealthy and ruling class seems to get richer and more powerful. For one to think of people living in houses that are constructed from cardboard boxes, with tattered clothes and their private parts exposed for the world to see, it is heart-wrenching and deeply saddening. Also, when one considers that there are some people who are filthy rich and never seem to consider giving support to a charitable cause, it suggests that the crippling class divide should end, as the rich thrives off the backs of the poor masses. Paulo Freire’s idea of resistance to the oppressor’s various and institutionalized trickster systems seems appropriate here.

To further elucidate the extent to which Veronica becomes politically conscious, inspired to research, and to help effect societal change in Heremakhonon, she capitalizes on every opportunity she can seize to gain deeper insights into the corruption that exists in Heremakhonon. For instance, Veronica becomes more aware of the crippling effect of European Imperialism and the underlying reasons for the jarring stagnation that imperialism has wrought in Africa, the Caribbean, and in other parts of communities of color. She concludes:

I have already realized that giving alms means giving away one’s salary. I have even learned to thrust aside with a strong hand beggars who are too enterprising. It is Birame III who taught me, learnedly explaining that individual charity is useless and that is no answer to poverty. My coins are
a drop in the ocean. Their only purpose is to give me a clear conscience.

We need a revolution, dixit Birame III. (31)

Although Veronica’s coins are but a drop in the ocean, the fact that she takes a proactive stand to assist the people of Heremakhonon who are in dire need of a revolution, is promising. Her leading the charge could serve to enlighten and inspire a couple of her students to lobby for societal transformation. Once the liberatory seeds of knowledge and enlightenment are planted and nurtured, the chances that they can thrive are significantly great. Condé’s protagonist advocates a social revolution in the various African communities she travels to where the masses of poor people are oppressed. Thus, Veronica is aware of the need for change and begins her stratagem of change with her students, the future leaders, and women and men. As part of her invective for change and difference, she presents narratives that work in opposition to the established educational paradigms. She attempts to enlighten her students on critical issues that impact their lives. She also promotes critical and revolutionary thinking skills. Veronica’s visionary and revolutionary thoughts and actions can be seen as emblematic of her drive for witnessing political and societal restructuring.

Equally important, one observes that at the end of Veronica’s journey to Europe and Africa, she finds her way back to her place of origin - Guadeloupe, in the Caribbean. Veronica’s return to her place of origin is symbolic as she is now more informed about the peoples, borders, boundaries, and the lands she traverses. She has satisfied her curiosities about Europe and Africa, and she removes any doubts she has about her native land as being significantly worse than places abroad. She is now informed and thus, empowered to make the comparisons between the known and the unknown. She is
qualified to shed light on crucial social issues which stem from the larger social problem. She now has a better sense of self and of place. She is liberated to assist ordinary women and men in the space she occupies. She has a grasp of both the private and public social spaces. Although Veronica first returns to France, she seems compelled by a force that is greater than her, to return to her native Guadeloupe and connect with people in her native community.

Where are you going?

Where? To find my sister in whoredom. Birds of a feather . . . Adama is emerging from her long siesta. She has just washed, perfumed, and combed herself. Jean Lefevre is bawling out an under-nourished worker who has spoiled some cement. The two of them shout for joy. Don’t tell me they are not trustworthy. You get the confessor you deserve. What can a whore afford except a priest? Or other whore? I cry a lot. They get worked up.

“What did they do to you? They’re evil in this country. All bastards! The white man’s lash, that’s what they need!”

I admit it’s ridiculous crying like that. But it has been a rough day. I sniff. I don’t feel like explaining the whole business. I merely ask a question.

Why is that no matter what I do they throw stones at me? They try to destroy me . . . Don’t I know already what they’ve cooked up? What they’re blaming me for? . . . When I was fifteen I read in a play by Ben Johnson . . . that black people’s hair didn’t whiten and I was surprised by Mabo Julie’s greying temples when she pushed back her madras. (66-67)
Veronica is targeted and insulted. She also receives labels such as “whore” because of her open expressions of sexual liberation. Why can’t she have the freedom to express her sexual liberation without interference, let or hindrance from people of society? Again, one realizes how the gender issue affects Veronica, a woman of color, in her various interactions. For instance, Mwalimwana, who appears to be a female misogynist attempts to stall Veronica’s efforts to assist poor and suffering people in Africa. It appears that he cannot see beyond his sexist interpretation of Veronica’s black, female body. Veronica admits that sadistic and insensitive people like Mwalimwana are evil. “They are “all bastards” that need the “white man’s lash!” (66) Veronica also claims that she literally feels sick.

I literally feel sick. It is all coming back, everything. The satin-stitch curtains, the smell of gladioli that my mother used to like, and our piano teacher . . . Calm down. I’m sick and see my sickness everywhere . . . Isn’t it precisely in the name of good taste, etiquette, and good manners that they made me what I am? (71)

Hence, she decides to return to her familiar environment to reconnect and make the comparisons between her experience abroad and home. It is on this symbolic return that Veronica is better able to piece the pieces of her circumstances together like the pieces of a puzzle. To illustrate the extent to which Veronica grows to maturity and senses the need to return to her place of origin, she recalls the following in a conversation she has with Ramatoulaye, a female character:

My father for instance, had the say over lives of hundreds of men-

Mwalimwana planted this idea of socialism in the country, of equality
between master and slave, and that’s what you get . . . students who no
longer obey their teachers. He has realized that socialism will kill Africa.
Will kill it far more radically than years of colonialism . . . The argument
is beyond me . . . I suppose the master is having his siesta like the rest of
the town . . . The master never takes a siesta. He is in his office. Working
. . . Abdoulaye rushes up . . .
“What do you do when you are Minister for the Defense and the Interior?”
. . . “I thought you knew already: we assassinate and imprison unfortunate
students” . . . It was one of the first lessons I was thought. The laugh
makes the nigger . . . Do I love this man or a certain idea I have of Africa?
When you think about it, it’s the same thing. Loving a man is the myth
you create around him . . . In my case perhaps it’s a bit more serious the
idea . . . What is this idea? That of an Africa, of a black world, that
Europe did not reduce to a caricature of itself. That might say: “When the
West was in a mess, we governed our peoples with wisdom, we created
and we innovated . . . We’ve just had a Revolution . . .
Oh yes? Some ascertain that it hasn’t taken place, your revolution . . .
“You speak about things you do not know . . .”
Firstly, he thinks it’s none of my business; I’m a foreigner. But mainly
because I’m more interesting sexually than my head or my heart or both.
(73-74)

After carefully analyzing her experiences and her struggles, Veronica realizes that she
manages to make some impact in the fictional town of Heremakhonon, Africa. Still, she
is seen as the “Sister Outsider,” as Audrey Lorde puts it, even within an African group, which is ethnically the same. Once again, one witnesses the limiting, divisive and reductionist philosophy of “Prospero’s othering” and perceived inferiority of “Caliban” and Caliban’s woman or the woman of color, coming into play. The statements: “We’ve just had a Revolution . . . I’m a foreigner. But mainly because I’m more interesting sexually than my head or my heart or both,” depict Abdoulaye’s resentment of Veronica’s political consciousness. It also shows his lack of interest in her concern for the welfare of a suffering people, and his merely sexualizing her black female body, rather than giving her full credit for her intelligence and capability. In brief, Veronica’s body is objectified. The result is Veronica’s unpopular choice to respectfully walk away from a ruthless sexual male predator, who attempts to use his position of power to subordinate her and to hinder her, from moving beyond the limiting institutional parameters and struggling for making a difference in her own life, and in the lives of other destitute women and men of color. The story which Veronica relates to Abdoulaye, about the Negress who has the thrust of coil springs and regularly sends her partners up to the ceiling, not only exhibits Veronica’s keen and discerning sensibility to detect a criminal male predator, but it highlights her rare and ethical decision to take a backward step from institutional corruption. Hence, it is with these considerations that Veronica resorts to returning to her native homeland of Guadeloupe. Probably, Veronica returns it appears, if for no other reason, than to physically and spiritually revisit her familiar and well-known space and territorial ground.

Thinking along similar lines, one recalls that Ann Morris acquiesces that in novels like Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea, Jamaica Kincaid’s, Annie John, Paule E. Marshall’s
The Chosen Place, The Timeless People, for instance, all the female protagonists experience exile as “fundamentally a discontinuous state of being.” (235) Morris further states that exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, and their past. Then, she acknowledges that the question of a Caribbean identity is a primary concern of West Indian Literature. This, she claims, is true for individuals as well as for the region as a whole. And she maintains that for women in particular, it appears that achieving such a Caribbean identity depends upon a bond with and through many mothers, to one’s island home itself (235). For several of Caribbean women, who are raised and nurtured by grandmothers and other extended women folk, this seems substantially true. Scores of young women in the Caribbean as well as in Africa, where there remains a strong sense of communalism and cultural retentions, espouse the maternal figures, who heavily influence their lives.

For instance, many a household in the Caribbean consists of extended family members of which women figures assume leading roles. Not only do they cater to spouses, they cater to their own children as well as to the children of other family members who reside abroad as a result of finding employment and educational opportunities that are not available on their respective native islands. It is needless to mention the pivotal role in the upbringing and socialization of the youth, particularly girl children, for whom society is adamant to insist that they more so than boys, uphold the deeply culturally engineered gendered expectations. Hence, one notices that Veronica is convinced, if not destined, to symbolically return to the sacred ground of Caribbean soil once more. It would seem that she returns to reconnect with her maternal leaders, “ground,” with them as Walter Rodney puts it, and finds her bearings.
Besides, it is from Veronica’s strong and domineering maternal figures such as Aunt Paula and Veronica’s own mother, Marthe, that she is inspired and envisions her leadership potential. She is inspired irrespective of how adamant and strict her maternal figures are with her to uphold the gendered societal norms. What these maternal figures could see clearly was Veronica’s physical development and material security. They could not see beyond a “girl’s place in the kitchen and home.” Even more, Veronica appears to see far beyond the physical and societal horizons. As she comes of age to the historic trauma of women and men of color, she begins to sense the need to move beyond the societal barriers or boundaries and assert selfhood. Veronica grows to a better understanding of herself. It is the very restrictive and limiting set of circumstances that propel Veronica to resist her female subordination and, by extension, face up to her identity crisis and become a woman of influence. Yet, she returns to the very place that she runs away from in the first place. Ryhaan Shah’s heroine Aleyah Hassan also returns to her homeland and it would seem that Aleyah, like Condé’s heroine Veronica, is predestined by that spiritual “umbilical chord,” to return to her homeland.

