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Hundreds of Years in Every Face: Continuing Colonial Influence On Postcolonial Representations of Women

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**“HUNDREDS OF YEARS IN EVERY FACE”:
CONTINUING COLONIAL INFLUENCE ON POSTCOLONIAL
REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN**

A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For Graduation with Honors

By

Olivia Tracy

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Preface

This paper is the result not only of a year's work, but of an interest in and love of postcolonial literature that started when I was only eight years old and read an article in *Highlights for Children* about Clementina, a girl who sold mangoes in the Caribbean. This story both changed the way I cut mangoes and changed the way I saw the world, and this paper is the result of my attempts to change my worldview and create a consciousness that is less tied up in colonial hegemony and more concerned with developing a way of seeing the world that may be unfamiliar, but that will hopefully allow more people to recognize the oftentimes outdated and negative traditions and thoughts that accompany our day-to-day lives.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Once upon a time, there were two little girls who loved to read. They began to read at an early age, and they read often. Both read stories about little white children in English, the national language of both of their countries. One loved ginger beer, although she had never tasted it, because the children in her books drank it. Soon she began to write little stories of her own about these white children and their ginger beer, in English, because that was the national language of her country. She thought that all books “had to have foreigners in them” and all had to tell about things she herself had never experienced. The other girl loved the olden days of traveling west and sometimes felt that the little white children in the stories were the only stories, because they were the ones she read the most. However, then the girl who loved ginger beer discovered the few African books that she could, her whole outlook changed. “I learned that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate whose kinky hair could not form into ponytails could also exist in literature,” she said. The girl who loved the olden days picked up a book about a little girl in Africa and saw that books had foreigners in them. And so both began to see their worlds in a new way.

The girl who loved ginger beer grew up to be young Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie. The girl who loved the olden days grew up to be me. Adichie told her story at the TEDtalks Global conference in 2009...somewhat fittingly in Oxford, England. She spoke out against the incomplete stereotypes that a “single story” creates, saying of the story of her childhood reading English books: “What I think this illustrates is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, especially as children”

(Adichie). She would not have realized the importance of herself and her own people in literature if the work of the select few African writers who were working at the time had not changed her perspective from one in which English literature was the only literature to a view that allowed for creativity and agency by people like her. I would not have been aware of the lives of girls like Adichie had I not read books about people more like her than I. Both of our lives and our outlooks were drastically altered after we read postcolonial literature.

Critics often contest the precise definition of the adjective “post-colonial,” but the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule; of or relating to a former colony. In later use also: of or relating to the cultural condition of a former colony, esp. regarding its relationship with the former colonial power” (“Post-Colonial”). Thus, post-colonial literature defines itself through its relationship with its previous colonizer, a bond that is challenging to escape. When analyzing the situations of women in literatures depicting this postcolonial condition, many Western readers of such literature would assume that the provided representations of these women are authentic and real; however, this is often not wholly true. Women in postcolonial countries have been represented by both native authors and Western ones. I suggest that, although native authors may be coming closer to an accurate depiction of the women of their culture, Western biases placed onto these literatures in fact cause these literatures to be, in many ways, used against the women of these nations to justify Western assistance of women. Western ideals are often thought to save women from their

more oppressive native regimes, regimes assumed as oppressive based on the lack of discussion about women in certain postcolonial literatures.

The usefulness and the problems of the “post-colonial” category come from its broadness and vagueness. Because this term encompasses the works written within and about any country in the world after their independence from their colonial regime (including a large portion of the global south and even the global north), it becomes nearly impossible to place works written early in the period in one country and works written much later in the period in a much different area of the world within the same category of literature. If this is attempted, we run the risk of placing the people of the postcolonial countries into a mass group of the “native,” which takes away their identity as individuals and their identities as sovereign nations. The language barrier of the colonies themselves pose an initial problem; many of the previously colonized countries share the language of their colonizer, colonizers that include France, Germany, Holland and many other equally distinct European entities which have brought not only their language, but many of their customs, to their occupied countries. Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on countries previously under British colonial domination and who speak English as their sanctioned colonial language. However, even this group is far too large to be spoken of as though they were a homogenous entity and thus I will attempt to focus even more closely on the literatures of Nigeria, the West Indies, and India, areas representative of the various regions and peoples which the British colonizers affected, as well as the literatures from which have become in some ways the most groundbreaking of the postcolonial literature canon.

Postcolonial literature is often presented and discussed in conjunction with postcolonial literary theory. The two are, in many ways, interdependent, and a reader cannot fully understand postcolonial literature if the theory behind it is not made clear, especially because of the close ties between author and politics. Politics also affect Western theorists who are often the commentators and practitioners of postcolonial theory. Tony Affigne suggests that “mainstream perspectives have been embedded in Euro-American culture, which views the world in racial terms, uncritically accepting as a normal tradition (and thus not requiring explanation) the primacy of European thought, culture and state institutions” (7). This “primacy of European thought” serves as both the root cause and the primary result of colonialism. The Europeans felt that they were inherently superior to the natives in terms of language, intellect, and religion, making them feel justified in engaging in colonialism, and it is because they engaged in colonialism that the Europeans felt superior to the natives. Thus superiority was both a justification of, a reassurance of, and a result of the colonial paradigm; the natives “inferiority” was necessary to justify the West’s superiority which then justified their power in the region and justified their own mental processes that were so different from the native ones they encountered. Edward Said refers to this process of creating and then studying a culture inherently different from Western culture and then assuming its inferiority as Orientalism. He says that

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or a field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions...it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even

to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that...is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power. (Said 12)

It is this desire to “control, manipulate, even to incorporate” that pushed the colonial ideological framework into existence; in order to control, the West had to be in a position of authority, and in order to do that they had to establish themselves within the colonial paradigm as inherently superior to the people they were exploiting for their natural resources. As Said says,

There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. (Said 19)

He who holds authority exercises unnatural power over the people he controls. The most important part of authority is that it “establishes canons of taste and value”—that is, he who is in authority creates the values of the society, in essence ignoring the traditions of the people in order to place them under the rules of his newly-formed traditions. The fact that he establishes “canons” suggests that he not only develops the current taste and virtue, but in fact creates a history of taste and virtue to back up the decisions he is making today—thus, in many ways, rewriting the history of the oppressed peoples. The Western-made historical ideology implemented here is the defining force which not only

determines truth but also determines history, essentially negating the agency and history of the people they are oppressing.

