Violence against Women in Caribbean Narrative

Kevin G. Kelly
English Department
University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo

Abstract:

West Indian women's writing has always been a voice for the most oppressed and marginalized members of the Caribbean, beginning with *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* in 1831 and continuing to the present day writers Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat, and Shani Mootoo who are using their writing to challenge the dominant discourses. There have also been extensive theoretical texts published in relation to West Indian women writers and their role in rewriting a violent history including Nana Wilson-Tagoe's Historical *Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature,* Evelyn O'Callaghan's *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women,* and Carol Boyce Davies & Elaine Savory Fido's *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature.* This essay explores the violence against Amerindian, African and African descended, East Indian violence committed against women in the Caribbean and how Caribbean women authors explore it in relation to history.

Resumen:

La escritura de las mujeres antillanas siempre ha sido una voz para los miembros más oprimidos y marginados del Caribe, comenzando con La historia de Mary Prince, una esclava antillana en 1831 y continuando hasta las escritoras actuales, Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat y Shani Mootoo, que utilizan sus escritos para desafiar los discursos dominantes. También se han publicado extensos textos teóricos sobre relación con las escritoras antillanas y su desempeño en la reescritura de una historia violenta, incluyendo *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* de Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* de Evelyn O'Callaghan y *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* de Carol Boyce Davies y Elaine Savory Fido. Este ensayo explora la violencia contra los amerindianos, africanos y afrodescendientes, la violencia de las

Indias Orientales cometida contra las mujeres en el Caribe y cómo las autoras caribeñas la exploran a través de la historia.

Key Words: Caribbean , East Indian , Indenture, Amerinidan, African, Violence , Slavery
Palabras Claves: Caribe, India, Contrato, Amerindiano, Africano, Violencia, Esclavitud, Servidumbre.

As Antonio Benitez-Rojo highlights in the introduction to *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, the recorded history of the Caribbean has been complex since its inception due to the combination of African, European, and Asian parts that began as individual units, and eventually merged into a distinct and syncretic culture. This creolized culture possesses both a linear history where it is easy to establish a cause and effect based on its five hundred year recorded history and there is a dynamic history also, and it is being reconstructed in the form of the narrative and short stories using the recorded history, oral history, and imagination. As Benitez-Rojo states, "Caribbean literature cannot free itself totally from the multiethnic society upon which it floats" (27) and it surely cannot free itself from its multiethnic history involving three continents and four colonial empires. This approach to viewing the Caribbean narrative as a reconstructed history, or perhaps it should even be labeled the *other* history, is supported by other theorists as well as the novels and short stories themselves.

This concept of Caribbean literature being related to Caribbean history is also put forth in Alison Donnell's *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*as she writes "the connection to place is not only about being able to locate oneself in relation to geography but also in relation to history" (qtd. in O'Callaghan 30). Dionne Brand is an example of a female Caribbean writer that is able to position herself in relation to history through her writing. Brand, although writing from outside the Caribbean, is able to rewrite history through her many novels, including *At the Full and Change of the Moon* where the author details the *other* history of resistance and opposition the colonizers had to contend with on a daily basis. Whether it was the inducement of abortions, the breaking of tools, running away, or mass suicides, it reveals that the atrocities of the plantocracy system did not go unchallenged, despite the fact that the documentation is limited. The novel also reveals 158 years of African descended female history that includes physical abuse both during slavery and post emancipation, in the Caribbean and within the Diaspora.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, highlights how historians have engineered history through the silencing of sources, the selection of events to record, the selection of recorded items for archives, and where they are placed within those archives. In chapter three, "The Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-event", the author highlights how the rebellions and acts of resistance by African slaves in Saint Domingue were depicted by planters in their journals and in correspondence. Publications and letters that were further removed from the plantation omitted entirely any mention of these incidents, or perhaps accomplishments would be a better word. The documents by those on or near the plantations treated these incidents/accomplishments as individual deeds, thereby repositioning them within history as a way to diminish them. Even the rebellion that began in 1791 in Saint Domingue and eventually led to the first free black nation state in the Western hemisphere was so unthinkable that no one took it seriously while it was happening and went largely unannounced when it was successful (88). Consequently, this engineered history, in this case Haitian history, leaves huge gaps where writers such as Myriam Chancy divulge the selections either left out of history or stored in sections of the archive room plagued by mold and mildew.

Chancy's *Spirit of Haiti* occurs during the one week preceding a military coup that ousts first freely elected president of Haiti, Jean-BertrandAristide. Although Chancy claims that the noveltakes place in a seven-day period, she uses many of the same writing techniques as Dionne Brand, including fragments, breaks, silences, absences, and distant connections to unravel over two hundred years of Haitian history, the *other* history. It is within this unraveling that Chancy describes a colonial and postcolonial Haiti where African descended people deal with exploitation, racism, inhumanity, and the physical abuse of women on an almost daily basis.

Additionally, Nana Wilson-Tagoe presents the space where Caribbean writers are re-writing history in *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* in which the author examines "nature, meaning, and the impact of history on the West Indies" (2) as a means of exploring how and why West Indian writers create their work. Wilson-Tagoe asserts that West Indian authors, compelled by a history and dominant discourse defined by "colonial impulses" (2), are contesting European recorded history with a redefined history created within a mobile space where writers use techniques that allow them to make shifts in time and space to connect disunited events that are related. The author also highlights how important is to approach a text from a poststructuralist viewpoint where the text is examined for multiple meanings and structures or techniques, as opposed to one structure and one meaning. In other words, the reader needs to consider the totality of the author's experiences and the periods of time that contributed to the text, even if they are not obvious on the surface (3-4). Therefore, before a writer can rewrite history, they must first understand the recorded history as well as the epistemologies that influence the spaces where the works are made and where they move.

The European conquistadors came to the New World to pursue more wealth, and with that desire for increased wealth, they also transported their culture of violence. In *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent,* Eduardo Galeano highlights the main impetus for Christopher Columbus' journey was Europe's "lust for gold and silver" (12), as well as the abundance of spices the Far East possessed. King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile financed the trip so that they would have a direct source for these spices in an effort to increase their profit. Consequently, Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean during 1492 and his return trips over the next few years marked the first major contact between the New World and the Old World, a contact marked by aggression. These physical assaults, or more specifically

violence against women, were an important tool in the subjugation process involving multiple ethnic groups, including Amerindians, Africans, and East Indians; and its legacy is still evident within the societies of the postcolonial Caribbean.

Amerindian Violence

As stated earlier, one of the main tools used in the subjugation of non-European peoples has been the reliance on written history, which has excluded the majority of the world's history and was used as a tool to justify violence. There are writers, such as the Guyanese Wilson Harris who use the recorded history and work to fill in the gaps through an imaginary exploration to unravel the history of the Caribbean and its indigenous peoples. Through his work, including *Palace of the Peacock*, *The Whole Armour*, and *The Secret Ladder*, the reader is exposed to breaks, flashbacks via dreams that are utilized to communicate a complex history composed of violence against Caribbean indigenous peoples. Also included are the enslavement of African peoples and the beginnings of the plantation system. His imaginary fictional exploration of the other history is, only in recent times, slowly entering into record as theorists, such as Bridget Brereton, are exposing previously silenced letters and ship logs.