Given that Veronica returns, it suggests that she cannot totally separate herself from her place of origin. Practising scholars of the Ancient Kemetic Feminine principles including Anika Daniels Osaze and Karlita Robinson-Myers likewise emphasize the connection between the divine creator who is both male and female and the subjects of creation, who must return to their origins as part of the process of their healing and self-redemption. Additionally, the chord that ties Veronica to her ancestral and maternal homelands seems unbreakable. And perhaps, one could further argue that both the ancestral and maternal homelands coalesce to engender Veronica’s total self. It is not
until after Veronica makes her pilgrimage to Africa that she is able to adjust her lens on
life in her native Guadeloupe and the outside world. In brief, it can be inferred that
Veronica comes of age to the colonized cause of people in the fictional world of
Heremakhonon, Africa, and Guadeloupe. She notices that they are both alike in more
ways than one. The political and economic hardships that the people in both communities
face are very similar. Likewise, the societal mindset trains along similar paths. Veronica
also realizes that no matter what she tries that there are some societal undercurrents that
work counter to her selfless and feverish efforts to help the poor and marginalized
colonized masses of people. Of course, one such undercurrent stems from her being a
female. And the irony here is that Veronica seeks to champion the cause of her fellow
Black women who are exploited in the marketplace and silenced by the gendered social
orderings. Veronica notes:

There is something in this country that, no matter what you try, ends up in
regret, remorse, and disillusionment. Fortunately, Hafsa brings her new
baby, the fifth in five years. Ramatoulaye sighs. We talk about birth
control. The pill. Coils. These are highly feminine subjects and not
demoralizing. The gentleness of the evening at Heremakhonon takes me
by surprise each time. Perhaps it is due to the big trees. The flowers. The
silence. Especially the silence. (117)

Veronica observes that one ends up in regret, remorse and disillusionment, no matter
what one tries. In short, Veronica cannot comprehend these harsh facts about the women
of Heremakhonon. From these observations, the native African women in the fictional
world of Heremakhonon continue to be marginalized and silenced. Considering that the
women are denied access to birth control—the pills and coils, is disturbing. This raises the issue of women’s role in the marketplace, since the more offspring women produce, it lessens their chances at self-advancement. Instead, they remain domesticated and are unable to assert themselves educationally and politically to spaces where the potential for economic power lies.

Particularly women of color are limited and can only access but meagre financial resources. Sadly, access to ‘economic self-sufficiency,’ the term coined by bell hooks, remains a mere figment of the imagination for scores of women who reproduce excessively. In essence, when women of color reproduce they are unconsciously providing the labor for the capitalist oppressors to fill their coffers. However, what is deep and troubling about the oppression of the women of color, is the seemingly deafening silence amidst the various forms of oppression. The societal espousal of the gendered norms, the silence and apathy are not only a problem in the fictional world of Heremakhonon, Africa, but are a problem for colonized women of color in the Caribbean. Hence, it is imperative that they become aware of their oppression and struggle to lessen its incidence. Education and access to political resources are two avenues that oppressed women of color can utilize to assert positions of leadership and power. Carter G. Woodson congruently, urges “oppressed people” to resist, “think for themselves and do the so-called impossible” (44).

Equally important, Veronica states that the male political demagogues, historically and traditionally, have never impressed her. She submits that they appear for the most part are pure talk and make empty and meaningless promises to the people. In
essence, she insinuates that the political demagogues are self-serving leaders and constantly delude the poor masses of their respective communities.

Political eloquence has always seemed abject to me. Since the beginning of time, men, leaders, have climbed platforms and promised wonders to others. They don’t believe a word of it. I know there were a few idealists, cranks who did believe. Whether they believed or not they were unable to keep their promises. Otherwise we wouldn’t be where we are. Some in opulence, others in shit. I know I ought to shut up since I’ve always refused to take sides. But what would my “engagement” as they say, have changed? Not much. Nothing. I listen to Mwalimwana in the hope of deciphering a message, an intention, from the hollow, overworked phrases. Like the racing forecast . . . And the punters . . . have never been so worked up as I am. Mwalimwana speaks for three hours. More, as I can bear it . . . What shall I do? Wait . . . We don’t know yet. We can dream. The day will come to an end sooner or later. Night too . . . Me too.

Tomorrow. (148-149)

Here the content of Veronica’s commentary is one of disgust. She seems tired of hearing the political demagogues spit words and offer no solutions to the societal problems. She points out that it has been the male leaders who continue to assume the leadership positions and things remain much the same. Simultaneously, she implies that the day of male dominance will soon come to an end. When she asks: “What shall I do?” it signals that she has an awakening and she is optimistic that the tomorrow she dreams about will be a new day both temporally and politically. In addition, Veronica’s commentary is
prophetic and she seems invigorated and ready to serve. She plans to return to her homeland of Guadeloupe, the familiar or known territory and cultural space, and navigate her way through these same spaces and attempt to assume a leadership position. She seems compelled to rise to the challenge and help redeem a female space from the male leaders like those in Africa and elsewhere in the colonized world who historically, have done nothing more than offer the people empty and airy promises. The subsequent statements uttered by Ramtoulaye, who holds a critical conversation with Veronica regarding the status of women of color and their troubled country are profound and depict the political stagnation that plagues the people. “We talk about birth control . . . People like Ibrahima Sory who try to save the past are called reactionaries, a new word. It is said they want to mystify the people, exploit them, all new words. They say you have to progress. Progress what’s that?” (117). Yes, what really is progress as it relates to the impoverished peoples of the world? Might the term progress be another delusional term and a euphemism? Veronica and Ramatoulaye seriously consider the symbolic significance of the language used by the male political tricksters. Veronica thinks about arriving at a solution to both the woman problem and the greater social problem. She admits that male leaders seem to be a part of the problem and their role could lead to the solution.

As a case in point, the character traits that are exhibited by the protagonist, Roselie Thiabaudin, in Maryse Condé’s other novel, *The Story of the Cannibal Woman*, also shows how male leaders helped to perpetuate women’s oppression. Roselie goes on a quest of self-realization to France, then to Capetown, South Africa. It is on this journey that Roselie, a Guadelupian woman of color, eventually discovers her creative talents and
arrives at fulfilling her true passion. When Roselie is in exile in Capetown, she struggles financially and starts a prostitution business for survival. Roselie’s behavior typifies that of a brave and dauntless woman in the face of government scrutiny and public opprobrium. Now, as queer as it sounds to individuals who revere mainstream values, Roselie asserts selfhood and manages to outlast the rough patches she experiences. Even before she moves to France and later to Capetown, she exhibits separatist thinking. The conversation between Roselie’s mother and Roselie’s Art teacher in elementary school depicts a separatist line of thinking and is also characteristic of revolutionary feminist language.

In class, she dreams. She sleeps standing up. The Art teacher in particular complained: “You see her free compositions. Hideous! The other day she drew a woman with legs wide open spurting a stream of blood. I shouted: “Good Lord, what’s that?” It’s a rape, she replied. “Have you ever seen a rape?” I asked her angrily. Those sort of things don’t happen around here.” She replied: “I’m raped everyday.” And when I shouted in anger: “Don’t say such things! Who rapes you?”

She answered calmly: “My papa, maman, everyone. (151) Here the concept of “a little child leads them” and “out of the mouths of babes,” two famous adages and quotes derived from the Holy Bible, come to mind. In essence, Roselie expresses gender consciousness through the revolutionary language she uses from an early age. The unfortunate part is that although she is gender conscious her dogmatic parents, teachers, and everyone, she claims, is responsible for raping her
everyday of her life. Roselie’s statements are profound and prophetic and thought provoking. Here she can be seen as a child prodigy, who is the emblem of a shift in cultural gender formation or scripts and the classical conditioning of young girls to enable them to redefine gender images and experience gender neutral, free, and creative individual expressions.

Additionally, later on, one realizes Roselie’s independent thinking and revolutionary mindset when she meets a few male figures such as her husband Stephen, the college professor, who expresses a deep passion for writers in the likes of Yeats and Wilde, and Didon, the white man, who seems to adore her very much. Although Roselie and Stephen complement each other as a couple, Roselie always thinks about and strives to do things her own way. Not only does Roselie express resentment and a need for difference in the traditional gender roles in her open expressions of language, but she reveals it through her actions. Equally important, it is said that actions speak louder than words. Thus, it could be said that Roselie creatively forms associations with Stephen and Didon, until she is able to maneuver her way through the male-dominant societal spaces that are found in France and Capetown. Besides, Roselie’s survival is heavily dependent on her unmatched determination and will to do so. Roselie’s learning to be an independent thinker and having a will of her own is a safeguard and it prepares her for later developments in her life. She soon comes to realize that the men in her life are living a double life and are not heterosexuals as they present themselves in public. They actually sleep with other men of influence. Here one might ask: why would the men including Roselie’s husband Stephen have an intimate affair with another man or men? What follows is a comment Roselie makes as she learns about and tries to analyze the
homosexuality of her husband Stephen, a so-called man of stature and the
homosexuality of Didon, her good male friend and confidante.

Despite appearances, my life resembles Rose’s. All women’s lives are
alike: victimized, humiliated, or failing that abandoned. Simply, unlike
Elie and so many others, Stephen had done it with elegance . . .

The coward does it with a kiss

The brave man with a sword. (282)

Roselie’s statements are profound. The limiting gendered language that is used here
underscores the widely held mindset that women are victims and are generally
undervalued as well as perceived less than men. The language used here shows some of
the ways in which women suffer owing to gender stereotyping. Here one can infer that
Stephen as well as the other men practise homosexuality either freely or for financial
reasons. The irony of the situation is that both Stephen and Didon, who are seemingly
men of repute, hide their homosexual tendencies from Roselie. In short, Stephen and
Didon appear as male performers on the stage of patriarchy. Obviously, these men hide
their homosexual tendencies because of the societal gendered expectations and the
public’s resentment of homosexuals. Needless to mention, both Stephen and Didon run
the risk of losing a woman that they both claim to love. At this point, one recalls bell
hooks’ view that the problem of female subordination stems from the “patriarchy and not
poor and working class of men” (17).

Although Roselie is disillusioned, she does not give herself enough credit since,
literally, she refuses to accept the role of victim and she manages to redeem herself by
the very choices she makes. Her single hope for survival at the end of all her
disappointments, conflicts and struggles, it appears, is to singlehandedly explore her true passions which are writing and painting. Roselie’s selling her own stories and honing her painting skills offers her a winning chance in the Arts and serves as an excellent opportunity to enable her to give voice to and visually express her daily struggles, conflicts and obstacles. Thus, Roselie’s oral, visual and written narrative techniques serve to her credit as they not only give her a space and recognition on the artistic landscape, but she becomes able to echo a consciousness and a keen interest in her womanly state of being. Kevin Enrod Quashie’s idea of “women of color un/becoming the subject” (149) appears relevant here. Moreover, Maryse Condé’s protagonist Roselie, can be regarded as a female leader in her own right since she attempts to redefine the sexist language and images used to represent herself, a woman of color by making expressions of her own womanly state of being. At the same time, Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Scholars including Eudine Barritteau-Foster, Verene Shepherd, Cristina Cabral, Lourdes, Cassal, Mimi Sheller and African writers in the persons of Chimanda Ngozi Adiche, Chikwene Okonkjo Ogunyemi et al strongly articulate difference and inclusion for women of color. Both of Condé’s heroines, Roselie and Veronica, articulate difference to sexist gender labels, an inclusionist mentality, and self-knowledge of their cultural limitations as women of color.