Postcolonial literature, in general, attempts to re-establish the voice and the agency of the native peoples in these previously colonized countries. It, too, however, contains many issues, most importantly that postcolonial literature is still most often analyzed and theorized by their previous oppressors—the West. Ritu Birla, in her essay discussing Gayatri Spivak’s groundbreaking work, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, suggests that “the claim on the part of the intellectual that subalterns can and do speak for themselves stands in for not doing anything about the problem of oppression. At the same time, the claim to do something about the problem, as simply speaking “for” the subaltern, also furthers the problem and the civilizing mission of benevolence while occluding the question of audibility” (Birla 93). In this passage, Birla suggests two things. First, she suggests that the typical mode of the west—which suggested that the native peoples had agency even while they did not—simply ignored the problem (a paradigm primarily found within the colonial paradigm and soon after). However, she further suggests that any attempt made by the West or the colonizer in terms of “speaking ‘for’ the subaltern” is just as bad because it continues the “civilizing mission of benevolence”—that is, it continues to perpetuate the ideological, non-monetary side of colonialism: the claim that colonialism was done to benefit and civilize the native peoples. Thus, even when the West attempts to remedy the problems of agency they have created, they invariably reinforce the same ideas. Ketu Katrak makes a similar point when she says that “Western intellectuals...end...up validating the dominant power

structure, even when they ideologically oppose such hegemonic power” (Katrak 256). The double-bind that the Western intellectual finds his- or herself in when dealing with postcolonial literature has led to various debates about the ability of white people to teach these literatures, as well as a general discussion about the importance of experience and authenticity in such discussions.

This lens—in which the colonizer sees the colonized only through the lens of colonialism—must be further complicated by gender. Women seem, in many ways, to be missing from the web of postcolonialism. Many early postcolonial writers (and many postcolonial writers, in general) were and are male, just as many early theories written about postcolonial literature were written by white people. Therefore, women haven’t held a prominent place within the literature. This is, of course, due to the inherently patriarchal Western culture, a patriarchy transferred both to the colonized countries and, subsequently, to the theories surrounding those countries. Tony Affigne describes this system as a “deeply embedded pattern of social hierarchy—a Western system of *patriarchal* power, in the family, community, and polity, perpetuated through socialization, law, and physical force” (10). The notion that this patriarchal social hierarchy is “embedded” suggests that it exists, perhaps, at the very core of Western discourse and is so vital to Western ways of thinking that it is “perpetuated through socialization”—the simple, day to day interactions in which people perpetuate it without attempting to, but simply do so because it is so ingrained within the system. Because this patriarchy is so deep-seated, it then takes over absolutely everything, especially the potential agency of those who do not fit into this patriarchal power paradigm. As Silvy

Nagy-Zekmi says, “it is not surprising that the other can be found there only through gaps and absences. The other is silent; s/he is spoken for by the colonizer (or by the male in patriarchy)” (173). Nagy-Zekmi suggests that women not only have their agency removed due to their colonizer, but also due to the patriarchy surrounding them. This “double colonization,” a crucial term that has many implications both in terms of postcolonial theory and in terms of the ways in which native women are perceived. The term “Double colonization,” was coined in the mid-1980s and is best associated with the book *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings* written by Kirsten Holst-Peterson and Anna Rutherford. This theory suggests that native women living in colonial nations have been doubly oppressed under the colonial regime—after being initially oppressed as natives, their womanhood made them additionally oppressed, and this double oppression develops the colonial idea of the native woman.

This double colonization has definite political repercussions; however, I will explore the effects through literature. The “Orientalization” of native woman has led to a re-creation and re-representation of native women as fitting into a homogenous, all-encompassing ideal of femininity and nativity. Nagy-Zekmi says that “female subjects tend to be represented by an ambivalence of desire and disdain. They are mysterious yet untrustworthy, sexually arousing yet not quite clean, intriguing and yet uninteresting” (172). They are, in many ways, exoticised and eroticized until they very often become, as Said describes, “the creatures of a male power-fantasy” (207). This suggests that women become the embodiment of the weakness that the patriarchal Western male gloats over, the person whom they can most control—or, rather, the person that they perceive they

can most control. This “ambivalence of desire and disdain” applied to the Orientalized female metaphorically embodies the feelings of the colonizer toward the practice of colonization in general—they desired the goods and services they could get out of the colonized people, as well as the further complication of desiring the colonial women sexually in many instances, but they did not like or respect the people themselves, using them as simply means toward an end.

With these two ways of making women inferior, the disdain portrayed toward these women is “doubled” and therefore is occasionally more powerful than that shown to their male counterparts. Oyeronke Oyewumi dissects the theory of double colonization toward women by stating that native women “were dominated, exploited and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African woman” (257). Therefore, they became the objects of “desire and disdain” both in terms of their usefulness and ‘worthlessness’ as colonial subjects and they further became devalued due to their lower status as women. The main way in which this double-colonization occurs is through the definite elimination of the female agency through a façade of choice—what Gayatri Spivak calls “a process of dissimulation” (Spivak 89). In this process, the native female that exists within the postcolonial patriarchal paradigm seems to have the freedom of choice—Spivak’s example is the rite of sati-suicide. In this rite, it seems the woman makes the choice to die on her husband’s grave, but Birla suggests that, in reality, it is more a case of “the construction of female free will in two patriarchal discourses: the nativist, which coded widow-immolation as ancient and sacred ritual, and the colonialist, which institutionalized it as crime” (94). The choice to

participate in widow-immolation was decided for the woman by her native patriarchal culture, which established the history in order to control the female's choices. Then, the choice to participate was taken away by the colonizers who prohibited women's right to participate, further separating her from her own decisions and placing her in a double-bind of patriarchal discourse from which it was impossible to escape—whether she decided to participate in sati-suicide or no, she was still playing into the hands of the patriarchal ideology on either side.