In "The Historical Background to the culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago", Brereton refers to the annihilation of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean as "the first great genocide of modern history" (2). What began as an expedition to expand wealth by means of the spice trade quickly grew into wealth acquisition by the appropriation of land by force and the enslavement of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. Three short years after Columbus' initial voyage, Columbus led an attack on the island he referred to as Hispaniola. Columbus, two hundred men, and specially trained hunting dogs attacked, overpowered, and subjugated the

indigenous population. The indigenous people that did not die were enslaved, with more than five hundred of them transported to Seville, Spain and sold as slaves (Galeano 27). Thus began the destruction of Columbus' Eden and the decimation of indigenous cultures in the Caribbean. Rebellions, although infrequent, did happen and they were met with severe consequences. The last Amerindian rebellion in Trinidad in 1699 at Punta Galera resulted in almost all the Amerindians drowning themselves in an attempt to escape attack, and the remaining sixty-one men, women cut into quarters, and their remains placed on public display on St. Josephs Road. (Brereton 1-4). This violence is portrayed in James Michener's *Caribbean*, when a priest relays the carnage to a fellow man of the cloth,

> So without war ever having been either declared or conducted we rampaged through Xaraguá Province, burning villages and slaying inhabitants. In all we killed eighty-three of the caciques, and when I say *killed* I mean we racked them, garroted them slowly, dismembered them, and slowly burned them alive. When we wanted to show our benevolence, we hanged them swiftly and properly. Besides the important caciques, we must have slain forty thousand (72)

The physical punishment inflicted upon females for rebellion was only a part of the violence they suffered upon them. The men that Columbus left behind on his first voyage proved that their lust for women equaled their lust for gold, as it was the principle complaint from Amerindians upon Columbus' return. Their complaints were ignored and the mistreatment of Amerindian women only increased as Columbus' and his men used them as sex slaves and they were beaten or whipped into submission if they resisted. They were viewed as property and Columbus would gift his friends Amerindian women. Detailed letters written by Europeans in the early 1500s describe their sexual conquests of Amerindian women. One such letter written by a friend of Columbus, Michele de Cuneo, describes how Columbus gave him "a very beautiful Carib woman" and how he was "filled with a desire to take [his] pleasure". When she resists, he

whips her into submission and reveals that, because of the beating, "you would have thought she had been brought up in a school for whores" (qtd. in Householder 16). During that second voyage, Columbus brought with him the first sugar cane roots in the Caribbean and planted them on the Island of Hispaniola in what is now known as The Dominican Republic and Haiti, and the plants prospered and this was a significant coup for the Spaniards due to the price of sugar in Europe. The reduction of the Amerindian population is reflected in *Caribbean* as well the same priest reveals that in four short years after Columbus' arrival the indigenous population went from three hundred thousand to one hundred thousand (70). Finally, the total eradication of a group of Caribbean indigenous people is divulged in a flashback dream like sequence in Michael Gilke's *Couvade* when a Shaman is chanting:

> Dream your dream
> When you awake
> Forest will die
> Deer tiger tapir howler monkey
> Die
> Fishes will die
> Tukuiu, Guacharo will fly away
> Behind the cloud
> Our people die
> Canoe of Makanter
> Will not sail cross the sky
> And dream our dream (1.1 2)

With these words, the Shaman is predicting the death of his civilization. This demise, combined with the birth of the Caribbean sugarcane plantations created a production/harvesting problemthat would lead the Europeans to look elsewhere for slave labor.

Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* reveals life in modern day Martinique for slave descendants and their struggle with being displaced from their homes, but it also presents a quintessential example of plantation life through the reconstructed memories of narrator Marie-Sophie. The narrator recounts an oral history involving the time of her grandfather, when slaves would resist oppression by poisoning livestock, and the Bekke would respond without mercy. When an animal does die, the Bekke orders an autopsy and if it is found to be poisoned, he withholds their rations of snake meat and salted cod, and locks the men in the barn at night so they are deprived of feminine contact. When they keep poisoning the livestock, the Bekke creates a dungeon where those found guilty are sentenced to life, only to leave the dungeon daily "for labor beyond all fatigue, with legs, neck, and soul chained" (36). This is where Marie-Sophie's grandfather would die. This is only one type of violence inflicted upon African men and women, as they are whipped on a daily basis, hunted down by mastiffs if they try to run away and of course the endless labor in the mud soaked fields. The recorded history of the Caribbean for the period following the demise of the Amerindian population is vital for a deeper understanding of how almost four hundred years of slavery and violence transpired.

With France, Portugal, Great Britain, and the Netherlands actively seeking riches in The New World and unable to make headway into the domination of the African peoples, Europeans began buying slaves from intermediaries and directly from African slave traders. The same violence used to enslave and work to death Amerindians was then used to enslave Africans. While Columbus was conquering and massacring Amerindians in the Caribbean, the Portuguese were making trips to the West Coast of Africa and capturing Africans that were sold as slaves in Europe, as well as the slaves that were gifts for Prince Henry. The Portuguese were already

trading finished metal pieces, such as bracelets, for spices and small numbers of African slaves when the demand for large numbers of slaves occurred. In the beginning, Portugal was the only European country in the slave trade until the sixteenth century when England, France, The Netherlands, and Spain entered into the trade of Africans who were primarily captured and initially sold by competing African groups. Europeans made huge profits in the slave trade, but their African counterparts also prospered. It was quite common for warring factions in Africa to capture and sell their enemies. African chiefs protected the interests of their own groups by participating in the slave trade. Portuguese sea captain Duatre Pacheco Pereire traveled to Benin in the early sixteenth century and he wrote that the kingdom "is usually at war with its neighbours and takes many captives, whom we buy at twelve or fifteen brass bracelets each, or for copper bracelets, which they prize more" (Obadina). This seldom discussed African participation in the slave trade is reflected in Aphra Behn's 1688 novel *Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave.* The novel's protagonist Oroonoko, a grandson of an African King, falls in love with Imoinda who is being pursued by a rival King. The rival King enslaves and sells Imoinda because she is no longer a virgin and Oroonoko is betrayed and enslaved and sold as well. They both endure The Middle Passage and reunite in Suriname under their new names, Casear and Clemene.