Roselie’s experiences with men strongly resemble those of Veronica in Condé’s Heremakhonon. For instance, Roselie receives namecalling and gender discrimination, which she resents. Veronica is also attacked by men and other people in France, who refer to her as a “whore” since she chooses to be sexually-liberated and chooses her men at will. One statement Veronica uses that depicts sexist language and evidences personal
attacks at her is the following, which the students place on the chalkboard of her classroom. Veronica uses this very statement as a corrective measure, as a form of enlightening her students on gender inequality and to raise consciousness on the degradation of women, particularly, women of color. “WE SHALL DESTROY THE MINISTERS, THEIR MERCEDES AND THEIR WHORES” (64). Another statement that Veronica uses when she attempts catching a taxi before leaving Heremakhonon and he asks her where she is going, exemplifies the same. Condé writes: “Where? To find my sister in whoredom. Birds of a feather . . .” (66). But at the same time, Veronica’s male counterparts, who are promiscuous and choose women at will, do not seem to be under attack. Again, one evidences the diminishing effect of the societal binary and gender stereotyping and the race and class issues. Furthermore, Marlene Nourbese Phillip’s body metaphor concept and the objectification of black women’s bodies are also reflected here. By the same token, Frantz Fanon’s view of the black body and the colonizer’s racist and reductionist philosophy also seems evident here. Moreover, the impression that is created here is that of Prospero, a fictional symbol of the imperial colonizer, who demonizes Caliban, the darker character and looks down on him.

In summary, Maryse Condé’s protagonist, Veronica can be seen as the embodiment of a visionary and revolutionary woman leader, in her own right. Like many a person who struggles for survival and strives for difference, Veronica complains endlessly and she seems at the point where she is fed up with the empty promises that politicians make to the people of the respective communities, where she volunteers her teaching, counseling and mentorship services. Veronica understands the people’s struggles and she seems eager to respond to their call, by remaining abreast of all the
latest political developments which directly affect the desperate masses. Perhaps
Veronica also realizes that the only way to assume a male powered space is by making
her presence known and by being recognized by the notorious “other.” Furthermore,
Frantz Fanon’s suggestion of making his presence known to the other by asserting
selfhood seems appropriate here. In a word or two, if women’s presence is not felt or if
their voices are not heard and their language is not put out there for the public and the
male-dominated world culture to observe, then the status quo will continue. Veronica
examines difference. Veronica envisions consistency, societal harmony and gender
equality. She attempts to recreate the ubiquitous and culturally-scripted female narrative.
Moreover, Maryse Condé, the author of *Heremakhonon*, did contest elections in
Guadeloupe in 1992. From these observations, one can infer that Maryse Condé’s
protagonist, Veronica, can be seen as a potential agent of political and societal difference
and change. Veronica’s struggles are characteristic of people’s struggles both in the
fictional and real world. Hence, there seems to be considerable worth in considering
Maryse Condé’s protagonist, Veronica, as a fictional woman leader, who returns to
original sites of struggle, makes unpopular choices, crosses gender, class, and racial
boundaries in an effort to redefine the negative perceptions about her, a woman of color.
Furthermore, Veronica struggles to gain her independence from a culturally
subordinating family, to access resources and help to revolutionize the lives of people in
the various communities in which she finds herself. Lastly, Veronica demonstrates
exceptional leadership abilities, which can be emulated by women of color in the real-
world settings.
Chapter Five: Wariinga, the Replacer

Dagere, the call: “Song-gbong batere nga gere
Kyo meng karambari nga!”
Response: “Song- gbong yee. The mistletoe has no roots, but it is very arrogant.” (Kuwabong 2018)
And its arrogance will attract the farmer to pull it off, so his fruit trees can yield better harvests. (Kuwabong 2018)

According to Kuwabong, the mistletoe will attract the farmer to pull it off, so his fruit trees can yield better harvests. Despite its arrogance, the symbolic mistletoe, finds its match with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s heroine Jacinta Wariinga, in his piercing novel *Devil on the Cross*. Wariinga can be said to epitomize a revolutionary female leader with strong, unique and creative abilities. She can also be seen as the personification of the societal elixir that will extinguish the life of the arrogant and preposterous mistletoe, and replace the original yields, prosperity, promise and peace that once existed in Ngũgĩ’s fictional land of Ilmorog. Ngũgĩ is a reknowned Kenyan writer, who was imprisoned for his expressive writings. It could be said that Ngũgĩ writes from the left. He is also a fighter of social justice. And he reveals his position on social justice, language, memory and the politics of memory in an online interview. According to Ngũgĩ, “Language carries memory. It is the keeper of people’s memory” (Ngũgĩ). He writes in his native language Kikuyu. He also points out how the memory of past voices enables us to evaluate the present. He speaks to the communal social climate that preceeded the coming of the British to Kenya. He also states that in hisfirst biographical novel *Dreams in a Time of War*, (which is set during the second world war and war of Kenyan liberation from the
British), his mother and women in his village had a major impact on his life and education. He notes his mother’s punch line was: “Is that the best you could have done?” (Ngũgĩ) It is clear that Ngũgĩ’s narrator is held to high character and academic expectations. From these observations, Ngũgĩ had a deep respect for his mother and the women of his village. This admiration for women characters is displayed in both *Dreams of War* and *Devil on the Cross*. The latter is set in post-independence Kenya. Ngũgĩ gives his female protagonist Wariinga, a super-ordinate role. She has agency. She challenges the status quo.

Some of the ways in which Wariinga challenges the status quo and fights to restore the former peace and harmony in her native Ilmorog, will now be examined. Wariinga is preyed on by a rising petit bourgeois class black male in Kenya, who himself becomes an oppressor to the people of Ilmorog. He is described in the novel as the Rich Old Man of Ngorika. He makes false promises to Wariinga. He buys her expensive gifts and he drives her around in an expensive car. Wariinga is deluded by this Rich Old Man’s lies and empty promises. Young Wariinga is quite gullible and malleable and so she yields to the lure of the Rich Old Man of Ngorika, who soon impregnates her and does not take responsibility for her pregnancy. Here one notices how the Rich and powerful Old Man of Ngorika uses his status and flaunts his ill-gotten material possessions, to help access Wariinga’s bodily goods. He suddenly begins to avoid Wariinga the moment she proves to be pregnant. His family and so-called good name mean the world to him. Wariinga remains an insignificant figure in his world. Wariinga’s story is familiar and commonplace in communities of color. Her struggle to raise a fatherless child and all the mental strain and criticism she receives from scores of
individuals in her native community as a result of becoming pregnant, is a very harsh experience. Worse, Wariinga is on the unpleasant receiving end of class division. Considering that the Rich Old Man of Ngorika does not as much as call Wariinga or ask about their offspring, exemplifies his belief that he is superior to her poor status. However, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga embodies strength, determination and self-reliance. The excerpt that follows depicts Wariinga’s vision, will power and strength. Wariinga washes her face and looks at the woman in the mirror. She also has a new dream.

The Wariinga of today has decided to be self-reliant all the time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life’s struggles in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity . . . Wariinga, heroine of toil, the heroism of life can only be discovered in the battle of life . . . Wariinga, our engineering hero . . . Yes, the gun she was given by Muturi to keep is also there. Wariinga never leaves the gun behind . . . It is as if the phase tester and the pistol were her two most important shields . . . Today Wariinga strides with energy and purpose, her dark eyes radiating the light of an inner courage, the courage and light of someone with firm aims in life - yes the firmness and the faith of someone who has achieved something through self-reliance. Wariinga, the black beauty! Wariinga of the mind and hands and body and heart, walking in rhythmic harmony on life’s journey! Wariinga, the worker! . . . this girl is a mechanical engineer, who specializes in motor vehicles and other internal combustion engines. (218)
Clearly, Wariinga is ready for action. She is self-reliant and is eager to accomplish her goals, at all costs. She is militant. She will devastate whomever or whatever attempts to hinder her progress. Wariinga is a brave lioness. Wariinga will not be denied an opportunity! Waringa is resolute on self-advancement and access to the resources that the “violent imperial culture of male brutes,” which is now perpetuated by the local petit bourgeois class that has stolen from her nation’s people, and currently controls them. Here one observes how an oppressed people can themselves in turn, become oppressors to their own people. In the words of Paulo Freire, the locals have “mirrored the images of the capitalist oppressor” and have started to oppress their own. Freire has advised that the oppressed, do not engage in this negative practice. Frantz Fanon as well, has warned against social alienation and exploitation of fellow human beings in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*.

It is a question of a victim of a system based on the exploitation of a given race by another, on the contempt in which a given branch of humanity is held by a form of civilization that pretends superiority . . . intellectual alienation is a creation of middle-class society. What I call middle-class society is any society that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, all discovery. I call a middle-class a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt. And I think that a man who takes a stand against this death is in a sense revolutionary. (224-225)

Accordingly, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga, “heroine of toil” and “heroine of engineering” (217), and daughter of Iregi rebels (222), is ready for war and seeks to
challenge this “alienation” and “exploitation” of her fellow citizens and attempts to clean up the mess in Ilmorog. Wariinga wants justice. She always carries around the gun which she was given by Muturi. Ironically, the gun that Wariinga constantly carries around, one can infer, is a symbol that underscores the petit bourgeois “imperial culture of male brutes” literally, is no match for a woman who possesses such powerful inner strength as Wariinga. One can infer this especially since the sadistic male imperialists as well as members of the petit bourgeois class use guns as their chief symbol of power. To qualify this statement, Wariinga not only carries around a gun, but she relies on wisdom and intuition to guide her thoughts and actions. Similarly, Wariinga’s possession of a gun, one deems, can be a counter-measure, against the oppressors and perpetrators of sadistic and crippling global masculine imperialism. The gun as well, can be seen as a precursor of freedom for the oppressed people of Ilmorog. In brief, the gun that is created by the oppressor to enable him to destroy people’s lives and control, can also be foreseen as the instrument the visionary and creative Wariinga, will use to dismantle the imitation oppressor and petit bourgeois’ very house and reduce him from power.