This double-bind creates a sense of powerlessness that many Western feminists believe binds all women together, and this sort of thinking places postcolonial women into yet another Western thought paradigm. Seeing women as a powerless group creates and places them into a homogenous theoretical group which further takes away their agency. Chandra Mohanty describes it thus: “When ‘women of Africa’ as a group (versus ‘men of Africa’ as a group?) are seen as a group precisely because they are generally dependent and oppressed, the analysis of specific historical differences becomes impossible, because reality is always apparently structured by divisions...” (262). The point Mohanty makes here—that “the analysis of specific historical differences becomes impossible” in the paradigm of native oppressed womanhood that exists—points out yet another Western attempt (inadvertent or no) to generalize the plight of postcolonial countries and their inhabitants. By generalizing, it makes the groups both easier to describe (in general terms) and easier to ignore. Descriptions of the ‘average third world woman’ always suggest very much the same thing—as Mohanty says, the third world woman leads a “truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained),

and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)” (261). Resorting to these stereotypes places women of developing countries in direct opposition to our own Western standards of free womanhood (liberated, modern, educated, middle-class) which reinforces the old bonds of Orientalism rather than successfully eradicating them—because native women are placed into a big, stereotypical group, they are unable to speak for themselves and are, instead, spoken for in a large group by Western feminists who cannot hope to understand their situations.

This inability to understand perhaps suggests the largest issue within Western treatment of natives, and native women in particular. The theory of representation, of speaking for oneself, becomes very important when one considers that perhaps people are unable effectively describe the actions and thoughts of another as effectively as they can describe themselves, even when the other is from a similar class, country, or ethnic group. This question of authenticity—what constitutes a mimetic depiction of the postcolonial situation or the situation of women—is one that postcolonial authors try most fervently to address. Edward Said brought up this inability to depict the other authentically in *Orientalism* when he said that no one has ever been able to detach themselves “from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society” (10). It is this inability of the Westerner to detach from his or her class and country—and thus from the inherent social (and patriarchal) beliefs of the West—that makes theories made by Western authors and theorists questionable. It

often seems that Westerners engaging in the discussion about postcolonial countries inherently work from within the colonial paradigm because they work within the Western paradigm—which is problematic for the many countries whose literature and theories are, for the first time in years, finally able to try to break free of colonial influence.

How, then, can I, a white woman from suburban Colorado, hope to discuss the theories and representations of women found within these literatures with any authority or authenticity? This is an extremely difficult question to ask. Many postcolonial theorists and authors, including Gayatri Spivak, would probably say that I simply cannot and that I shouldn't even try. It is true that I have never experienced anything close to what these women have experienced—I have never grown and eaten yams as a primary food source; I have never been circumcised (we even have a different term for it—Female Genital Mutilation); I have never lived on an island; I have never gone to a library that was once a colonial mansion; I have never experienced political upheaval in my country; I have never made chutney, and, most importantly, I have never lived under a colonial regime in which I was oppressed based on a perception of my supposed lesser gender and lesser race. I have, however, always wanted to read and learn about these things, to try to understand the cultures of others and to consciously avoid bias in my descriptions and discussions of them. Said says that every Westerner studying the “Orient” (or the global south or postcolonial nations) “comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second” (11). It is very true that I bring very Western and American ideals into my readings of these literatures—however, as often as possible, I try to put these in a second place to my personal desire for more knowledge and generally more

awareness, not so I can obliterate the Western ideals I have grown up with, but so that I can attempt to understand the lives of people on a more individual level in hopes of avoiding the traps of generalization and inferiorization that the colonial discourse invariably places on people. I am, in essence, trying to become less ignorant, as well as trying to make others much more aware of the biases that influence their readings of postcolonial literatures. Many Westerners, however much they may believe in their education, are woefully lacking in the basic ability to feel empathy with (not sympathy for) those who do not exist within the same paradigm that we do. This is further complicated by the way in which existing Western ideals often change the very way in which the literatures are written. I wish to see how my views of the women of the three countries I am studying—Nigeria, the West Indies, and India—are being shaped by still-extant colonial influences that are outside of my control, and whether by reading into the literatures of these countries I can change my views and prove that colonial Western ideals influence both writers and readers of postcolonial literatures, especially in their depictions of women.

A Case study of Colonial Paradigms: Heart of Darkness

In order to discuss how the postcolonial texts both work within and against the typical colonial paradigm of thought, it is important first to look at the colonial literary paradigm and the example provided by one of the most beautifully written and critically acclaimed colonial texts, *Heart of Darkness*. Postcolonial thought can once again only be presented as revolutionary through its comparison with this older colonial text. We must look at this text to understand why and how the postcolonial authors wrote against and in conversation with this tradition. There are many similarities between *Heart of Darkness* and Conrad's own experience working in the Congo during colonial times; however it is important to note that this text is not autobiographical (Conrad 12). It is, above all, a story, but it will be analyzed as a story that is indicative of a larger colonial mindset, that which affected all three of the discussed nations in different ways. When one looks at this story, Marlowe's (the main character's) juxtaposition of the two women in the story (the native mistress and the Western "Intended") tell a lot about Marlowe himself and about colonial and period attitudes toward women (and the colonial regime in general).

Marlowe gives an interesting allusion to his attitude toward Africa early in his story when he tells of his boyhood obsession with maps. He says that nearly every space on the map had been filled, but that there was one space—"the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after" (Conrad 22). This suggests that Marlowe was initially attracted to the nothingness of the space, the fact that its future was as yet undetermined—suggesting that Marlowe, like many colonizers, believed that the history and geography of a place didn't fully exist until it had been explored by the West who then put it into existence, similar to the colonial tool of creating history to legitimize their

control. This ideal, however, has been corrupted for Marlowe long before he sets foot into Africa, for, as he says, “It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery...It had become a place of darkness” (Conrad 22). This word “darkness” literally refers to the fact that all of the “rivers and lakes and names” have made the map appear darker with all of their ink; however, it also suggests that the area itself has become a place of evil. This could be read as an example of racism, of a comment on the darkness of the skin of the inhabitants or their moral darkness. However, as one reads further into the book, it seems to suggest that the main problem is the fact that the “blank space of delightful mystery” is gone. Before, Marlowe could simply dream of everything that the land could hold for him—always an adventure. Now, however, it has become evident that other people have already explored it—and, more importantly, that other people (native people) have also lived in it and the fact that people continue live in it and engage in it automatically seems to make it less interesting for Marlowe because he can no longer make it exactly what he wants—there are other people in the way. This idea of the natives getting in the way of the “great ideal” of colonialism—the grand dream of using the land and resources how they wanted—isn’t limited to Marlowe: it represents the ideology of colonialism in general.