At first glance, Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* appears to be written in fragmented bits, including the search for identity, colonialism, neocolonialism, and race, but Brand artfully connects all fragmentations with slavery and the door itself, which is The Middle Passage. Brand describes that part in the process as "that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the Old World for the New" (5). The Middle Passage took four or five months in the beginning of the slave trade and it was so common for many slaves to die during this part

of the enslavement process that the expedition's financial backers had insurance policies. Simon J. Hogerzeil and David Richardson, in "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797" examined the records of Dutch company Middelburgsche Commerce Company in an effort to explain some of the factors that contributed to mortality rates during this phase. One of the most important revelations is that the boarding process was very long and often exhausting six or seven months as slaves were purchased a few at a time. They also examined the buying patterns, which revealed that women and children were purchased first, and consequently spent more time on-board the ships being exposed to undesirable conditions including smallpox, dysentery, and scurvy, as well as sexually transmitted diseases contracted during the rapes they endured during the capture, boarding, and traveling processes. Brand reveals a Dutch Captain's letter,

> You would really wonder to see how these slaves live on board; for though their number sometimes amounts to six or seven hundred, yet by careful management of our Masters of Ships, they are so regulated that it seems incredible. And in this particular our nation exceeds all other Europeans for as the French, Portuguese, and English slave-ships, are always foul and stinking; on the contrary ours are for the most part clean and neat. (23)

The Middle Passage though was just the preparation for the culture of violence awaiting the Africans in the Caribbean. By the time the majority of the African slaves arrived in the Caribbean, the plantocracy system was already established and violence was one of the underpinnings that supported the entire system. Corporal punishment was so integral to the system that when the British government attempted to implement restrictions on the use of the whip in the cane fields and the flogging of women, plantation owners called special meetings all over the British colonies. At one such meeting in Trinidad, the largest plantation owner, W.H. Burnley, responded to the prohibition on flogging women as "so monstrous and extraordinary that I hardly know how to approach the subject" (qtd. in Brereton p4). Women were doubly

marginalized as they would be whipped in the same manner as the men and additionally they were sexually assaulted by males in authority positions such as slave owners, drivers, and overseers, as well as by their fellow African slaves.

Flogging and rape were daily occurrences for women because they were tools in the plantocracy system, the same as cutting cane. This is reflected in the narrative as well as plays, including Dennis Scott's "An Echo in the Bone". The author uses breaks in time to revisit the time of slavery and she uses present day characters to show the link between the past and the present. In Act two, scene one, Brigit tells Rachel

> I don't have anything, but I have the right to answer no. Black people used to work this land for nothing and they used to treat them like beast, they could amount them anytime. I not breeding for any man just because of pleasure. I is not an animal. I is a human being. (2.1 115)

In addition, another part of the system was the horrific punishments that were administered to slaves that committed acts of resistance, which could possibly undermine the plantocracy. These punishments were intended to torture the victims, but also to terrorize the rest of the slave population. Many of these victims were women, as they were active participants in running away, planning revolts, poisoning livestock, or organizing mass suicides. Women that were suspected of these acts of resistance were dealt with in a number of ways including forced to wear heavy iron balls shackled to their legs or iron collars, being branded like a cow, having their ears cut off, being hanged and decapitated with their heads on public display, being quartered, or being burned to death. The protagonist, Marie Ursule, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* walks with a severe limp due to having previously worn an iron ball attached to her leg, and she is missing part of her ear that has been cut off due to her participation in a rebellion. Her final punishment for aiding in a mass suicide of slaves intended to bankrupt the plantation

owners is a severe beating and then being burned alive. This same system also encouraged black on black violence and by the 1800's violence between slaves was as commonplace as white on black violence. Acts including rape, wife beating, and the use of corporal punishment against children were accepted practices between male and female slaves within the hutch. These types of acts of violence against women continued throughout indentureship (Brereton 5-7).

East Indian Violence

Rambai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* covers two hundred years of Indo Caribbean history and she reconstructs this history through the narration of Mona, who recalls dimensions and occurrences within her Indo-Trinidadian family while she was growing up in Trinidad, and additionally examining the journeys and experiences of her ancestors as they gave up everything they knew to move to Trinidad. The narrator approaches these experiences from a female point of view, which results in a history that explores the sexual assaults women endured during the long voyage from India, as well as violence in the home where fathers are physically and mentally abusive to their wives and children. Additionally, the author reveals an Indo-Trinidadian society where young women are the victims of sexual violence at the hands of their brothers, fathers, and uncles. Sexual abuse within the family is a recurring theme in the Indo-Trinidadian narrative, including novels by Lakshmi Persaud and Shani Mootoo. The Indentureship program that brought her Grandmother to Trinidad was a crucial program that existed from 1832 until 1838 to support and sustain the plantocracy post emancipation.

The West Indian Indentureship program promised to bring cheap labor to the Caribbean as well as reestablish labor control within the plantocracy system. As Rhoda Reddock highlights in "Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917: Freedom Denied",

there was also a large pool of East Indians that were in need of work as India's position of a leading producer of cotton was in demise at the same time as the population shifted to consumerism with British goods being the beneficiary. This coupled with land reform acts that were unfavorable to the native populations and a famine in North India resulted in a crisis for the British. Therefore, the British government devised a scheme that would address all three issues, while restoring the confidence of the European instilled hierarchies of class, race and gender via the stabilization of the plantocracy system. As there was an immediate need for field labor, women were initially deemed a liability because of the risk of pregnancy, so there were far greater men transported in the initial stages (Reddock 27-29). Recruitment began in markets, temples, and bazaars and there was a great debate about the moral fiber of the women being recruited from these areas, although nothing was said of the men recruited from the same areas. While some argued that these women with low morals were not the right type of women, others argued that these lower caste women were more suitable for plantation work and that higher caste women would not make very good workers. At least in the initial stages, although changes to the recruiting process were frequent, the moralist argument persevered and East Indian (EI) women were disqualified from the program for minor reasons and/or made to endure more scrutiny than their male counterparts, which resulted in a largely male oriented program in the early stages. Thus began a program of social engineering of the EI woman that would utilize all levels of colonial and British governments, as well as cooperation from EI males. It should be noted that the EI males that arrived in the Caribbean arrived with a strict hierarchy already embedded within their culture, one based on gender, class, and ethnic groups. They also arrived with a predisposition to violence as a means of reinforcing these hierarchies, especially as it pertained to gender.

On May 30, 1845, the *Fatel Razack* ship brought to Trinidad two hundred twenty-seven EI indentured servants, of which nine percent were female. It is interesting to note the types of women that constituted the first female arrivals. As previously stated many were from lower castes and/or market women, so unlike their middle and high caste counterparts, they were strong willed and independent thinkers. Also amongst the early arrivals were childless widows that were so head strong that they were breaking thousands of years of tradition (Reddock 30). These women are depicted in *The Swinging Bridge.* The author describes them in the very first page when she writes of:

> Widows who have escaped the funeral pyre by laws of forbidding sati laid down by British administrators in 1829. With no husbands to support them, many of these women face destitution. Those that have not given birth to sons are particularly vulnerable to abandonment by their in-laws. (3)

These headstrong and uncompromising women presented a great problem for the British and colonial governments, because the men, like the women desired to reinvent themselves and aspired to elevate their class, which required docile and submissive wives. The objections of the East Indian males were taken very seriously as the colonial government was relying on the presence of the males as a cheap labor source post contract period. Consequently, the governments continued to socially-engineer East Indian (EI) women as means of keeping the plantocracy system stable. EI women were paid less, even if they had the same production as EI males, thus creating a female to male financial dependence. Recruiting methods were changed in an effort to attract females that were docile and submissive and the period of indentureship was reduced for females in an attempt to appeal to more of them. The Canadian Presbyterian church was also active in engineering a docile and subservient EI woman in Trinidad, as they set up schools where EI girls were taught all the basics of being good homemakers: cooking, cleaning,

and sewing. Another tool of subjugation was legislative as new laws were created that further marginalized EI women. In 1880, 274 EI men petitioned for legislation that would punish EI wives with monetary damages and/or imprisonment if they left their husbands or were deemed unfaithful. This legislation officially passed in1889 as the Indian Immigrant Marriage and Divorce Ordinance, No 6 of 1861 (Reddock 33-43). These government attempts at marginalizing EI women, combined with the actions of EI men created a breeding ground for violence against EI women. Oppression that was not totally accomplished with legislation and recruiting policies would be accomplished with the whip and the cutlass.