Undoubtedly, Wariinga is determined to restore the peace and harmony that existed in Ilmorog prior to the takeover of first the colonials, and then, the petit bourgeois class, in the likes of The Old Man of Ngorika. So, she decides to fight back. She seeks to replace and clean up the politically corrupt environment. She fights, fires back, and resents the negative treatment she received as a young woman from the men or figures of institutionalized power in her life such as her boss, Mr. Kihara, and The Old Man of Ngorika. Hence, she asserts herself educationally and challenges the status quo by
becoming a female engineer, par excellence. Wariinga uses education as a weapon against her oppression. She seems hell bent on reaping justice for the exploitation of her female anatomy and her “bodily goods,” so to speak.

Her ambition was to study electrical, mechanical, civil engineering. The word “engineer” was what made her heart beat whenever she shut her eyes and tried to look into the tomorrow of her life. Wariinga could not understand why girls hardly ever opted for such challenging jobs, leaving the whole field open to men. There is no job a girl cannot accomplish if she sets her mind to it, and believes she can do it: that was what Wariinga told the other girls who would often laugh at the daring of her thought. But they were convinced that Wariinga could complete an engineering course successfully; that no girl or boy at Nakuru Day School could beat her at maths. Her knowledge of maths was legendary, and her name was known in all the neighboring schools. (140-141)

Here Wariinga’s dream and revolutionary train of thought not only challenge the status quo, but she defies the social myth of women as the “inferior other.” She challenges the notion that males only can excel at maths and science. She also demonstrates to the male dominated world that women and girls can do more and are worth far more than their mere, bodily functions. She purports the idea that women are intelligent beings and women engineers can be as equally good as male engineers. Furthermore, her reservation that there is no job a girl cannot accomplish highlights her determination to succeed, not only in her engineering profession, but at any goal in which she ventures.
Those who like to belittle the minds, intelligence, and abilities of our women might not believe that Wariinga is also an expert at fitting and turning, at forging and welding, at shaping a metal to suit a variety of purposes . . . People love to denigrate the intelligence and intellectual capacity of our women by saying the only jobs a woman can do, are to cook, to make beds and to spread their legs in the market of love. The Wariinga of today has rejected all that reasoning, because her thighs are hers, her brain is hers, her hands are hers, and her body is hers, she must accord all her faculties their proper role and proper time and place and not let any one part be the sole ruler of her life, as if it has devoured all the others. That’s why the Wariinga of today has said goodbye, to being a secretary and has sworn that she will never type again for the likes of Boss Kihara, bosses whose condition for employing a girl is a meeting for five minutes of love after a hard drink . . . Wariinga is always filled with joy for someone who watches the power of her mind and body struggling against nature, turning molten iron, for instance, into products designed to enhance human lives. (218)

Wariinga says “no,” to female degradation and the devaluation of women. She rejects masculine perceptions about women of color. She dreams of a communally owned garage to help bring economic relief to the poor people of Ilmorog. And this dream she manages to realize by networking with the locals and the City Council that eventually grants them permission to utilize the site. She also refuses to accept the denigration of women’s intellectual fortitude. She is the direct opposite of society’s definition and formulation of
a woman of color. She struggles for gender equality. She demands recognition and respect from all men. Her body will not be hyper-sexualized, fetishized, or objectified. The scene at the garage in which a man touches Wariinga’s buttocks in an attempt to meddle with it, meanwhile she is working on an engine, and in which she sends him fluttering to the ground and could literally blow him to smithereens, exemplifies this. Wariinga performs martial arts on him. She is furious and fierce as fire. She spits fire and ferociously lays into her sexual predator and assailant. Of course, a man like this who is disrespectful and has gone way past his place will never again try to cross Wariinga’s path. Here, Wariinga also becomes a voice for the voiceless women. Her kicking down of this male predator, not only puts him in his place, but the very act of Wariinga’s retaliation is both liberating and potentially subversive. Wariinga becomes the woman engineer and works with engines. Thus, she defies societal expectations about women’s roles. K.C Cole in her essay “Women in Science,” illustrates how society discriminates against women scientists. She gives an account of the forms of discrimination she faces in her field such as class discrimination, promotions, salary increases and hirings. (3) She also states that women scientists in some of America’s leading science institutions such as MIT face discrimination. She references the case of Vera Kistiaskowsky an experimental physicist, at MIT, who was regarded as “Unnecessary, Injurious, and Out of Place” by male scientists. (2) Here it is observed that the leading role of Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga as a female engineer becomes critical, in helping to reverse the negative perceptions about women engineers, scientists and leaders.

Indeed, the character of Wariinga is the embodiment of courage. She is also guided by her inner convictions. She defies societal gendered constructs and she
struggles daily to realize her goals. Coupled with her defiance of gendered stereotypes, the positive imagery presented here of Wariinga seems nothing short of a model visionary and revolutionary and forward moving young woman of the 21st century and onwards. Likewise, Wariinga’s vision seems tantamount to Amethyst E. Davis’s quote extracted from her poem: “Beauty” that reads “Young women of this generation need to recognize the new era of self-actualization . . . (2015). Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga, seemingly, possesses a form of erotic power that is emblematic of that which Audrey Lorde craftily describes in her text *Sister Outsider*. Wariinga observes her environment, she listens and she learns. At first, Wariinga asserts selfhood. Then, she is jolted into a revolutionary mode that will not merely benefit her personally, but her revolutionary struggles will considerably serve to enhance the quality of life for the people of Ilmorog, considerably. Here, Wariinga’s vision and actions are reflections of those exhibited by pre-colonial women rulers, goddesses and seeresses in African society such as Queens Nzinga, Amunatau, Makeda et al. Wariinga’s vision and resistant actions also resemble those depicted by revolutionary heroines from across the Caribbean region such as Nanny, the Maroon leader of Jamaica, as well as women in the Morant Bay Rebellion of Jamaica, and Queens Mary, Agnes and Mathilda of the U.S Virgin Islands, for example.

Wariinga is a determined, visionary thinker, quick witted and always seems to have a ready answer for the people of her community. She advises the poor and struggling workers of Ilmorog to take a stand against the oppressive system by forming a financial organization that would enable them to experience some economic relief, when they were hard up. In this organization, the money that the workers deposited into the pool would be the exact amount that they would collect when it was their turn to collect
funds or repayment. Similarly, Wariinga assists the workers to form a union that could help them to challenge the status quo and offer the poor and working classes some recourse. Notably, both the formation of a monetary partner hand organization and a workers union, would work counter to the existing societal norms that not only limit the workers, but exploit them.

Equally important, Wariinga forms an association with Wangari, an older female person who schools Wariinga on the history of Ilmorog and the rich ancestral heritage, they once possessed. It is here that Wariinga becomes increasingly politically conscious and she learns more about the root causes of the troubled social climate in which Kenyans live. She realizes that the current troubles facing the people were wrought by European interlopers and a “Clan of parasites” (53). Wariinga also becomes aware of Wangari’s arrest during which she spends three nights suffocating from the stench of shit and urine on charges of stealing and roaming the streets of Nairobi without being a resident of the city. Wangari explains to Wariinga. “I roamed the streets not knowing what to do or where to turn... The black mangave me up to the police who were black like me” (42-43). Wariinga also learns of the arms struggle in which Wangari is an active participant. Hence, Wariinga sees it fit to help bring about significant changes in the lives of the people of Ilmorog. In an effort to help reclaim their native lands, Wariinga arranges with Wangari to enter the Devil’s Angels Cave unannounced and with the assistance of the hypocritical police. Wangari, who is the first to enter the cave, notes the following in an earlier conversation with Wariinga, Gikuyu and Muturi.

Look at the towns we have built with our own hands: Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kisumu, Ruuwa-ini and Ilmorog. Look at the
coffee, and the tea, and the sugar cane, and the cotton, and the rice and beans, and the maize we have grown out of a handful of seeds. Look at the fire trapped inside copper wires that stretch from the Ruiru, Athi and Sagan Rivers, so that we can have suns and moons and the stars in our towns and in our houses after the nature’s sun, moon and stars have gone to bed! If the fruits of that cooperation had not been grabbed by the clan of parasites, where do you think that we the clan of producers would be today? Would we still know the meaning of cold, hunger, thirst and nakedness? (52-53)

Wangari refers here to the means of production and the local producers of Ilmorog, who owned the land and financial resources before the initial European takeover and then, the petite bourgeoisie who help to perpetuate the practice of controlling the natives. With the parasitic European takeover, the locals are not only displaced, but they are left out in the cold, hungry, thirsty, and naked, to suffer. Muturi, another character in Devil on the Cross comments: “Imagine! . . . The children of us workers are fated to stay out in the sun, thirsty, hungry, naked, gazing at fruit ripening on trees which they can’t even pick to quieten a demanding belly!” (46) Wariinga, becomes resolute to reverse and, if possible, to restore the traditional socio-political normalcy to her native Ilmorog. Wariinga’s blood begins to boil and she senses an obligation and a duty to respond to the cries and calls of a hurting people. Wariinga and her people’s sufferings strongly resemble those of the animal characters in George Orwell’s novel Animal Farm, referenced earlier in this dissertation. I will illustrate how some of the discussions advanced in Orwell’s work Animal Farm compare with those that are advanced in Ngũgĩ’s Devil on the Cross. In
Orwell’s work *Animal Farm* the pigs and other animal characters that are exploited by Mr. Jones, the farm owner, and his team. The farm animals are left hungry, naked and out in the cold. Hence, they must fend for themselves. They also plan a strike and rebellion against the farm’s administration as they seek justice for the negative treatment and exploitation they receive from Mr. Jones and his team, the farm authority. The following quote with wise words of counsel are mentioned by Old Major, the wise old pig, who advises his fellow farm animals to fight back and seek justice. Old Majors words depict the suffering animal’s sentiments and their strategy for liberation from their sufferings.

> Get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we would become rich and free . . . That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion! . . . but I know as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, that sooner or later justice will be done . . .

Beasts of England, beasts of England

Beasts of every land and clime

Harken to my joyful tidings

Of the golden future time . . .

Rings shall vanish from our noses,

And the harness from our back,

Bit and spur shall rust forever,

Cruel whips no more shall crack . . .