Through *Heart of Darkness* and his other works, many have decried Conrad as a racist for many reasons, the description of the blank continent above being one of these reasons. The Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (I will discuss his work in the next chapter) describes the racist nature of this blankness in great detail, saying that using the continent

as a background for Marlowe and Kurtz's thoughts makes "Africa a setting and a backdrop, which eliminates the African as human factor" (Achebe, *Hope*). The implication of Achebe's accusation of racism is, of course, that anyone who hasn't recognized this racist aspect of Conrad before now is also complicit in racism (Tredell 71). He discounts the theory that the racist aspects may be indicative of Marlowe's ideas rather than Conrad's by saying that Conrad condemns his ideas as parallel to Marlowe's "because he neglects to hint, clearly and adequately, at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters" (Achebe, *Hope*). For Achebe, what makes Conrad racist is his insistence on providing this single story of colonization; for him, even the seemingly neutral elements of the story are not enough to make him anything other than hostile to the native race.

Both the racist and somewhat conciliatory elements of the story come forth simultaneously in many instances, and often they are closely tied with each other. For instance, the "darkness" of Africa is described later in the novel as being one with the forest itself. Marlowe describes the area around an African colonial camp: "And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion" (Conrad 38). Here, Marlowe personifies the darkness—the forest and all it contains, including the native people—and places it in opposition to the colonial work, but in a way that the opposition is not aggressive, but instead simply waits "for the passing away of this fantastic invasion." This statement suggests that Marlowe perhaps believes that colonialism will come to an end, and although it is implied through the

perceived hostility of the environment, it does not appear to be something a staunch colonial believer would say. He also describes colonialism as an “invasion” and, furthermore, says that it is “fantastic”—the definition of which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means “existing only in imagination...fabulous, imaginary, unreal” (“Fantastic”). Marlowe suggests that colonialism is, in fact, illusory and unreal, which, again, seems odd for someone involved in the colonial system. In many ways, Marlowe’s entire journey through Africa to find Kurtz is one of disillusionment where everything that he expects to see (what he has been told, perhaps, by the ideals of colonialism) turns out to be untrue. Perhaps, then, Marlowe believes colonialism is illusory not necessarily because of any fatal flaw in the ideology but because of a flaw in the execution. It is unclear whether Marlowe is against colonialism as a whole or whether he just opposes the ways in which it is currently being carried out.

Within this questioning of the colonial framework, the other characters often seem very stagnant and nearly stereotypical, especially the natives and the women. The language used to describe the native peoples sounds fairly offensive to modern ears—at one point, Marlowe says of the native men that “they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast” (Conrad 28). Suggesting that their faces are “grotesque masks” could easily be construed as racism, and although he appears to give them a compliment when he speaks of their “wild vitality” and “intense energy,” he still limits this ‘goodness’ within them when he says it is “as natural and true as the surf along their coast”—suggesting, perhaps, that the only place where such

behavior is natural and true is in their natural environment, which is inherently wild and unlike his own. The many comparisons between the natives and wild animals further separate “them” from Marlowe—he goes so far as to suggest that they are, in fact, inhuman.

“No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—the suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough...” (Conrad 51).

Such blatant othering—suggesting that the realization of their inhumanity is inherently “ugly”—fits directly into the colonial/Oriental discourse in which the differences of natives were exacerbated in order to justify Western authority.

Marlowe’s contrasting depictions of the native woman and the “intended” creates a similar sense of this “othering.” Although both crucial to the story, these characters are only found in section three and are barely mentioned elsewhere. The women mentioned before are Marlowe’s maiden aunt—who speaks of the need to “[wean] those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (Conrad 27)—and the two women in the colonial office in the never-named Company’s offices (which have no geographic location other than a suggestion that they are in continental Europe. Marlowe describes these women, saying that “Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool” (Conrad 24). The image of these two women is an interesting one, especially when

viewed as another symbol of colonialism. These two women sit in the office on “straw-bottomed chairs”—chairs that could probably break at any second—and knit black wool. Black, of course, immediately brings to mind funeral attire and thus death and so these women sit on unsteady chairs and knit things the color of death—not exactly a promising vision to Marlowe, who plans to embark on this colonial adventure, and not a promising vision of the colonial venture as a whole. However, it is also notable that these women are essentially seen knitting and thus doing nothing directly involved in the colonial enterprise except, perhaps, acting as mourners and creating a knit, physical darkness.

This lack of involvement on the place of women—or at least Marlowe’s perception of it—is demonstrated when Marlowe mentions a girl midway through the novel. A few lines later, he suddenly exclaims, “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh-she is out of it—completely” (64). This girl he mentions is, of course, Kurtz’s native woman (we assume it is his mistress), but we can only figure this out through deduction, and can only do so much later in the book, as Marlowe doesn’t mention her again until the third section. The fact that Marlowe says that “she is out of it—completely” is striking, especially when one looks at his description of her later in the book. It is a striking description and perhaps one of the longest about any one character in the novel.

And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of

a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress (Conrad 77).

Marlowe spends a considerable amount of time describing her—however, he describes only her physical appearance rather than her as a person. He describes her steps, her cloths, her ornaments, her head, her hair, her leggings, her necklaces; he even places a value on what she wears, what must have been “the value of several elephant tusks”. He uses words such as “stately” and “magnificent,” which suggest some level of admiration and again place him outside the point of view of what the typical colonizer would probably say. However, never once does Marlowe describe her emotions or the intentions of her actions, suggesting that he cannot interpret her in non-physical ways. His description of her is entirely appearance-based, and her appearance is “barbarous” and, in fact, that of a warrior—her hair like a helmet, her brass gauntlets. Instead of being allowed to be a woman, her description sets her up as a militaristic manifestation of native barbarism. She is “savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent”—in essence, a spectacle of Orientalism, the savage, wild-eyed woman, “magnificent” only because of the many ornaments that she wears, all of which were probably bought by the gold that Kurtz sold after taking or buying it from her own people. Thus, she is a product of colonial trade rather than a product of her own people, which makes Marlowe admire her

and perhaps what makes him describe her so much more than the others—she wears the armor of colonialism and so she stands out among her “ugly” fellow natives.