On paper, employers in the indentured servant agreement did not have a right to flog or beat their employees, as they were compelled to use legal violence in the way of fines and or imprisonment as means of enforcing their contracts, but employers, accustomed to absolute control over their slaves, often overlooked the letter of the law and beat their workers. In 1867, Soudar Singh was severely beaten by his employer as well as the African laborers, and all of the accused were acquitted. In 1871, a plantation owner was fined six pounds for whipping two EI women, one to death, and he was acquitted of any criminal charges because the she was deemed to be in poor health, and in 1899 a woman named Sahti died due to a beating by the plantation owner's son and the coroner ruled the death as natural causes. East Indians rebelled against these abuses on several occasions, even murdering an African foreman, but these rebellions were dealt with both quickly and severely (Brereton 6-7). Unfortunately, for EI women, these abuses did not only occur on the ships and in cane fields, as they were commonplace at home too.

Post Indentureship

Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* and Ana Levi's *Medhina Girl* are examples of the acquaintance and domestic violence that plague Jamaica and Trinidad. Michelle cliff writes

of violence so horrific, it can almost not be imagined. A mother and prepubescent daughter raped by a lawn boy, the former with a jagged rum bottle. The author also reveals the equally horrific upbringing of young Christopher, who was raised in a shantytown in Jamaica called the Dungle that consists of shack after shack abutting each other, where the only piece of furniture is one bed. He shared the home with his Grandmother and mother who would spend her evening diving into garbage dumpsters behind hotels in an attempt to feed her son. When she dies, his Grandmother merely crosses off her name in the bible and continues her life, as there is no sense in mourning in a place so despondent. When his Grandmother dies, they take away her body, and leave eight-year-old Christopher in the shack by himself. He spends the next two years begging in the streets until Mas' Charles offers him some lawn work. He would spend the next couple of years trying to find his Grandmother's remains and when he feels he is close, he goes to ask Mas' Charles to ask for a piece of land to bury her. He knocks on Mas' Charles' door in the middle of the night and when he is told to go away, he flies into a drunken rage killing and mutilating the entire family, including the dogs (34-48).

A drunken violent rage best describes Roger's frequent moods in *Medhina Girl.* The novel begins with teenage dougla (a person of East Indian and African parents) girl Anna living on the streets because she was expelled from her home by her domineering father. She is taken in by a much older, and abusive, white creoleman that impregnates her. She describes one of the attacks as follows:

> I ran out of the bathroom with thoughts of suicide and I locked myself mourning in a dark room all day until Roger came in drunk and drugged with a piece of bamboo in his hands; he savagely attacked me. I stooped under the bed crying silently, too weak to retaliate. I shielded my belly so that I wouldn't get a wrong blow that would end the life of my unborn child. He paused for a moment then continued beating me mercilessly. (13)

In *Medhina Girl*, Anna also experiences a host of violent attacks on the street, and to better understand the modern day violence that Levi and Cliff divulge in modern day Trinidad and Jamaica, it is necessary to examine how this violence has been transmitted from the post emancipation and post indentureship periods to the modern day Caribbean.

The violence that was used as a tool of oppression against the indigenous, African, and East Indian peoples outlasted the plantation system, and became a part of both the colonial and post-colonial Caribbean. The plantation converted into the estate, the slave owner became the landowner, the overseer became the rent collector or the colonial police officer, and the slaves became *free* workers in the late 1830s. The only constant through the times was physical violence and psychological violence in the form of threats of incarceration, as well as the hierarchies of class, race, and gender. The colonial police officer was the form of colonial oppression that the lower class dealt with on a daily basis and violence was a major part of that role. The enforcement of the hierarchies of class and race in post-emancipation colonies maintained the high living standards for upper class, while creating low standards of living and an almost inhumane existence for the non-white majority. Consequently, it was commonplace for African descended and East Indian descended colonials to protest inhumane living conditions, including no running water, as well as government policies that only reinforced they subhuman living conditions. When these protests occurred, the colonial government would act swiftly with force, often deadly. It was not only violence inflicted by authorities that was carried over from slavery as violence among the non-white majority was common as well and it was transmitted from generation to generation (Brereton 7-9).

Colonial Trinidad was a breeding ground for violence as poor housing conditions and overcrowding combined with a predisposition to settling disputes with the fist or the cutlass. This is reflected in *A Map to Nowhere,* when the narrator relates a story from her childhood,

> One day two men got into a fight on the beach at Guyana. They parried glistening, sharpened cutlasses. Their faces were chiseled and murderous. I cannot recall what the fight was about. I could not know anyway. People tried to part them, their wives and their friends, but they were relentless. In the end, people gave up and left them to murder each other. In their rage one man raised his cutlass high to lat it in on the side of the other's neck; the other slipped quickly sideways, slicing how own weapon through the muscle of the man's arm. (10)

In one sixteen-month period alone from 1870-1871, there were four hundred and forty-five reported assaults among poor and working class Trinidadians living in the tenements and slums of the Port of Spain (Brereton 11). Post emancipation violence was accepted as normal and even necessary as a means of survival. Another carry over from slavery is the corporal punishment of children, which Merle Hodge, in "Everyday Violence against Children", cites also as the means of transmission from generation to generation. In the essay, Hodge reveals a postcolonial Trinidadian society that is so committed to the use of violence that they use corporal punishment as a means to socialize children who grow up believing that force is necessary to maintain order. It begins at home, and this dimension is also revealed in Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* as DaDa chokes his son into unconsciousness and forces his daughter to walk on her knees for hours on top of sharp gravel as punishment for wearing a dress he thinks is too revealing. Mona, the daughter, walks the yards for hours in the dark until her father falls asleep and she can come into the house and clean her bloody knees.

Hodge's essay traces backwards several murders in modern day Trinidad where the victims were shot, stabbed, or butchered to death. The analysis reveals that each murder began as a small transgression, such as an accidental bump, which in turn led to a slap and then quickly

escalated to murder (1-5). This small transgression escalating to a brutal assault is disclosed in Zee Edgell's *The Festival of San Joaquin.* The protagonist, young EI Luz Marina, recalls the events that led to her father's disability as she recalls the festival where her Papa Apolonio was dancing drunk near other men. Papa Apolonio exchanges some words with his friend Jose Alpuche Guerra, and then Papa Apolonio grabs a rum bottle and smashes it over Jose's head. Jose then grabs a machete from a coconut kiosk and hacks Papa Apolonio so severely that is hospitalized for weeks (18).