For that day we all must labor,
Though we die before it breaks;
Cows and horses, geese and turkeys,
All must toil for freedom’s sake.
Pass on this message of mine to those who come after you, so that future
generations shall carry on the struggle until it is victorious. (32-33)

Here one observes how Old Major, a major character in Orwell’s work, not only
envisions justice for the injustice done to him, his fellow pigs, and a rich and free future,
but he insists that rebellion is necessary. Old Major suggests that liberatory struggle,
should be a key ingredient that is passed on to the future generations. Simultaneously, in
Ngũgĩ’s Devil on the Cross, one resistance strategy that Wariinga utilizes to help restore
the traditional socio-political setting in Ilmorog is as follows: She orchestrates a march of
protest with Gatuiri, Muturi and students from the University of Ilmorog (ILUSA) against
their political oppressors. It is here that Waringa’s sleeping giant is awakened. So she
moves the people to action. She laughs as she contemplates the battle that will be fought
out in the cave between the forces of workers and the forces of evil blood-sucking thieves
and robbers. The workers pour out of every corner and hole in Ilmorog, that day. Some
of the placards bear various slogans as follows:

WE REJECT THE SYSTEM OF THEFT AND ROBBERY; OUR
POVERTY IS THEIR WEALTH; THE THIEF AND THE WITCH ARE
TWINS- THEIR MOTHER IS EXPLOITATION; THE BEEHIVE IN
WHICH WE ROLL THIEVES AND ROBBERS DOWN THE SLOPE
OF THE HILL OF DEATH HAS ALREADY BEEN BUILT BY THE
WORKERS. WHAT’S THE BIGGEST THEFT? THE THEFT OF THE

(203)

Clearly, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga exhibits a revolutionary line of thinking that is inclusive of the welfare of the poor masses of people. Evidently, the spirit of Godliness seems to leave the bodies of the workers, who fill the streets and line the sidewalks to protest, march, and stand in solidarity against the torture of their oppressors. Here one recalls Paulo Freire’s philosophy regarding hegemonic oppressors and the liberation of oppressed people’s. “It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. For this to happen, a total denouncement of fatalism is necessary. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation” (125). Wariinga assumes a liberatory posture and simultaneously expresses compassion, empathy, and a deep concern for the humanitarian cause of the oppressed masses in Ilmorog. Her stand for justice in unprecedented and unpopular ways speaks to her creativity. Likewise, her directly and radically facing the oppressor speaks to her valiance and transformative abilities. Frantz Fanon’s view of National Culture in his work The Wretched of the Earth shows that “revolution must be fashioned with the people in mind” (206). Here Fanon advocates a bottom up model for societal transformation. “The political parties start from living reality and it is this reality, in the name of the stark facts which weigh down the present and the future of men and women, that they fix their line of action (207).

Thus, Ngũgĩ’s novel Devil on the Cross seems to present a substantive amount of material that stages a solid discussion to support this study’s thesis which is that
women’s assuming leadership positions, resisting established norms, and redefining their own ways of being, could help to lessen the incidence of societal female marginalization. It is necessary for the poor class of women and men to take an active stand for justice and become a part of the solution to their problem. Possibly, the disparity of class division and class struggle could be reduced. Perhaps what seems more insightful is that Ngũgĩ, a Postcolonial writer, brings into the female discourse, the male perspective. This observation allows for considerable balance in my discussion, and might serve to echo the marginalized man’s sentiment regarding the African people’s struggle, and offers new insights into the complexity of female subordination and gender disparity.

As mentioned before, Wariinga is heavily influenced by Wangari, an older and more experienced woman mentor, who fearlessly stands up to her male oppressors or criminals, and the police. Accordingly, Wangari, a female giant, fires out the following statements at the policemen, then raises her voice in song (even though her hands are chained as the brutal policemen shove her out of the Devil’s Cave with their batons and spit at her):

So you police force, are the servants of one class only?
And to think that I stupidly went head and entrusted my love of my country to treacherous rats that love to devour patriotism!...

If ever you hear drip, drip, drip,
Don’t think it’s thundery rain.
No, it’ll be the blood of us peasants
As we fight for our soil! (198)
Wangari can also be seen as a major force behind the people’s struggle for liberation and a visionary woman symbol for replacing pre-colonial and pre-petite bourgeoisie women’s leadership, land ownership, societal harmony, balance and justice in Ilmorog. In short, her statements are prophetic and indicative of the poor people’s cry for change, even if that change involves bloodshed.

In this same vein, Ngũgĩ points out in another novel entitled, A Grain of Wheat, that in pre-colonial Africa, women assumed leadership positions. Accordingly, Gikonyo, the male protagonist, recalls a time in African History before the advent of the Europeans, when the Whiteman told of another country beyond the sea where a powerful woman sat on a throne, while men and women danced under the shadow of her authority and benevolence. Of course, this woman, to whom Gikonyo refers, was the colonial Queen of England. After the arrival of the Europeans on the continent of Africa, major havoc and social disunity ensues. Seemingly, it is from this moment in time, that traditional African Religion and Culture is eroded. “This woman was ready to spread the shadow to cover the Agikuyu” (11). And Gikonyo admits that the “Whiteman’s” words echoed something in the heart, deep down in their suppressed history.

It was many years ago. The women ruled the land of Agikuyu. Men had no property. They were only there to serve the whims and needs of the women. Those were hard years. So, they waited for the women to go to war, they plotted a revolt, taking an oath of secrecy to keep them bound each to each, in the common pursuit of freedom. (11)

So, seemingly, coupled with European erosion of the traditional Agikuyu culture, the once prestigious role that Agikuyu women held had suddenly been rendered redundant
by their own Agikuyu men. Here one observes how the intrusive Western Outsider comes into the African trenches, and succeeds, at causing a rift in local life and at seizing control of the land and other natural resources, including the womenfolk. Likewise, one can also observe that the very conflict and displacement that the people of Ilmorog, in *Devil on the Cross*, encounter, originally stems from colonial/settler disruption and conquest. Ngũgĩ notes in an interview with Reinhard Sander and Bernth Lindfors with assistance from Lynette Cintrón, that Ilmorog is a fictional land, but the fictional representations may be applicable to Kenya, as it is applicable to East Africa, Africa, and the Third World. (84) In brief, it can be seen how the invasive settler culture brought to pre-colonial Africa, a loss of women’s power, widespread social unrest. Ngugi’s heroine Wariinga seeks to restore former feminine led spaces and replace lost identities in Ilmorog.

In a similar vein, Chinua Achebe, a postcolonial male writer from Nigeria, highlights the concept of women’s rule and how crucial women and goddesses are to life, balance, and the smooth running of affairs in traditional Nigerian society in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Accordingly, one day, Okonkwo, Achebe’s male protagonist, attempts to subdue his youngest wife, Ojuigo, but she is not an easy woman to be subdued. So, Okonkwo reverts to physically beating her into submission and Erzeani, the priest of the earth goddess and the villagers of Umuofiacry shame on him. They remind Okonkwo that the earth goddess who brings prosperity and blessings to the lands and people will be furious and greatly disturbed. The following explains the significant role of women in pre-colonial Nigeria and in Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*. 
Take away your kola nut. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our goddesses and ancestors . . . We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil . . . the evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall perish . . . you will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. (32)

Not only does Okonkwo disturb the peace of Umuofia, but he violates the sacred domain of the goddess. He also humiliates and disrespects, Ojuigo. Hence, Okonkwo receives public opprobrium and is brought to order by Erzeani, the priest and messenger of the Earth goddess. Okonkwo’s reckless act can cause the people of Umuofia to suffer greatly and so the priest admonishes that he seeks intercession and a request for reprieve by sacrificing one she-goat, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. Okonkwo is afterwards repentant as his symbolic blow to the female is grounds for cursing the land of Umuofia and its people. Here, bell hooks’ and Audrey Lorde’s philosophies of “Sisterhood” and solidarity also seem very essential. Similarly, Max Dashu’s concept of women’s goddesses, seeresses or priestesses in liberatory movements and the need for them to help maintain the balance of the spiritual and political or material planes of the cosmos seems pertinent here as well. “Priestesses, the women who lead rituals . . . often lead liberation movements (1).

Accordingly, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariingacan thus be perceived to possess goddess-like and spiritual powers. She is clairvoyant, sensitive and seems to have a keen sense of
discernment. For instance, in her visions she is able to foresee and thus she can predict events. In one dream, Wariinga discovers some interesting revelations. The following excerpt of a prescient and apocalyptic conversation that she has with a voice one day underscores some core developments in the novel. It also highlights Wariinga’s coming of age to the insidious nature of the system of oppressive male robbers and exploiters. Perhaps more important, it shows Wariinga’s recourse is to extinguish the parasitic flesh eating and bloodsucking Kimeendeeri.

Voice: The Kimeendeeri of this world are not foolish as you think they are. Kimeendeeri will show them only two worlds, the worlds of the eater and the eaten. So the workers will never learn of the existence of a third world, the world of the revolutionary overthrow of the system of eating and being eaten. They will always assume that the two worlds of the eater and the eaten are eternal.

Wariinga: How will they manage to fool them like this?

Voice: Every Sunday the workers will read sermons that will instruct them that the system of milking human sweat, human blood and human brains- the system of robbery of human labour power and human skills-is ordained by God, and that it has something to do with the eventual salvation of their souls . . . Kimeendeeri will also build schools in which the workers will be taught that the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh has always held sway since the world was created and
will always hold sway until the end of the world and that there is nothing people can do to put an end to the system. The children will be allowed to read only those books that glorify the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh . . . They will sing only those songs and hymns and read only the literature that glorifies the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh . . . Kimeendeeri will also publish newspapers, whose role is to denigrate those opposed to the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh . . .

Wariinga: Eaters of men! Is that possible?

Voice: Take eat my body . . . Take yourself for example. When the Rich Old Man from Ngorika snatched your body, what did you do? You did not put up a fight. You said that since he had taken away your body, he might as well take your life too.

Wariinga: I am a woman. I’m weak. There was nothing that I could do, nowhere that I could go and no one that I could turn to for help.

Voice: . . . The trouble with you Wariinga is that you have no faith in yourself . . . Men will kneel before your body, some of them content merely to touch the soil on which your feet have trodden, others driven to standing by the wayside, hoping to be touched by your shadow as you pass
by . . . Oppressor. Exploiter. Liar. Grabber. I am worshipped by those who love to dispose of goods that have been produced by others. Give me your soul, and I’ll guard it for you.

Wariinga: Go away Satan! Take your wiles and offer them to your own people. If I were to give you my soul, what would I be left with? (189-193)

It is through this ominous conversation that Wariinga realizes that the single and ultimate recourse she has to replace the peace, sovereignty and superiority of women in Agikuyu culture is: to extinguish the lives of the entire system of male predators, liars, and exploiters who prey on the bodily goods of herself and other women. Wariinga will do so by considering the existence of the “Third World” which promises the revolutionary overthrow and extermination of “the system of drinking human blood and the eating of human flesh” in all its forms and traces.

Undoubtedly, Wariinga seeks redress for the injustice done to fellow African women and men. By standing up and challenging her male oppressors, Wariinga gets justice. She bravely confronts the Rich Old Man of Ngorika, who preys on her bodily goods, impregnates her and does not ever take responsibility for fathering Wariinga’s daughter, Wambui. The Rich Old Man of Ngorika’s so-called “good name,” his mansions, wealth, and family status mean far more to him than Wariinga and Wambui ever will. Can one imagine that he is filthy rich and helps to conceive an offspring and never offers Wariinga even a penny to help support his offspring? Can one imagine that Wariinga has to struggle to muster the funds to gain an education? Can one imagine that
Wariinga has to raise a child singlehandedly? Can one imagine that Wariinga has to rise above all the odds, to help poor struggling people like herself with meagre resources?