However, Marlowe soon forgets about even this striking image, watching as she “stretched tragically her bare arms after us” (Conrad 84)—which she does perhaps because she wishes to see Kurtz again, an assumption of their potentially sexual relationship relegating her again to the role of the desired and sexualized other; the outstretched arms do seem to initially suggest that she desires the boat and its colonialism to come back to her. However, the men on the boat take care of that vision, for “then that imbecile crowd down on the deck started their little fun, and I could see nothing more for smoke” (Conrad 84). The actions of the colonizers, then, completely obliterate the native woman from view, literally making her disappear in the smoke caused from their violence—here, the violence of their guns, but elsewhere the violence of non-representation. Marlowe never allows this woman to express her views, never even allows her to come near the boat, and by keeping her away from the colonial enterprise he shields the enterprise from her thoughts and actions and thus makes her incapable of making a difference through her actions.

The image of the “intended” presents a similar degree of powerlessness. When Marlowe moves Kurtz into the boat, he is struck by Kurtz’s possessiveness. “You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory.’ Oh, yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station my river, my—‘everything belonged to him (Conrad 65). The fact that he claims the intended along with a long list of possessions (which include his holdings in Africa

but, notably, do not include his mistress—he apparently does not lay claim to her) suggests that she is simply another one of the things that belongs to Kurtz, that he is collecting in order to make himself seem greater. However, the Intended has one thing the mistress does not have—a voice. When Marlowe describes the Intended, he describes her engaged in conversation, and describing her in more human terms than he did the African mistress. However, she, too, is described romantically but in almost an otherworldly sense, as though she exists apart from the material world to the same extent that the African mistress was tied up in it. Marlowe says that the Intended “came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me... This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me” (Conrad 91). The floating and the halo imagery almost suggest an angelic persona, completely pure and completely apart from the world which Marlowe has inhabited for so long. However, this “ashy” halo and dark eyes also suggest that she, too, contains real darkness, the darkness of the colonial enterprise.

However, both women are brought together in Marlowe’s mind by the similar action of holding out their arms—the Intended does so “as if after a retreating figure” (supposedly the now-dead Kurtz) (Conrad 93) just as the African mistress “stretched tragically her bare arms after us” (Conrad 84). This similar action implies a reaching toward this one man—Kurtz—and their desire to be with him. In some ways, he seems to suggest that perhaps these women cannot live the same lives without him—the Intended, even a year after his death, seems “as though she would remember and mourn forever” (Conrad 91). This figure is one which they cannot forget; if Kurtz represents, in some

ways, the colonial ideal (for he does very much succeed in the primary goal of colonialism—trade—and seems to have lofty aspirations toward higher goals, at least initially), then their desire for Kurtz takes on a few different dimensions. For the African mistress, her (mute) desire for Kurtz could represent (at least from Marlowe's view, the colonial view-- the only opinion we see) her own inability to exist as she does without Kurtz and without colonialism. Perhaps she mourns her loss of income—that is, jewelry and expensive things—that Kurtz provided for her.

It is important to note, however, that all of this is conjecture—Marlowe never explicitly says that the African woman is Kurtz's mistress; that is simply the impression the representation of her reaction to Kurtz's departure provides. Her outstretched arms could be a sending-off, a pushing-out, a rejection of Kurtz and the boat that carries him; however, it is interesting that for Marlowe the action immediately signifies a wish to have the colonizer Kurtz back. For the Intended, her action motions to a “retreating figure,” suggesting that Kurtz moves away from her as well, but moves away into death—and, at least in Marlowe's mind, moving into the darkness that he has become a part of. This then could be a desire by the Intended to take her lover back from the colonial enterprise so he could remain with her rather than dying far away, because she “alone know[s] how to mourn for him as he deserves” (Conrad 91). She suggests that her claim to him and love for him is the only ‘legitimate’ claim, suggesting that the bond Kurtz and his African mistress may have had is in some way less real due to the circumstances he was in at the time.

Both the African mistress and the Intended help to depict a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the colonial enterprise, but a rather decided attitude toward the general powerlessness of women. However, there is a clear distinction between the depiction of the Intended (a Western woman) and the African mistress (a native), thus clearly demonstrating the double colonization of the native woman in an interesting way—here, Conrad initially put the African mistress down because she was a woman, but he then placed at a level lower than her European counterpart simply because she was native and portrayed as an object rather than a human being with actual feelings. This theme of the native woman without voice or agency was typical within the colonial period, where both the native woman and the Western women were so heavily stereotyped that it became difficult to get an accurate representation of their thoughts and feelings in any way (although the Western women’s feelings were slightly more clear due to her having a larger voice in society than the native peoples did).

Thesis Summary

In this thesis, I will argue that the ideals of the patriarchal colonial power continue to effect representations of women made by postcolonial authors. In order to do this, I will look at literatures from three former English colonies for the purpose of continuity and language comprehension. I will discuss three nations: Nigeria, due to its geographical location in the highly colonized African continent as well as large number of famous postcolonial authors which it has bred; the Caribbean based both on its diverse culture and identity as well as on the continuing struggles with colonialism that it faces; and India due both to its extremely long history of colonial occupation and the level at which many English customs have been integrated into the society. I will look at the works of both a male and a female author from each country in order to assess whether the gender of the author affects how they represent women.

I will begin by looking at Nigeria, the nation from which came one of the most famous postcolonial books in the world, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. I will analyze this work as one of the canonical standards of postcolonial literature and will analyze its depictions of women and the relation of these depictions to the women depicted in the less famous *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa. *Efuru* focuses far more closely on the lives of Ibo women than *Things Fall Apart*. I will argue that Achebe did not focus on women perhaps because he wrote so passionately against the colonized, but Nwapa was able to remove herself from the direct colonial confrontation and instead focus on the interactions between the Ibo themselves.