Additionally, violence against females is accepted and often goes overlooked and unreported. Espinet, in *The Swinging Bridge* writes how it was, and still is, quite common on paydays for men to go out to the rum shop, come home and beat their wives (81). This violence that is revealed in both critical essays and in the narrative has been documented by both the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in their report *Inter-Agency Campaign on Violence against Women and Girls,* as well as Amnesty International reports.

UNDP's report reveals a survey in Trinidad and Tobago of two hundred women, where 84% of women believe that gender violence is very prevalent and another 9.5% believing that it was somewhat prevalent. Only 2.5% of women survey did not think that gender related violence is an issue. Moreover, it reveals the types of violence, which include murder, rape, beatings, and physiological abuse. The numbers of rapes and murders of women are so high, and with a majority of the crimes being committed by husbands, boyfriends, or acquaintances, that the government passed special legislation in the forms of Sexual Offences Act of 1986 and the Domestic Violence Act of 1991. Unfortunately, the legislation has been stifled and those figures are severely underreported due to an inability to interconnect different agencies and disseminate information related to the individual families that approach different agencies for assistance.

Jamaica has not fared any better according to UNICEF. In Jamaica, as in Trinidad, violence begins in the earliest years of a child's life. Jamaican children between ages two and five are routinely subjected to all forms of violence in their socialization, but this is not limited to the home, as violence is still a mainstay in the colonial education system. Moreover, girls are routinely victims of sexual violence, in 2006, girls under the age 16 accounted for 32% of all reported sexual assaults. A recent Amnesty International report reveals that in Jamaica today, marital rape is not a statutory offense. The report also reveals that women in Jamaica are regularly subjected to:

> Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs in the family, including battering; sexual abuse of female children in the household; dowry-related violence; marital rape; female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; and violence related to exploitation. Physical, sexual and psychological violence that occurs within the general community, including rape; sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women; and forced prostitution.

This autogenous violence against women within the colonial and postcolonial Trinidadian and Jamaican societies has been either partially silenced or totally silenced by historians, as they have put forth a dominant discourse that has been both Eurocentric and hegemonial masculine. Even within the Caribbean narrative, male writers have traditionally positioned, repositioned, and at times have even silenced the violence against women that plagues the Trinidadian and Jamaican societies. Within the last twenty-five years though there is a new wave of Caribbean female authors that are reconstructing the histories of their respective islands and are telling the history of African and East Indian women, and their descendants, that have been marginalized by both European, African, and East Indian males, and their descendants. This includes everything from the "buckra rapes" (35) in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* to the violence or the "promise of violence and the threat of abuse" (11) that schoolgirls encounter everyday on their way to school

in Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance: A Novel.* These women are challenging the dominant discourse with either the fragments of recorded history that have been positioned outside of that discourse or events that were not selected for record, as well as their own memories and the memories of their female family members.

This new wave of female writers include Trinidadians Dionne Brand, Rambai Espinet, Shani Mootoo, and Jamaicans Makeda Silveraand, Opal Palmer Adisa, who are writing about violence against women during slavery, during indentureship, and during the colonial and postcolonial periods. The novels and short stories to be closely examined in this research on violence and women are *At the Full and Change of the Moon*and *Sans Souci and Other Stories* by Dionne Brand, *The Swinging Bridge* by Ramabai Espinet, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Out on Main Street* by Shani Mootoo,*The Heart Does not Bend* by Makeda Silvera, and*It Begins with Tears* by Opal Palmer Adisa. *The Lonely Londoners* by Sam Selvon, and *The Mimic Men* and *Miguel Street* by V.S. Naipaul will also be included to reveal how male Caribbean writers disclose the same types of violence against women.

Literature

Carole Boyce Davies in the introduction of *Leftof Karl Marx: the Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* discusses at length how black females that have confronted imperialism, capitalism, racism, and misogyny have been silenced by history, and or arrested and even deported so that their voice could be silenced. She cites the case of Claudia Jones that was an active communist and outspoken proponent of the disenfranchised in the 1930s-1950s. She highlights how Jones was imprisoned and then deported, but she could have been talking about the tens of thousands of radical African and African descended women that have resisted

oppression and violence on an almost daily basis during slavery. One such woman was Thisbe, who was tortured, hanged, and burned alive for her role in a mass suicide on a Trinidadian estate. The plantation owner then displayed her head on a spike as a warning to the remaining slaves. Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* begins a few years after the slave rebellion of 1819. The rebellion failed, according to the narrative, because some slaves betrayed the resistance. As a sentence for her role in the revolt, Marie Ursule (Thisbe) is sentenced to thirty-nine lashes and is forced to wear a ten-pound ring on one of her ankles for two years, it is a ring that leaves her permanently disabled. After its removal she can no longer climb steep hills or walk without a limp. Brand writes "But the memory of the iron ring hung on, even after it was removed. A ghost of pain around her ankle. An impression. It choreographed her walk and her thoughts each day" (4). Marie Ursule does not stop resisting though, and as she limps around the countryside, she is utilizing her botanical knowledge to locate poisonous herbs that will be used in a mass suicide of slaves as a means of inflicting a huge financial loss for the plantation. Marie Ursule also knows about the maroon settlements, such as Terre Bouillante, hidden in the dense forest and forever moving to avoid detection. Running away was one of the most common acts of resistance carried out by female slaves. Brand then uses a break in time to reveal that Marie Ursule has a long history of opposition and resistance, as her ear tips had previously been cut off as punishment for her part in a rebellion in Guadeloupe. When she is sold to a group of Ursule nuns, Marie Ursule utters a chilling phrase in French "Pain chest viand bequest, vin chest sang bequest, nous van mange pain bequest nous van boar sang bequest" which translates into English as "Bread is the flesh of the white man, we will eat the white man's flesh, we will drink the white man's blood" (11). Her last week of life consisted of administering the poison to dozens of slaves, and then waiting for the plantation owners to find the tragedy. From there it was seven

days of torture, and finally with broken arms, hair matted with blood, and a face so disfigured that it was unrecognizable, Marie Ursule returned to Africa. Interestingly, Brand uses another break in this sequence to disclose what Marie Ursule saved that day, and that was "girls eighteen years if a day with liquor on their breath and razors in their panty hose and men casually holding their genitals" (21). While parts of the novel are linear and sequential, Brand uses breaks like this to make the connection between pre-emancipation violence against women and the violence against women in modern day Trinidad. Brereton, in the previously mentioned essay "The Historical Background to the culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago" highlights both time periods and divulges many of the same acts of violence that Brand writes about. In chapter three, Brand uses a break and distant connection to reveal Augusta, the blind child of Marie Ursule's daughter Bola, who had a baby with an East Indian man that arrived on that first ship of indentured servants -the *Fatel Razack.* Brand focuses more on the discrimination this new group faces, and not the violence against women, but Ramabai Espinet does reveal that dimension in *The Swinging Bridge*.