What is admirable about Wariinga is that she never once compromises her values, in her resolve to address the cause of the suffering people of Ilmorog.

Notably, with her education and her mechanical engineering skills, Wariinga is able to selflessly navigate a space to assist the poor masses of Ilmorog. She creates ways for them to have more access to financial resources and schools them on how to sustain their pool of material resources. By the same token, she confronts the key members of the oppressive regime of Devil’s Angels, head on. She uses the very tool or weapon that serves as a symbol of their power to wipe them out: the pistol with the cosmic bullet.

Clearly, without their guns and money, the oppressive regime has no power. So Wariinga decides to hit the evil regime where it hurts the most. She reflects on a dream that she has in which a strange voice relates much of the corruption in Ilmorog to her, in plain view. This dream also enables her to see in true and living color some of the key male figures and oppressors that she must eliminate, so that the town of Ilmorog can be redeemed. She grows increasingly exasperated. She remembers Wangari, Muturi, and the student leader, who helped to arouse her from her mental slavery. She feels anger that she did not feel when she killed Gitahi. Wariinga is now resolute on extinguishing the evil ways and lives of ranking members of the Devil’s Angels Organization, with her own two hands. The Rich Old Man of Ngorika now becomes one of the most WANTED human beings. On sighting Wariinga, he murmurs:

I am a man of the Church. I just want you to be mine. I just want you to be mine . . . Please save me! Save the honour of my name! Save the honour
of my son! Jacinta, save the honour of my home, and you’ll see before you a man who knows what gratitude is . . . I have never seen beauty that shone with such brilliance, save me! (253)

Evidently, Wariinga’s mind is made up. It appears way too late, for the Rich Old Man of Ngorika. Today, he will no longer play the game of hunting Wariinga’s bodily goods. Roles will shift! The people of Ilmorog will now be given back their lands, financial resources, and power that he and his predatory male oppressors have stolen. Wariinga is ready to strike! Wariinga’s action will not only subvert the Devil’s Angels Organization, but will replace it, with the grassroots organization of the People and their Power. She acts.

Wariinga stood exactly where she stood when she entered the room. She spoke like a people’s judge about to deliver her judgment.

You snatcher of other people’s lives! Do you remember the game you and I used to play, the hunter and the hunted? Did you imagine that a day might come when the hunted would become the hunter? What’s done cannot be undone. I’m not going to save you. But I shall save many other people, whose lives will not be ruined by words of honey and perfume . . .

Look at me! Wariinga commanded, with the voice of a judge. . . . (253).

First, she goes up to her initial and chief male oppressor, The Rich Old Man of Ngorika, and plants a bullet in his forehead. Then, she loads his body with two more bullets.

Serendipitously and symbolically, it would seem, a total of three bullets are lodged in his evil body. “There kneels a jigger, a louse, a weevil, a flea, a bedbug! He is mistletoe, a parasite that lives on trees of other people’s lives” (254). Ironically here one might point
out that the word trees can be seen as a pun for the man of the Church, who subscribes to the tenets of the Orthodox Church and its Holy Trinity - the father, the son, and the Holy Ghost. Hilariously, not even the Holy Trinity, with all its religious symbolism and dogma, can save the so-called man of the Church, The Rich Old Man of Ngiroka, this time. Wariinga is ready to destroy the parasite that thrives on other people’s lives. She knocks off the knee caps of Mr. Kihaahu and Gitutu, her second and third male oppressors blowing them to cinders. And Nguuni wa Nditika scatters terrified, holding his belly as he shouts for the evil Robin Mwaura, the traitor. Here, it can be observed that Wariinga gets justice, the violent way. One by one she takes them out. She walks on without looking back, even once. For once, justice is served in Ilmorog. Hence, violence becomes a necessary evil. How else could Wariinga guarantee justice, when she has to deal with relentless and ruthless devils? Of course, one cannot spare the devil even half a second! Here one recalls Malcolm X’s philosophy of using “Any Means Necessary” to get justice. Malcolm X claims that there can be no true revolution without violence” (MalcolmX qtd. in Myers 130). Malcolm X’s philosophy appears consistent with Frantz Fanon’s philosophy of violence and the ejection of the settler culture advanced in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s heroine Wariinga’s radical resistance codes of behavior can, likewise, be considered instructive, revolutionary and noteworthy liberatory mechanisms for the poor masses of Ilmorog. Through her choice of extremity and blood bath, the Devil’s Angel organization is crushed. Thus, Wariinga increases the chances of the land and power being placed back into the hands of the poor masses and rightful owners. Besides, one witnesses a degree of rebirth and social catharsis in Ilmorog, which
could occur only with the symbolic shedding of the Devil’s bad or evil blood. Therefore, Wariinga uses a necessary evil to cast out and replace evil with harmony, peace and goodness. The recent situation whereby the White farmers in South Africa are currently being driven out by Black, South Africans, is a real-world instance that typifies how colonial powers have sought to displace and dispossess the natives of the African continent, a large part of whom are women. Not only have the people been dispossessed, but they have been struggling for centuries to reclaim their lands (which were stolen during years of European conquest). Wariinga’s drive to lead the charge to oust the rising petite bourgeoisie and the Devil’s Angels Regime is a classic example in which the people resist their oppressors.

Finally, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga can be considered a visionary, revolutionary and model example of a serious woman leader. Wariinga’s relentless defiant actions to replace land ownership in the hands of the natives, seem consistent with Fantz Fanon’s philosophy on how the dispossessed should resist the domineering ways of the settler culture. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* suggests that for the people to decolonize the ways of the settler’s culture they have to eject him, take the settler’s place, and become his equal: “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. . . “Let the settler know that I am no longer afraid of him. . . I do not give a damn” (44-45). Indeed, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga, demonstrates to the domineering and boastful Devil’s Angels Regime of Ilmorog, that it is high time they be ejected from Ilmorog, using violence. And it is ironic, that Wariinga uses the very violent means, to eliminate the territorial Devil’s Angels and their occupation of Ilmorog’s native lands.
By way of analogy, Wariinga’s struggles seem very similar to those of the Anguillians who suffered miserably, prior to the Anguilla Revolution, during their years under the hostile Robert Llewelyn Bradshaw administration of St. Kitts. “Pappa Bradshaw” (as he was referred to by his die-hard and brainwashed supporters) and the petit bourgeois class had taken root, and were now oppressing poor blacks like themselves. And the oppressed Anguillians, including the revolutionary heroine, Daisy “Wong” Richardson, seemed to have done what Fanon suggests. They fearlessly stand up to “Pappa Bradshaw,” the oppressor, and had him and his followers of the time ejected from their island. By the same token, Paulo Freire’s advice to the oppressed that “they do not mirror the images of the oppressor and become oppressors,” one deems necessary here. Sadly, “Pappa Bradshaw” emulated the negative and oppressive practices of the colonial oppressor, and become the oppressor himself. Clearly, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga is resolute in her pursuit of justice and she ploughs down without fail, every visible trace of the institution of “sadomasochistic” male assailants and criminals, who have been mercilessly inflicting torture on the natives, displacing, dispossessing, and occupying their lands for several ages. In short, Ngũgĩ’s heroine Wariinga’s resistant course of action enables her to wipe out the presence of the oppressive Devils’ Angels regime and replace the peace and harmony that precedes them, and enable the beauty of the native choruses to echo in the ears of Ilmorog, once more.
Conclusion: Where Women Tread the Land, See the Sun, Embrace the Moon

(Peace)

As I approach the final pages of this dissertation and I attempt to offer logical conclusions, pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research, it seems fitting to briefly recall Mrs. Hyacinth Hughes’ poem “Election Fever,” in *Where I See the Sun: Contemporary Poetry in Anguilla*, in which she discusses the status of women and their role in Anguillian politics. She writes:

. . . Den mi cousin tell mi de women dem tryin to tek over,

So de men dem better run fi cover,

For dey dun had dere chance and fail,

So tis time fe de women dem ti prevail

Well uh tell her how uh please fe so

Ti see more women runnin den ever before;

Uh wish dem could form a new register

So we could elect our first woman Chief Minister. (57)

The rhythm, beat, and pulse of Hughes’ poem are intense. The persona in Hughes’ poem seems to echo a keen desire and a clairvoyant vision for a majority of women, who seek to witness change on the political stage in her homeland, Anguilla. Hughes’ persona seems to dream of a new day in Anguilla’s political history by having the first woman chief minister elected to public office. The mood that is created in Hughes poem is one of excitement and hopefulness. “Den mi cousin tell me de women trying to tek over . . . so de men dem better run fi cover.” The persona’s message also seems prophetic as of the
year 2018, three women now occupy powered spaces in the Anguillian parliament. “So we could elect our first woman chief minister” (line 24). Clearly, female subordination remains a longstanding problem in Anguilla, the wider Caribbean region and Africa, and should be reversed. In essence, oppressed women of color should begin to live and cease from merely existing within the limiting patriarchal context. Accordingly, the outstanding roles of women of color in pre-colonial times such as Queen Nzinga of West and Central Africa, coupled with revolutionary undertakings of women of color in various parts of the colonized world, including Indira Gandhi, Winnie Mandela, Eugenia Charles, Albena Lake-Hodge, Malala Yousafzai et al, seem to be reliable indicators of the woman of color’s ability to lead and effect radical changes in their native communities. Moreover, based on my findings of the Contemporary scholarly analyses, arguments and interpretations with regard to the woman question, one can safely conclude that women’s asserting selfhood and assuming leadership positions, could considerably help to lessen the incidence of female subordination.

To begin with, from a collective assessment of the fictional presentations involving women of color that were advanced by postcolonial women’s writers, the struggle of women of color seems to be part and parcel of the larger patriarchal social issue. Even a few male writers, including George Lamming, point out the complexity of women’s subordination within the context of patriarchal hegemony. Frantz Fanon, likewise illustrates in both his works The Wretched of the Earth and Black Skin, White Masks how the hegemonic matrix and its binaries cause colonized peoples of color to be caught center stage and struggle as a result of its violence and pressures. Hence, an initial point of departure for marginalized women of color would be to thoroughly tackle or
resist the dehumanizing hegemonic system that divides or classifies people by lines of
gender, race, and class. Clearly, more women of color need to experience socio-political
freedom from the societal dualisms including racism, sexism and classism.