I will then move on to the Caribbean, where I will analyze two very different works by equally famous authors. I will first assess V.S. Naipaul's essay "A Flag on the

Island: A Fantasy for a Small Screen” and the implications that it has for the possibility of colonized identifying with the colonizer to such an extent that he actually begins to write from his point of view in a way that places women in the background of the narrative. In opposition, I will discuss Jamaica Kincaid’s novels *A Small Place* and *Lucy*, both of which demonstrate a very definite idea of writing against the colonizer, but which deal with the issue of gender in two different ways. *A Small Place*, the more political of the two, seems to not discuss the issue of gender much, but *Lucy* clearly grapples with the issue of what it means to be a woman from Trinidad, and it is the first discussed work written from the point of view of a colonized person living in a Western country. This provides an interesting commentary on how Western ideals are absorbed into the worldview of people who enter the West, and how this occurs the opposite way.

Finally, I will discuss India and two publicly political writers, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. I will discuss the heavy importance of the female in Salman Rushdie’s *Moor’s Last Sigh* and *Midnight’s Children* and the role these females play as creators, manipulators and monsters, to the point that the stories seem to rest on them. On the other hand, in Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things*, women are less of a central issue, although they do feature heavily, and political issues and social class issues are seen as the most important themes within the novel. I discuss the possibility that perhaps by the time of the publication of *The God of Small Things* the gender issue had ceased to be an issue, but the social class distinctions evident in the book point against this idea.

Chapter Two: Nigeria

Before its colonization, the area currently known as Nigeria was an area containing hundreds of tribes, first controlled by the Fulani Empire and then later divided into two protectorates of the British Empire, the Southern and Northern Protectorates, which the British incorporated as Nigeria in 1914. Combined, these two protectorates included more than 200 distinct ethnic groups, and the protectorate leader of the Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, “concluded that Nigeria was ‘a mere geographical expression’” rather than any sort of cohesive national group or proud origin of identity (Adebanwi 381). From this point in 1914 until October 1, 1960, Nigeria remained under British rule, a period of nearly fifty years. These 200 distinct ethnic groups all lived under a British rule which essentially perceived them as one homogenous group: Nigerians.

Many Western people make this assumption of homogeneity when thinking about Nigeria (and many African countries), but the ethnic identity of the authors is very important. Both Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa, authors who wrote the works featured in this chapter, are often referred to as “African Writers” or, more specifically, “Nigerian Writers,” but are truly “Ibo Writers,” for they are both Ibo and their works both depict very specifically the lives of the Ibo people of Nigeria. The Ibo (also spelled Ebo or Igbo) people live in the lower Niger region of West Africa, an area which falls into the borders of modern-day Nigeria. Their language group is one of the major languages in Nigeria (“Ibo”). The assumption of homogeneity results from the colonial enterprise; the colonizing English did not attempt to distinguish between the peoples of Nigeria but rather to assume that they were all “natives” and thus inherently the same.

When readers think of Nigerian literature, they are probably thinking of Ibo literature, for there is an “overwhelming presence of Igbo novelists in the production of the Nigerian novel” (Nwakanma 4). Obi Nwakanma, in trying to analyze this phenomenon, concludes that the high level of education among the Igbo people, saying that “by 1945, in spite of their relatively late entry, the Igbo...had by far outstripped every other Nigerian group in the number of people with secondary education...” (5). This, combined with the fact that the Igbo are the most urbanized and the most geographically disparate group of Nigerians led to their high propensity for novel-writing. This high level of education paved the way for what many deem one of the most influential postcolonial novels, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Rhonda Cobham says that Achebe “was able to address imaginatively the nostalgia, social insecurity, and nationalist sentiments of an entire continent” (178)—not a small feat by any means. In many ways, however, the canonical nature of his work makes it, in some ways, unchallengeable, and has in other ways created a reality about Nigerian culture for its many readers that may not have shown the full picture of Igbo society, and Igbo women in particular, a tendency that is directly linked to the double colonization of the women in the novel.

Biodun Jeyifo suggests that *Things Fall Apart* and other books written by male Nigerian authors have created such a false sense of male-oriented Ibo history that women writers must “reinvent a *presence*... [that had been] theorized as absence... [and] recover the submerged female tradition” (190). This sense of reinventing a presence out of an absence has echoes of the task of the initial postcolonial authors who had to portray a

history and identity that the colonial oppressors considered basically nonexistent. It is then the burden of female authors, such as Flora Nwapa, to create a world of female representation that for people outside of Ibo traditions does not appear to ever have existed, which is what Nwapa achieves in her novel *Efuru*.

Things Fall Apart tells the story of Okonkwo, a village elder in an African village who considers his manliness to be the most important aspect of his personality. He feels himself to be great within his society; however, his fortunes begin to change fairly quickly after he kills the young man he adopted as his son in an attempt to show his unabashed manliness and lack of mercy. He is sent in shame to his wife's village in order to serve out the term of a seven year banishment sentence. In the second half of the novel, his life is further complicated by the arrival of white missionaries who convince his son to join them and abandon Okonkwo's traditional way of life, leaving Okonkwo with no son to carry on his titles. At the end of the novel, Okonkwo commits suicide by hanging himself from a tree.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the women in *Things Fall Apart* is their unnamed nature, and thus their subordination. Okonkwo's first wife is a perfect example of this. Since she is Okonkwo's first wife, she has the most power within the household; however, she is always referred to as either Okonkwo's "most senior wife" (Achebe 14) or "Nwoye's mother" (Achebe 29), Nwoye being Okonkwo's eldest son. By not giving her a name, Achebe gives her an identity only in relation to either her husband or her son (the inheritor of his father's successes), subjugating her within the native patriarchal paradigm. Her status as a woman does not seem valued by Okonkwo either, for at one

point, when he is upset at the apparent laziness of his son Nwoye (who acts much more like Okonkwo's "weak" father), Okonkwo says, "I have done my best to make Nwoye a man, but there is too much of his mother in him" (Achebe 66). Here Okonkwo not only discounts Nwoye's mother, but mothers (and females) in general, considering them something weak and not to be taken seriously. This pattern is found throughout the book. Generally, Okonkwo tends to discount the opinions of wives, although his entire community doesn't seem to agree with this opinion. In a conversation about a deceased couple in their clan, Obierika says that people thought the two had "one mind...He could not do anything without telling her." Okonkwo replies, "I thought he was a strong man in his youth" and another clansman replies, "He was indeed." In response to this, "Okonkwo shook his head doubtfully" (Achebe 68). It thus appears that the men in the rest of the clan may seem to have a higher opinion of women than Okonkwo does, but due to Okonkwo's centrality to the story and his very opinionated nature, his opinions often form the focus for values in the novel and are thus the ones that the reader notices most. Even though his eventual suicide silences these ideals, readers often associate Okonkwo's attitude with the book, even they interpret his suicide as the failings of his ideas.