The Swinging Bridge covers two hundred years of Indo-Trinidadian history and it discloses the violence women were escaping in India, the sexual assaults they endured on the ships traveling to Trinidad, as well as the psychological and physical violence EI women endure in colonial and postcolonial Trinidad and within the Diaspora. The novel begins in India, with lines of women applying for the British government's new indenture program. Many of them are childless widows who escaped death by funeral pyre because of British legislation, only to be forced to live with their in-laws in a life of physical and physiological abuse. Many of these women will be on that first ship**,** which in itself requires a tremendous amount of personal strength, because crossing the ocean, or the *Kali Pani*, was taboo in India and it was said that

anyone that attempted to cross it was consumed by sea monsters. Brinda Mehta, in "Engendrando la historia: Una poética del `Kala Pani´" en *The Swinging Bridge* de Ramabai Espinet", states that Espinet situates the *Kali Pani,* which has typically been analyzed in relation to the marginalization of Indo-Caribbean women, as a seascape for agency where East Indian women were able to obtain power. The *Kali Pani* was the vehicle for the transnational migration that enabled childless East Indian women to move from Pariah to agents of their own destiny. That is not to say that it was without violence, as Espinet reveals the first member of Mona's family, Gainder Beharry, to arrive in Trinidad suffered a sexual assault by a crewmember on the ship. Through Mona's memories growing up in Trinidad in the late 1940s early 1950s, Espinet reveals the fate of Indo-Trinidad women that are either childless or abandoned by their families when she recalls a conversation between her parents about a local beggar woman Boonie. Da-Da tells Muddie that he does not want Boonie to work in their house because "is not the beggar woman fault but she does live alone, she don't have nobody…. she don't have nobody. The fellers in the village does use she" and

> Toolsie say that in the night he does he hear footsteps running and people beating down the door. He say, 'Everybody around here does beat that.' That is what he say. She used to scream at first and try and chase them away by cussing real nasty but that didn't stop them, (111)

What Dada is revealing is that sexual violence in the Trinidadian society is so commonplace, that it is collectively condoned and or overlooked, even by women as Muddie is not moved to help this tortured soul. This sexual violence is not limited to strangers though, as Espinet reveals an Indo-Trinidadian society where sexual abuses by family members are common. Mona remembers peering through a hole in her bedroom floor and seeing her mother fighting off her husband's brother Baddal as he groped her and tried to forcibly kiss her, while she emitted "small animal cries" (36) during her attempt to escape his assault. Likewise, as a

teenager, Mona would find herself in the same desperate struggle scratching and biting her way out of Uncle Baddal's grasp. Mona's EI classmates did not fare any better as she recalls her classmate Kowsilla who hanged herself one day at school. She was found by her classmates, who later learned that she was pregnant as the result of being repeatedly raped by her father and brothers (135). Sexual violence is not the only violence these women and girls suffer in the home.

As revealed earlier in summarizing Merle Hodge's essay "Everyday Violence against Children", violence committed by fathers in the home is how the violence is passed from one generation to the next, and Mona's home was no different. Mona remembers the big fight around Christmas of 1958 when Da-Da, upset that his wife Muddie will not sell the family land back in Trinidad, flies into a drunken rage. He breaks things while threatening the entire family while Mona, Kello, and Muddie are hiding behind the locked tin door of the bath area, as he shouts:

> Is all yuh who have me in this trap! All yuh have me in a vise, yuh hear? I must be kill priest to have all yuh like a blasted millstone around mih neck! Every fucking day, sun or shine, is pressure in mih blasted arse because of all of yuh! Who put me in dis trap, eh? Who? Is all yuh! All yuh bitches think all yuh could squeeze my neck, eh? Well, this is the end, is the end of the fucking line! Is the end of the fucking line! (21)

As Da-Da shouts these insults, he is pounding on the tin door trying to break it down. Finally, his son Kello rushes out to confront him and Kello knocks him down, but Da-Da quickly recovers and grabs Kello. As Da-Da tries to choke the life out of Kello, Muddie opens the door and starts hitting Da-Da with a stick until he releases Kello who falls to the ground gasping for breath. Mona would also be the victim of his abuse as well on multiple occasions. Another occurrence is during a family outing to the countryside where they stop at a rum shop for some refreshments. Mona is wearing shift dress, which does not extend past the knees, when the shopkeeper keeps glancing over at her. Da-Da notices, drags her outside and yells at her, and

forces her to wait in the car while the family finishes their refreshments (174). Finally, there is the previously mentioned incident with the same dress that left Mona walking on gravel with her bloody knees. The way Rambai Espinet writes about and connects the different types of violence against women is similar to the writing of Shani Mootoo.

Vivian May, in "Dislocation and Desire in Shani Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night" highlights how Mootoo is able to weave together multiple dimensions of dispossession and oppression that are usually compartmentalized separately. The novel reveals an almost linear transmission from the violence of indentureship and the before mentioned social engineering of EI women, which resulted in a meek and submissive Indo-Trinidadian female, to the violence inflicted upon EI women in Trinidad today. Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* begins in a nursing home where Mala has been sent after a judge dismisses murder charges against her due to a lack of evidence. Mootoo uses flashbacks, breaks, silences, and fragments to unravel a personal history that is too horrific to remember.

The reconstructed memories reveal the story of Chandin, the son of an indentured East Indian living in Trinidad. He is only one generation removed from the violence of indentureship and his wife humiliates him by leaving him for another woman. This is particularly shameful for Chandin because of the previously mentioned gender hierarchy within East Indian communities, so Chandin responds by raping and brutalizing his prepubescent daughters on a nightly basis. Mootoo describes the first time with these words:

> One night he turned, his back to Asha, and in a fitful, nightmarish sleep, he mistook Pohpoh for Sarah. He put his arm around her and slowly began to touch her. Pohpoh opened her eyes. Frightened and confused by this strange and insistent probing, she barely breathed, pretending to be fast asleep. She tried to shrink away from under his hand. Suddenly, awakening fully, he sat up. Then he brought his body heavily on top of hers and slammed his hand over her mouth. (117)

Chandin could no longer control his wife, but he could control his young daughters, and his oldest daughter Mala would withstand the worst of the attacks,

> He pushed her to the sink and shoved her face down into the basin, pressing his chin into her back as he used both hands to pull up her dress. He yanked out his penis, hardened-weapon like by anger. He used his knees to pry her legs open and his feet to kick and keep them apart. With his fat fingers he parted his buttocks as she sobbed and whispered "Have mercy, lord I beg". He rammed himself in and out of her. He reached around and squeezed her breasts, frantically pumping them to mimic the violent thrusting of his penis. (380)

Vivian May's other essay on *Cereus Blooms at Night, "*Trauma in Paradise: Willful and Strategic Ignorance in Cereus Blooms at Night", points out how *Cereus Blooms at Night* challenges the dominant discourse on family by writing about acts that do not involve love, caring, kindness, and compassion. May also suggests that *Cereus Blooms at Night* uncovers how "violent epistemologies" (109), or violent ways of knowing, interweave with physical violence and incestual rape to support societal hierarchies that marginalize Trinidadian women at every level. These violent forms of knowing involve a conscious effort to overlook and ignore, as was the case with Boonie's multiple rapes, as well as Uncle Baddal's frequent attacks in *The Swinging Bridge.* These violent acts are also evident in the Jamaican narrative, as is the case with Makeda Silver's *The Heart Does Not Bend.*