Additionally, to help lessen the incidence of female subordination and enable
more women of color to assume leadership positions, agency and spaces of power, the
literary presentations, the transformative dialogues and discussions that are found in the
works of more postcolonial writers should be included in the literary canon. For one
prime example, the literary presentations of women of color by postcolonial thinkers and
writers such as Ryhaan Shah, Maryse Condé, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, reflect the gender
contentions, history, and lived realities of women of color. In addition, I deem that
recognition and difference can help to alleviate the tensions and pressures of female
subordination, sexual and economic exploitation of women and men of the poor and
working classes. Furthermore, Carole Boyce Davies, Anh Hua and Cristina Cabral, for
example, articulate that women of color use memory and resistance as counter measures
to hegemonic oppression. According to the broader Contemporary scholarship,
postcolonial narratives by both women and male writers seem to be potentially
subversive revisionist tools, as the narrative technique helps to memorialize original sites
of oppression, and could possibly enable women of color to reclaim their lost identities,
hidden histories, cultures and spaces. Once past struggle is memorialized, the language of
struggle can be kept alive and will become a part of the collective struggle and repertoire
of oppressed women of color.

Simultaneously, considering that Contemporary Caribbean Feminist scholars and
literary critics, namely Audrey Lorde, bell hooks, Eudine Barritteau-Foster, Rhoda
Reddock, Zee Edgell, Lisa Outar, Gabrielle Hosein, Patricia Mohammed, Patricia Collins, Barbara Christian, Linda Peake, Lourdes Casal, Cristina Cabral, Consuelo Lopez, Lisabeth Paravisini- Gerbert, Mimi Sheller, Emilia Ippolito, Ann Morris et al in concert, recommend addressing issues of difference and an examination of experience, identity and inconsistencies in the gender discourse. Coupled with the former, other revolutionary male thinkers including Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, Carter G. Woodson suggest resistance to the existing oppressive systems. Walter Rodney as well recommends challenging the societal myths, labels. Collectively, their analyses of the classification of humans and their articulations for examining difference could help to shed new light on “the woman question.” Probably, the negative perceptions and degradation of women can be shifted from the negative to the positive degree. Thus, one can conclude as well, that liberatory texts including Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s *Devil on the Cross*, could be used to create awareness on the dynamics of gender relationships within the patriarchal context and simultaneously, enlighten women on ways to resist and lessen the incidence of hegemonic oppression in the real-world setting.

Moreover, in summarizing and analyzing the works of fiction by Shah, Condé and Ngũgĩ, it suggests that this dissertation can serve as an eye opener for women of color who are constant “subjects” of gender discrimination in their respective societies. To be more specific, developing young women and men of color should be provided an opportunity to read more works that deal with critical issues such as gender stereotyping, gender conflicts and the underlying causes of gender conflicts. Perhaps the Caribbean region can witness gender neutrality as awareness on varying gender identities can be
raised and brought to the fore. Young women and men of color need to see each other in
egalitarian terms and not bodily or sexist terms. Once these understandings are
propagated, Caribbean gender relationships will be redefined and the incidence of
violence and crimes stemming from male chauvinism, for instance, can be lessened as
well. Education seems to be key to help reversing female marginalization and
increasing the woman of color’s chances to ascend to positions of leadership. Likewise,
I believe that this dissertation through its use of documentation of historical data, its
trajectory of the forms of resistance used by the marginalized women of color, its
autobiographical accounts, and interview data and comparative methods, coupled with
the fictional contestations, brings some noteworthy indications for revisioning,
restructuring, re-organizing and, thus, enlightening women and men of color in Caribbean
society on gender, gender relationships and how the class and race issues are hinged on
the said gender relationships. Equally important, with these liberatory gender revisionings
and restructurings of hegemonic society, it would seem that the chances for women of
color to ascend into leadership positions can be considerably increased.

Similarly, from an analysis of other postcolonial novels I have read by female
Caribbean writers, women’s marginalization and its reversal stands out as a prevailing
theme. Likewise, they give their heroines superordinate and empowering roles. The
presentation of more works such as those that have been presented by a few
postcolonial male writers such as George Lamming and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, whose
works give due attention to women’s issues and female empowerment, seem necessary.
Thus, it would seem that women’s asserting selfhood in the real-world could serve as a
potent invective against hegemonic systems, as fictional women of color seem to model
real-world possibilities. In short, women’s ability to assert selfhood and agency promises empowering possibilities.

To further qualify the previous statements, while William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for example, that I referenced in the introduction is not one of the primary texts for this dissertation, it is considered a foundational text, since its themes strongly reflect the linear and scripted thinking of already established institutional societal structures such as the home and family, church, school, marriage, politics that perpetuate patriarchal tendencies, practices and gender formations. In brief, the lingering societal imprints of colonialism seem to dictate its relevance. The canonized literary representations such as those presented in *The Tempest* and other canonical works seem to require serious scholarly review and close evaluation. Simply, *The Tempest* appears to be a literary work that sets the tone and standard for portrayals of women, both in the fictional and real-world settings. The territorial Prospero and Caliban, the Inferior other and his or her inferiority complexes, still pervade Caribbean and African societies. And at this point in history, the aim should be for the overall racial and societal uplift of people of color, women and men, alike. Hence, *The Tempest*, a work that embodies Prospero, the colonial interloper, is foundational to discussions involving women of color. Moreover, it was referenced comparatively with non-canonical works such as Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, Maryse Condé’s *Heremakhonon* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*, to highlight the similarities and differences between the marginalized and the liberated woman of color.

Consequently, women of color should begin to identify the various forms of cultural female subordination and question, challenge, and resent them. Questioning and
challenging the established societal structures, in the words of Michel Foucault, promises “enlightenment and liberation” (Foucault qtd. in Gordon 90-91). Once women are able to identify the forms of subordination, they could fight to open up new spaces for themselves in the public spheres. I also deem that if more women were present and occupied spaces that are considered to be powered male spaces, then the negative images about women could be reversed. Similarly, if girls, young women, and even young men, are educated on ways to resist the existing oppressive power structures and creatively define their own ways of being in their respective societies, then they should be able to increase their chances to occupy powered spaces. Of equal importance, negative attitudes, like the negative images towards women, could change.

Likewise, through the Contemporary Feminist Critiques that were presented, coupled with Postcolonial analyses, decolonizing philosophies of Verene Shepherd, Barbara Christian, Marlene Nourbese Phillips, Carole Boyce-Davies, Clenora Hudson-Weems, Joy James, Paulo Freire, Frantz Fanon, Eric Williams, Kamau Brathwaite, Edouard Glissant, Myriam Chancy, Consuelo Lopez, Julia De Burgos, Myriam DeCosta-Willis et al, and the resistance strategies utilized by the literary heroines, again, it is felt that this dissertation also becomes worthy of scholarly review. Not only could it offer new, enlightened, and meaningful contributions to the field of Caribbean Literary Studies, but it can potentially be used to help educate students and future women and men to become enlightened and empowered to help reverse gender inequity and assert leadership positions themselves. Historically, women of color seem to have assumed leading roles both in private and public spaces in traditional societies, but were displaced by European colonizing powers that conquered and seized control of their lands and
installed their hegemonic patriarchal systems of rule. The latter is a good indicator of potential change for women of color. Furthermore, realizing that women of color have always sought to resist the colonial oppressor and his various institutionalized systems, it suggests that the chances of their reclaiming ownership of powered spaces are favorable.

To be more specific, if more and more women of color were to identify the resistance strategies that their ancestral and maternal forbears utilized against hegemonic oppressive systems and follow suite, there seems to be a relatively high probability that women of color could reclaim spaces by returning to the origins of their struggles. As a case in point, Karli Sherlita Robinson-Myers’ work, *Sankofa Healing: A Womanist Analysis of the Retrieval and Transformation of African Ritual Dance*, which deals with African Sankofa Healing, Retrieval and Transformation, provides some insights for women of color to reclaim, return, and replace existing struggles occasioned by Westernized oppressive systems. Robinson-Myers argues in favor of past retrieval not only as a form of healing for women of color, but as a transformative point of departure from patriarchal hegemonic oppression. Possibly, the collective redemptive struggle of women of color could replace existing male-dominated systems with their own visionary female-based structures and states of being. The collective redemptive struggles of women of color could also serve as counter-narratives to oppressive patriarchal systems. At the same time, their collective redemptive struggles could cater to the concerns, struggles, realities, experiences and goals of the poor and suffering masses of people of society. In short, the socio-political vision of Contemporary Feminist thinkers, writers and artists both in the fictional and real-world settings appear to be primarily
concerned with the revolutionary struggles of the common woman and man of color. Hence, the existing patriarchy that is fraught with gender, race, and class divisions, can be replaced with a feminine-centered political culture and an economy that promises to allow a vast majority of individuals to access economic resources, and experience “economic self-sufficiency,” as bell hooks, postulates.

Now, I propose the following visionary suggestions for cultivating revolutionary women’s leaders and a feminine-centered economy in Caribbean society and offer some recommendations for future research. First, the suggestions for fostering a female-centered economy and Caribbean society will be discussed. Second, the recommendations for future research will be identified. One suggestion for cultivating women’s leaders is to enable girls to become aware of female support spaces, groups, or organizations where women already occupy and encourage them to identify the strong and resilient survival mechanisms that women of color utilize. In so doing, girls and women of color could begin their networking skills and they could also learn to build lifelong relationships and friendships.

A second suggestion is to have girls educated on financial literacy and to develop entrepreneurial skills at an early age since basic trading and neighborhood bartering, as well as Sou-Sou (Su-Su) and partner hand financial safety nets, are practices that have been handed down by their ancestors. The recently elected and first woman Prime Minister on the Caribbean island of Barbados on May 24, 2018, the Honourable Mia Mottley, also seems to think along these lines. She seems to see value in women of color developing financial literacy and trading skills such as the traditional neighborhood bartering and trading with or investing in their own people. For example, within hours of
her election Mottley announced a scholarship fund for helping to educate Barbadian young women. Admittedly, the practice of promoting financial literacy and entrepreneurship among local people, women and men of color, and investing locally could also be a point of departure from their lack of access to and their dispossession of resources. It could increase their chances for autonomy and “economic self-sufficiency,” for example.