Okonkwo's value system seems to interpret women's "weakness" through an inherent lack of drive and agency, a lack which is, of course, forced on them by the patriarchy in which they live. The betrothal ceremony of Obierika's daughter Akueke provides a striking example of this lack of female agency. Although she has a name, she has very little ability to act on her own accord, as shown by the passage, "When she had

shaken hands, or rather held out her hand to be shaken, she returned to her mother's hut to help with the cooking" (Achebe 71). Akueke does take some action here when she goes to help with the cooking—a traditionally female job. However, although able to perform actions with other women, she seems unable to perform actions upon a man, for rather than shaking hands with the men (the active choice) she holds out "her hand to be shaken" (which is definitely passive, underscoring her lack of agency and giving the men the active action). The clan's distinction between the types of crime that one commits toward other clansmen supports the same passivity. When Okonkwo accidentally shoots and kills Ezeudu's son, Achebe explains: "The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent" (Achebe 124). Characterizing the inadvertent crime as the female crime makes the male crime inherently conscious and active, thus again suggesting that the association of the male with conscious thought and action and the association of the female with inaction and inadvertent results-- a side-show to the patriarchal action and one that doesn't deserve a voice.

By associating women with inaction within Okonkwo's values, and thus the value paradigm of the novel, Achebe, whether consciously or unconsciously, removes them from the very structure of the clan of Umuofia itself, and thus removes them from the historicity of the novel. Women cook, clean, or are courted in nearly every scene in which they appear and they are rarely seen through the public eye. The image of the *egwugwu* house where the spirits of the ancestors reside best demonstrates women's peripheral nature. The house faces away from the town so people cannot see inside, and it

is decorated with drawings done by a select group of women who are only allowed limited access: therefore, “These women never saw the inside of the hut. No woman ever did. They scrubbed and painted the outside walls under the supervision of men. If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan” (Achebe 88). If one takes the hut to represent the core government of Umuofia—its past, its traditions, its government—one can see that women, in this story, have never taken a role in the history of Umuofia. They cannot even imagine the details of this history because they are kept outside, keeping things looking nice and clean, and always under the watching eyes of men. The only time we see women banding together to do anything other than cook is when the women force the owner of a stray cow to pay a fine (114); this is the only time that we see women engage in any sort of project to help their community as a whole rather than simply their family individually

However, this lack of solidarity becomes understandable when seen in relation to women’s conversations in the novel. Rarely do we find two women having a conversation together without a man present—in fact, only twice, one between Ekwefi (Okonkwo’s named, second wife) and her daughter Ezinma, and another conversation between Ekwefi and Chielo, the High Priestess, about Chielo’s taking of Ezinma to Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. Thus, other than these few times, we only see what women talk about with men present and only once do we get a view into a woman’s thoughts—Ekwefi’s thoughts about when she married Okonkwo (Achebe 109). Even within her thoughts, Okonkwo is still present, suggesting that he, as a man, is still central.

Because of this, we never see into the true “women’s world” of Igbo culture during the time this story takes place, which somewhat limits the historical scope of the novel by not including the role women played in the interactions between colonizer and colonized.

Things Fall Apart shows the men’s culture well, but it doesn’t delve into the very active women’s culture that existed in Igbo culture at the time, a culture that may come as a surprise to many readers of the novel. Contrary to the depiction of Igbo women as silent, oppressed beings, it seems that Igbo women were actually very active in the community and in judicial decisions within the clan. According to Rhonda Cobham, the Igbo women’s group, the *umuada* (daughters of the clan), “regulated the markets in each town” and engaged in “intervention or threatened intervention...crucial in civic as well as marital disputes” (175). We do not see women’s power in the market because no market scenes are depicted in the novel, probably because the market lay outside the realm of men, the realm which this novel ultimately attempts to portray and discuss—what manhood means in a world where an outside power is changing the traditional values and customs almost beyond recognition. At this early stage, when postcolonial literature first began to engage its oppressor through literature, it would have been far more difficult for Achebe to also attempt to address the patriarchy inherent within his own culture; therefore, he chose to simply look at the interactions of male colonizers and male colonized rather than choosing to engage the double layer of colonization of Ibo women.

It is possible, however, that the colonial powers themselves played a role in Achebe’s decision not to include depictions of women’s power in disputes—a tangible instance of double colonization. The *umuada*’s intervention in marital disputes usually

manifested itself through rude songs and gestures toward whoever was at fault, essentially shaming them into mending their ways. In Achebe's case, perhaps his very desire to make his book accessible to Western readers forced him to eliminate this depiction of women's power from the novel, for he "would have been hard put to imbue such scenarios with the decorum expected of women within Western tradition" (Cobham 176). Achebe knew that Western views of decorum saw this behavior as inappropriate and therefore he chose not to offend (perhaps in hopes of making sure his novel reached the widest audience possible). Biodun Jeyifo suggests that this was true, saying that, in many postcolonial literatures, there is a "so-called strategic, programmatic suspension of gender difference in the name of a unified resistance to foreign *racial* domination," (192), suggesting that, in order to achieve a unified resistance, authors had to ignore gender difference. However, Jeyifo goes on to suggest that there are "deeper causes of the marginalization of women, as characters, writers and critics, which enabled the constitution of postcolonial African literature and critical discourse as an engendered tradition" (192). Because Achebe and other authors suppressed the traditional actions of women in favor of a much more meek and mild depiction that showed women who followed orders and did not engage in rude songs (to help with the "unified resistance" idea), mimetic depictions of Igbo women were marginalized, thus placing them outside of the perceived realm of agency and Igbo history. The morals and mores of the colonizer helped authors to justify the suppression of traditional female practices in postcolonial texts, which demonstrates that while women were possibly oppressed in their native

culture, it was the colonial power that ultimately caused their subordination within postcolonial texts.