The Heart Does Not Bend consists of the stories of three generations of women, Mama, Glory, and Peppier, and how they deal with the hierarchies of class, race, and gender in postcolonial Jamaica. One of the dominant themes in part two is the violence of intentionally not knowing. Mama's son Freddie beats his wife Bella on a regular basis. The entire family knows about this, but nobody comes to Bella's aid. Molly describes:

> We had all seen her bruises, but we did the polite thing and kept quiet. Some nights she'd be wearing dark glasses. Sometimes I'd go babysit Vittorio and she would make excuses about bumping into a closed door. (154)

The beatings progress and one day when Freddie beat her so badly for talking to her mother on the phone in Italian that she is hospitalized. At the hospital, Bella tells Mama that she was going to leave Freddie, but Mama is not supportive. In fact, Mama tells her that she needs to stay because "it important for de child to have a mother". (156) Bella lives in constant fear until one day, she put her son in front of the television with a bag of potato chips and she walks out, she does not even take any clothes with her and no one hears from her again. This is a sharp contrast to how male writers, such as Sam Selvon, position spousal abuse within their narratives. Selvon, in *The Lonely Londoners,* uses humor to lessen the degree of severity and perhaps make the reader laugh. Selvon's protagonist Moses jokingly informs a newly arrived Jamaican, Lewis, that homemakers in London are unfaithful while their husbands work. Moses so convinces and upsets Lewis that Lewis leaves work early so he can go home and beat his wife. Lewis beats his wife for her perceived transgressions several more times, and Moses does not let him know he was joking, and he goads him further by telling him "you only suspect your wife, you don't know anything for sure," (53). Selvon's insensitivity and acceptance of domestic violence is a sharp contrast to Makeda Silvera's denunciation of the same act, and how Dionne Brand portrays violence against women in *San Souci and Other Stories*.

Dionne Brand's *San Souci and Other Stories* begins with the protagonist Claudine being raped by her neighbor Prime at the age of thirteen. What makes this rape particularly horrifying is the iniquitous response of the villagers. Her neighbors ignore the event and express no outrage whatsoever. Brand describes the rape in the following passage,

> He has grabbed her and forced her into his little room and covered her mouth so that his mother would not hear her screaming. She had bitten the

> flesh on his hand until there was blood and still he had exploded her insides, broken her. His face was dense against her crying. He did it as if she was not there, not herself, not how she knew herself. Anyone would have seen that he was killing her but his dense face told her he saw nothing. She was thirteen. She felt like the hogs that were strung on the limbs of trees and slit from the genitals to their throat. That is how her first child was born. (12)

Claudine washes the blood off her body and dress and returns home, but when she goes to the doctor the next day and he explains to her that she is pregnant, she is too afraid to go home for a couple of days. When she does return, her mother blames her and informs her that she now has to do more household chore. Claudine's mother yells and berates her during her entire pregnancy. In the same fashion as they dealt with the rapes in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Swinging Bridge*, the townspeople ignore the rape, and the only acknowledgement they make is that Claudine is now Prime's girl and Claudine goes on to have two more children by her rapist. (12) As stated in the violence against Africans section, black on black violence is encouraged by the dominant system as well as female on female violence including what transpires in *It Begins with Tears*.

Opal Palmer Adisa's *It Begins with Tears*, set in Kristoff Village Jamaica, is a story about a community that is having difficulties maintaining traditions and customs in changing times. Community, or the sense of belonging, is a major theme but the novel also reveals a society where violence is thought to be the solution for perceived transgressions. One villager, Monica, leaves the village to pursue prostitution in the big city, but returns after a few years because she yearns for a better life. Monica's sex appeal does not go unnoticed by everyone in the village, and she simultaneously steals the attention of all the men while garnering the contempt of all the women. She seduces Desmond Burton, and Ainsworth McKenzie becomes fixated with her. Their wives, Grace and Marva, observe what is happening and they blame Monica for their

failing marriages. They viscously beat Monica and put hot pepper sauce in and around her vagina. It is Miss Cotton that cares for Monica by putting cloths soaked in milk on her vagina, and it is Miss Cotton and some of the other older women that reunite the village people in the end. What is interesting about the violence the African descended women inflicted on another woman is that there are very similar violent acts committed elsewhere, within the East Indian Diaspora. Jamaica, much like Trinidad, partook in the EI indentureship program, so it would suggest that these are borrowed customs. In the village of Laggala in Sri Lanka, there is also contact between the African and East Indian Diasporas and this type of violence against the vagina is used against any woman that is deemed impure. Their folk songs include references almost identical to Adisa's description:

> We going to eat *katuvula* (thorny yam), friend,
> A *katuvula* got stuck in the vagina;
> What medicine for this complaint friend?
> Pour milk of one coconut into your vagina
> Pour some ground *kocci* (chili pepper) into your vagina. (211)

These types of reconstructed traditions and customs are only permitted in the Caribbean when they support the hierarchies put forth by the dominant order.

As previously mentioned, Sam Selvon's use of humor when describing domestic violence contributes to the desensitization and acceptance of violence against women, and reinforces the belief that women are chattel, which is a holdover from slavery, indentureship, and colonial Trinidad and Jamaica. Selvon is not alone, as other male writers either silence the history of violence against women by not writing about it, or they reposition women using hyper-sexualization and characterizing women as mercenary. V.S. Naipaul is a writer that utilizes all three techniques in *The Mimic Men* and *Miguel Street*.

Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* contains many themes, including migration, racism, the corruption of colonial politics, neocolonialism; but the one subtheme that is a constant is Naipaul's misogynistic objectification of women. Ralph's addiction to sex and his frequent visits to prostitutes in both London and Isabella speak volumes to his upbringing in a colonial island (Trinidad). Naipaul waxes on about these interludes ad nauseum,

> Language is so important. Up to this time my relationships had been with women who knew little English and of whose language I frequently knew nothing. These affairs had been conducted in a type of pidgin; they were a strain; I could never assess the degree of complication we had arrived at after the sexual simplicities. (44)

Ralph views all women as inferior and if a woman is on the same social and intellectual plane as he is, he finds her devoid of femininity. Naipaul explains, "It has since occurred to me that the art of physical love is in the keeping of women, and depends to a considerable extent on the position of women in society. As the position improves, so the art of love declines" (49). While few would debate the brilliance of Naipaul's writing when it involves migration, racism, classism, colonial politics, or simply his prose, it could be suggested that his inability to *appreciate* a sexual encounter with a woman his equal is a contributing factor to the violence against women he inflicts with his pen.