Even more, the local financial safety nets could operate in opposition to the established financial institutions of the capitalist free market economy. Likewise, the chances for poor and marginalized individuals to eventually become, the bonafide owners of the means of production, can be significantly augmented. A third suggestion is for women and men of color to learn as much about their ancestral past and capitalize on this ancestral knowledge and historic understandings to help inform their present struggles and discover practical methods and strategies for survival, redemption, self-advancement, recognition, liberation and continue the struggle for gender equity and the cultivation of more spaces for themselves, and more women and men of color to access financial and other resources. Accordingly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a male postcolonial thinker of color and an educator, also notes in Devil on the Cross that: “The third story was the one that left an indelible mark in my heart . . . The kind of education bequeathed to us by the whites has clipped our abilities, leaving us limping like wounded birds” (62-63). In a word or two, Ngũgĩ implies that women and men of color start to examine their physically, mentally and emotionally wounded states, and perhaps seek awakening and self-redemption. Dependence on the oppressor for redemption would remain merely a figment of the imagination.
A fourth suggestion would be for girls and women to form a neighborhood women’s circle in which they could help to keep the local cultural practices such as storytelling, folklore, poetry readings, and dramatic performances alive. A fifth suggestion would be for the women’s circle to ultimately collaborate with men and other people from across their respective communities to participate in activities such as the performance of skits, plays and dramatic monologues, inter-school local calypso competitions, Spelling Bee competitions and various other artistic expressions that would reflect critical feminine themes and dialogues on enhancing gender relationships and simultaneously help to revive their local arts and folklore and thus keep their local culture alive. By observing these crucial communal practices, both literacy and cultural education can be promoted. Therefore, the activities identified seemingly promise to enable this dissertation to break new ground, as it positively places women and men of color and their experiences and lived realities in the central focus. For one example, they would be getting the total historical and cultural experience that would enable them to own their dialogues and narratives, which figure squarely on their lens of the world and their various inter-textual sites, and not a foreign influenced set of patriarchal gender-based systems that are imposed on them. Considering that Kamau Brathwaite’s work *The History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, in which he purports the value of nation language and expresses a deep sense of self and identity through his emphasis on the importance of Creole narratives to Creole women and men, exemplifies this view, I deem the above pedagogical suggestions to be sound.
Additionally, given that Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* and his concept of the “Créole Totalité” whereby he advocates for Creole students to be taught using culturally relevant and culturally stimulating materials as well, emphasizes the psychological attachment of the Creole person to her or his native language. The Creole student’s psychological attachment to her or his native language is just another example that illustrates how marginalized women and men of color can assert selfhood, embrace a true Creole identity, and cause hegemonic patriarchy to topple. Mikhail Bahktin’s decolonizing philosophy also exemplifies this. What I have observed is that the gender issues of women of color are deeply grounded in the contexts of language, culture and politics. Likewise, I have observed that the issues of women of color are also issues of men of color, and that women’s issues should also matter to men of color. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a male writer, for example, seems to think along these lines as he strongly expresses these ideas in his novel *Devil on the Cross*. Ngũgĩ appears to envision an egalitarian Kenyan society, but uses the empowered female protagonist as a female symbol to highlight women’s agency and the element of harmony that existed between women and men of color in pre-colonial African society. Categorically, the struggles of women and men of color appear very similar, and should not be seen in isolation. The struggles of women of color should then be contextualized historically and culturally and both the hegemonic mirror and its images should be brought into full focus.

Hence, by virtue of cultivating the positive representations of women of color and non-sexist revisionings of feminist language and feminist conversations, it serves to be potentially subversive both in theory and practice. Perceptions of women of color could change once the culturally and socially driven representations depict their
strengths and positive aspects, and not, negative, racist or sexist bodily images. Michelle Rowley’s and Emilia Ippolito’s commentary on the powerfulness of identity formation and the conceptualization of voice in Caribbean women’s narratives is also promising. Perhaps, the provocative statement which Veronica’s students wrote on the chalkboard in Maryse Condé’s novel *Heremakhonon*, which highlights the degradation of the woman of color, can also be used as a model example to start the gender conversation, address female subordination and degradation. It could also be used to help teach and enlighten Caribbean women and men on gender: WE SHALL DESTROY THE MINISTERS, THEIR MERCEDES AND THEIR WHORES (64). Hence, the chances for lessening the incidence of female subordination on the Caribbean and African landscapes seem favorable, and women’s chances of assuming leadership positions can be considerably augmented. These revisionary strategies identified, not only seem to challenge the established societal orderings, but they also seem to enable women to have an opportunity to “ground” with their own mothers and sisters and, simultaneously, “un/silence” the oppressor’s territorial grounds. Women of color should unite to help cope with the societal pressures of the patriarchy. In practice, they will “cause the oppressor to lose his grounding,” as Paulo Freire purports.

Finally, as far as recommendations for future research are concerned, to further develop this dissertation, a comparative analysis of fictional women’s leaders of color in the Caribbean region, the African-American and Aboriginal Australian landscapes can also be explored. Additionally, another angle could be to examine fictional women’s leaders of color in works by authors from the Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean. For yet another angle from which this
dissertation can be further developed, is to conduct an analysis of fictional women’s leaders in works by Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican authors. Likewise, a fourth research option could be to compare and contrast fictional women’s leaders of color in Chinese and Japanese communities. Then too, this dissertation could also be dovetailed into a comparative study involving Indo-Caribbean and Chinese women.
Works Cited


Anguillian Newspaper. 8 Mar. 2016.

Anguillian Newspaper. 1 Aug. 2016.


Equiano, Olaudah. The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African. W.Cock and Agents, 1815.


--- Online Interview. 15 May. 2017

Hua, Anh. “Black Diaspora Feminism and Writing: Memories, Storytelling, and the


Hughes, Hyacinth. Personal Interview. 10 May. 2018.


James, C. L. R. Beyond a Boundary. Hutchinson, 1963.


Richardson, Daisy. Personal Interview. 7 Feb. 2018.


Smyth, Heather. “She Had Made a Beginning Too.” *Beka Lamb and the Caribbean Feminist Bildungsroman Genre* 1 June 44.2 (2011): 181-204.


Walker, Alice. “Everyday Use.” *Making Literature Matter* 2nd ed. Schilb John and


Wells, Ida. B. “Crusade for Justice.” *African American Literature.* Edited by Reinhart,


Wilmot, Swithin. “Females of Abandoned Character: Women and Protest in Jamaica
    1838 -65.” *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in a Historical Perspective.*
    Shepherd, Verene, Bridget Brerton and Barbara Bailiey eds.


Wynters, Sylvia. “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the Demonic Ground of


Yousafzai, Malala. *I Am Malala, the Girl who Stood up for Education and Was Shot by
APPENDIX A

Table Showing Real Life Freedom Fighters and Women Leaders from Across the Communities of Color

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indira Gandhi of India</td>
<td>1966-1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnie Mandela of South Africa</td>
<td>1968-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenia Charles of Dominica</td>
<td>1968-1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albena Lake-Hodge of Anguilla</td>
<td>1967-1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia Mottley of Barbados</td>
<td>1994-the present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan</td>
<td>2011-the present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Flow Chart Showing Trajectory of Real-Life Women’s Leaders and Freedom Fighters from Across the Communities of Color who Helped to Create Spaces for Women of Color
**APPENDIX C**

**T-Chart Showing the Roles of Women of Color in Pre-Colonial Africa and Women in Present-Day Caribbean Society**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women in Pre-colonial Africa</th>
<th>Women in Present-day Caribbean Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rulers with Superior roles</td>
<td>• Subjugated subjects with subordinate and inferior roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Controlled financial resources</td>
<td>• Denied equal access to financial resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Judges</td>
<td>• Bodily objectified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Legislators</td>
<td>• Marginalized socially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Revered</td>
<td>• Underrepresented in Parliamentary undertakings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Goddesses, priestesses, and seeresses</td>
<td>• Demonized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Queen warriors</td>
<td>• Largely adherents to societal norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Led tribal wars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Occupied various public spaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


APPENDIX D

Venn Diagram Depicting the Relationship Among Women in Pre-colonial Africa, Revolutionary Caribbean Women Leaders 1878 – 1970s, and Caribbean Women Leaders 1980 to the Present
## APPENDIX E

**Table of Comparison Showing Roles of Subordinated Heroine in William Shakespeare’s Canonized Literary Presentation and Liberated Heroines in Non-Canonical Writings by Postcolonial Feminist Writers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>William Shakespeare’s <em>The Tempest</em></th>
<th>Miranda is subordinated physically and mentally. Her voice is silenced.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryhaan Shah’s <em>A Silent Life</em></td>
<td>Aleyah is a mentally liberated change agent. She has a resistant voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryse Condé’s <em>Heremakhonon</em></td>
<td>Veronica is sexually and mentally liberated. She is a change agent. She has a resistant voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s <em>Devil on the Cross</em></td>
<td>Wariinga is a liberated woman warrior. She is a change agent and has a resistant voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

Table of Comparison Showing Resistant Similarities Between a Literary Heroine by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a Postcolonial Male Writer (*Devil on the Cross*) and a Real-Life Revolutionary Heroine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literary Heroine</th>
<th>Real-Life Revolutionary Heroine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngũgĩ’s Heroine Wariinga</td>
<td>Queen Mary of the U.S Virgin Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. She is the daughter of the Iregi Rebels.</td>
<td>1. She was a Queen Warrior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. She stands up for justice.</td>
<td>2. She stood up for justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. She reaps justice for the injustice done to her and her people.</td>
<td>3. She reaped justice for the injustice done to her and her people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. She defies authorities of Ilmorog by barging in on and helping to crush the Devil’Angels Organization and later shooting her male assailants.</td>
<td>4. She defied authorities of the Danish West Indies on St. Croix in 1878, by spearheading the “Great Fireburn.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX G

**Table Showing Sexist Language That Degrades Women of Color in Nigeria and Caribbean**

| Nigerian Adages                          | 1. “A woman is like a lemon, you squeeze her and throw her away.”  
|                                          | 2. “Women have long hair and short sense.”  
|                                          | 3. “Nwaanyi sin na nwoke na ya nyulie mamiri elu. If a woman claims equality with a man, let her urinate upwards.” |
| Anguillan Adages                         | 1. ‘Little girls should be seen and not heard.”  
|                                          | 2. “A woman’s place is in the home.” |
| Kittitian Adages                         | 1. “If he no bang me, he no love me.”  
|                                          | 2. “She ain’t nuttin but a sore foot.” |
| St.Thomian Adages                        | 1. “She barn wid her payment.”  
|                                          | 2. “She working fuh di hairy bank.” |
APPENDIX H

Excerpt from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Novel *Devil on the Cross*

First Movement

Voices from the past, before the coming of British imperialism

The gicaandi calabash
The one-stringed violin
Drum flutes
Rattles, horns
Stringed instruments
Wind instruments
Percussion instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td><strong>Our Women</strong></td>
<td>Clearing the forests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking riddles</td>
<td><strong>Our men</strong></td>
<td>Clearing the bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling stories</td>
<td><strong>Our children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying</td>
<td><strong>Young men</strong></td>
<td>Breaking up clods of clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settling Disputes</td>
<td><strong>Young women</strong></td>
<td>Planting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in ritual ceremonies</td>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>Cultivating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td><strong>The Crowd</strong></td>
<td>Protecting millet from the birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Birth</td>
<td><strong>The Masses</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriages</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grazing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burials</td>
<td></td>
<td>Building houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making pottery (227)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>