Miguel Street is another male written novel that uses humor to downplay domestic violence. In the chapter "George and the Pink House", George beats his wife and daughter, and it is described by a neighbor: "He beat them all. And when the boy Elias grew too big, George beat his daughter and his wife more than ever (23)." There is also Mr. Bhakcu, *The Mechanic* who beats his wife with a cricket bat, it is described as follows:

> For a long time I think Bhakcu experimented with rods for beating his wife, and I wouldn't swear that it wasn't Hat who suggested a cricket bat. But whosoever

> suggested it, a second-hand cricket bat was bought from the Queen's Park Oval, and oiled, and used on Mrs. Bhakcu.
>
> Hat said, "Is the only thing she really could feel, I think."
> The strangest thing about this was that Mrs. Bhakcu kept the bat clean and well-oiled. Boyee tried many times to borrow the bat, but Mrs. Bhakcu never lent it. (119)

These acts of violence are surrounded by humorous events and quotes that minimize the severity of violence suffered by women and children. Naipaul also positions the women of Trinidad as mercenary, as he writes:

> "For her first six children, she tried six different men". (84)

And:

> I know that sort of woman. She has a lot of baby, take the baby by the fathers, and get the father to pay money. (98)

Finally, there are his choice of, or perhaps self-authored, calypso lyrics:

> Every now and then just knock them down.
> Every now and then just knock them down.
> Black up their eye and bruise up their knee.
> And then they love you eternally. (87)

And:

> Man centipede bad.
> Woman centipede more than bad. (96)

Naipaul's writing supports the dominant patriarchal discourse that went unchallenged until the 1990s; it is writing that merely regurgitates the recorded history of the Caribbean and offers no insight to what has been silenced.

Historians are not born with the desire to silence history; they themselves are victims of the dominant discourse that dictates the protocols of their discipline. Caribbean historians have neither the academic preparation nor the support to challenge the dominant discourse with recordings that resist and oppose a system that replicates hierarchies of class, race, and gender that have subjugated women of color in the Caribbean for four hundred years. The new wave of

female writers, including Dionne Brand, Rambai Espinet, Shani Mootoo, Makeda Silvera, and Opal Palmer Adisa are able to challenge the dominant discourse and in the process re-write Caribbean history with stories that reveal the physical and psychological abuse that women have endured, as well as a history that involves radical women of color. These authors are themselves radical female historians that are contesting the recorded history using parts of the system itself including items buried in archives, graves, and plantation records, as well as an oral history that has been passed down from generation to generation. As most of these writers are writing from the Diaspora, this research also suggests that the process of reconstructing one's identity in exile forces these writers to confront some of the dynamics embedded within that identity, including violence that was inherited from slavery and indentureship.

Works Cited

Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave*. 1688. Online.

Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Post-Modern Perspective.* NC: Duke University Press, 1992. Print.

Boyce, Davies Carole. Introduction. *Left of Karl Marx: the Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.

Brand, Dionne. *At the Full and Change of the Moon.* Grove Press: New York, 1999. Print.

--- *Sans Souci and Other Stories* Stratford, ON: Williams-Wallace, 1988. Print.

--- *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Toronto, Canada: Doubleday, 2001. Print.

Brereton, Bridget. "The historical background to the culture of violence in Trinidad Tobago" in *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*. 4 (February 2010). Online.

Chamoiseau, Patrick, Rose-Myriam Réjouis, and Val Vinokur. *Texaco*. New York: Pantheon, 1997. Print.

Chancy, Myriam J. A. *Spirit of Haiti*. London: Mango, 2003. Print.

Cliff, Michelle. *Abeng*. New York: Dutton, 1984. Print.

---*No Telephone to Heaven*. New York: Dutton, 1987. Print.

Edgell, Z. (1997). *The Festival of San Joaquin.* Reed Publishing, Portsmouth, NH. United States. Print.

Espinet, Rambai. *The Swinging Bridge*. Toronto, Canada: Harper Collins, 2003. Print.

Galeano, Eduardo H., and Cedric Belfrage. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. New York: Monthly Review, 1997. Print.

Gilkes, Michael. *Couvade: a dream-play of Guyana*. London: Longman Caribbean Ltd. 1974, 65 pp. Re-issued by Dangaroo Press, Aarhus in 1993. Print.

Harris, Wilson. *The Whole Armour*. London: Faber & Faber, 1962. Print.

-- *The Secret Ladder*. London: Faber & Faber, 1963. Print.

--*Palace of the Peacock.* London: Faber & Faber, 1970. Print.

--*The Sleepers of Roraima: A Carib Trilogy*. London: Faber & Faber, 1970. Print.

Hodge, Merle. "Everyday violence against Children" in *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*4 (Feb 2010). Online.

Hogerzeil, Simon J and David Richardson. "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortality: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797" in *The Journal of Economic History*, 67. (Mar. 2007). 160-190. Online.

Householder, Michael. "Eden's Translations: Women and Temptation in Early America" in *Huntington Library Quarterly.*70. (Mar 2007): 11-36. Online.

"Jamaica: Sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica: "just a little sex" in *Amnesty.org.*n.d. April 15, 2013. Online.

"Key Facts – Children and Violence in Jamaica". *Unicef.com*. Feb 2008 Online. April 01, 2013. Online.

Levi, Anna. *Madinah Girl*: A Novel. Madinah Girl: A Novel, 2015. Print.

Michener, James A. *Caribbean.* New York: Random House, 1989. Print.

Lovelace, Earl. *The Dragon Can't Dance: A Novel*. New York: Persea, 1998. Print.

May, Vivian. "Dislocation and Desire in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*" in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 372 (Fall 2004) 98. Online.

Mehta, Brinda J. “Engendrando la historia: Una poética del `Kala Pani´ en *The Swinging Bridge* de Ramabai Espinet” in *Caribbean Studies* 33 (Jul-Dec 2005). Online.

Mootoo, Shani. Cereus Blooms at Night. New York: Grove Press, 1996. Print.

--- *Out on Main Street*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993. Print.

Obadina, Tunde. *AFBIS*. African Business Information Systems. Web. March 2006.Online.

O'Callaghan, Evelyn, "'You'll find no finger posts to point you to our place": Mapping the Literary and Critical Terrain', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 182 (Apr 2010) 21-31. Online.

Naipaul, Vidiadhar Surajprasad. *The Mimic Men*. Penguin Books, Middlesex, England. 1967. Pp. 5-54, 83, 214-242. Print.

--- *Miguel Street*. Penguin Books, Middlesex, England 1959. Print.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. “Pregnancy cravings (Dola-Duka)” in *Relation to Social Structure and personality in a Sinhalese Village*” in *Culture and Personality: Contemporary Readings* edited by Robert A. Levine. 1974. 209-211. Online.

O'Callaghan, Evelyn. *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*. New York: St. Martin's, 1993. Print.

Opal Palmer, Adisa. It Begins with Tears. Oxford, England, Heinemann.1997. Print.

Plummer. Geofroy. “When Bad is Cool: Violence and crime as Rites of Passage to Manhood” in *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*. 4 (February 2010). Online.

Reddock, Rhoda. “Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917: Freedom Denied.” *Caribbean Quarterly.32*. (Dec 1986): 27-49. Online.

Silvera, Madeka. *The Heart Does Not Bend.* Random House of Canada. 2002. Print

Wilson-Tagoe, Nana. “Configurations of History in the Writing of West Indian Women” in *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1998. Print.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. “The Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-event” in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. 70-107. Print.

Wilson-Tagoe, Nana. *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1998. Print.