The Western paradigm thus suppressed the depiction of a native female practice, forcing the image of Igbo womanhood to conform to what the West found appropriate, even in a novel that, as Achebe himself said, sought to “teach other Africans that their past was neither as savage nor as benighted as the colonizers represented it to be” (Cobham 172). Although Achebe suggests here that he attempted to write a novel that could tell the truth, one removed from the colonial narrative that suppressed native opinion and ideals, he in fact seems to censor himself in order to please a Western audience and thus falls right back into the colonial trap of suppression. Thus it appears that the actions of these Igbo women are being censored not only by Achebe (who writes about the patriarchy) but by the Western world as well (which does not approve of the type of actions they take). This “absence” of agency hints to the fact that perhaps their agency exists, but both the male author and the Western reading public oppress and repress their representation in such a way mimetic representation is impossible. Women are therefore not only repressed by double colonization in practice, but also in literature and other such representations that share their behaviors with the world.

Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, published in 1966, appears, in many ways, to provide a much fuller and more nuanced representation of the lives of Ibo women. Flora Nwapa was the first published female African author and made huge steps for women in the field of postcolonial literature. She, like Achebe, was raised in Nigeria but educated in England (Nzegwu). Her more nuanced representation of Ibo women becomes apparent

early in the novel when the main character, Efuru, takes her “bath,” a term used for female circumcision-- something never even spoken of in *Things Fall Apart*. This plot point does not necessarily promote the ritual, which is very controversial among many women’s rights groups; rather, its inclusion demonstrates the author’s belief that the ritual was important enough to Ibo society (and to Ibo women) to justify inclusion in the novel and was by extension deemed important enough to share with every reader. This gives the ritual a place in the reader’s mental history of this culture and provides the women of this culture a place within this history.

Beginning with this women’s ritual sets the tone for the rest of the novel, which is centered on the many rituals and behaviors of women that Achebe’s representation left out. Even the simplest rituals—such as how to properly sweep a floor and how to properly sit like a woman—are treated with close attention, especially by Ajanupu, who tries to teach the servant Ogea how to do things properly (Nwapa 45). Ajanupu serves as the bearer of women’s rituals and traditions in this novel. She is very wise and has advice for every situation. Besides this, she functions as a healer for Efuru’s daughter Ogonim, a role that Okonkwo played in *Things Fall Apart*. Where Achebe’s Ekwefi only followed Okonkwo’s commands in order to save her daughter, Ajanupu takes a much more active role—at one point, she is likened to “a young medical practitioner who is at a loss what to ask next” (Nwapa 64). It is interesting that Nwapa chooses to equate Ajanupu with someone who practices Western medicine. This is perhaps due to Nwapa’s great exposure to Western thought (she studied at various European and English universities) and has its foundations in the increased presence of Western culture within this novel.

Regardless, this comparison gives Ajanupu a sense of gravitas and knowledge that perhaps was not as evident in Okonkwo's practice. Does this then suggest that, in the minds of a Western reader, a native healer can only gain legitimacy in comparison to the Western doctor that a native healer can gain any sort of legitimacy? It is interesting, then, that although Ajanupu seems the more competent of the two, her patient Ogonim dies while Okonkwo's patient Ezinma lives.

The death of Ogonim provides, for Efuru and her community, a further reason to believe in Efuru's apparent bad luck, which the community interprets as being tied to her status as a specific type of woman. It is apparent that Efuru is seen as different from early adulthood. She initially defies convention by moving in with her husband Azidua before he has paid her dowry to her father and she seems completely unconcerned about this. She repeats a certain phrase various times throughout the novel: "Never mind what people would say" (Nwapa 18). For Efuru, it seems lucky that she has this sort of attitude because she is certainly the talk of the town throughout the novel, and, through this town voice, we see her actions and inactions as the town and tradition perceives them, which provides an important lens into the community that we don't receive as often in *Things Fall Apart*.

The ability to reproduce also becomes a central topic within Efuru's story, and probably a central topic within both male and female Ibo society, which has close ties to the concept of logical reasoning; society sees Efuru as different because of her apparent inability to reproduce and her ability to think logically. "Neighbors talked as they were bound to talk. They did not see the reason why Azidua should not marry another woman

since, according to them, two men do not live together. To them Efuru was a man because she could not reproduce” (Nwapa 24). Thus, in the minds of the town, reproduction is the main function of a woman and a wife and if she cannot achieve this she is not regarded as a true woman. Furthermore, later in the book, Efuru herself notices that she seems to behave differently from other women, even in terms of her thought patterns. While contemplating her relationship to the goddess Uhamiri, Efuru thinks that she is “growing logical in her reasoning. She thought it unusual for women to be logical. Usually intuition did their reasoning for them” (Nwapa 165). The way this passage is worded implies that men, rather than women, are usually seen as logical, which explains why Efuru finds this so odd. This somewhat echoes the male-female distinctions made in *Things Fall Apart* and also made in many Western societies—that men are the logical, rational beings and women are ruled by inaction, intuition, and accidents. However, Efuru shows us that Ibo women possess the same capability for rationality as their male counterparts; in fact, it seems that very often males in this book behave in a decidedly irrational manner (Azidua not coming home for the burial of his child, Gilbert getting arrested for untold reasons). Thus Efuru takes on the more responsible role in each of these relationships and, in some ways, becomes the male.

While this distinction between male and female may make Efuru seem an oddity in her community, her male actions and thoughts in fact liberate her. Because she can have no children, she does not have to take care of them and can trade all day without having to pay for a nurse. This allows her to acquire quite a bit of money for herself and her husband Azidua, especially since “Azidua was not good at trading. It was Efuru who

was the brain behind the business” (Nwapa 36). She is free to trade and, while trading is typically a woman’s role in Ibo society (and thus something she would normally do), Efuru is not burdened by children and therefore she can trade far more often and more effectively than her counterparts. After she helped her servant Ogea’s mother by paying for her to go to the hospital, Ogea’s sister tells Efuru, “You have done what only men are capable of doing and so you have done like a man” (Nwapa 132) which places her more masculine abilities (such as financing expensive surgeries and making connections to hospitals) in a more positive light.

What is perhaps most striking about Efuru’s almost masculine powers and tendencies is her friendship with Difu, who is an Ibo male as well as a Western-educated doctor. In *Things Fall Apart*, we never saw a friendship between a man and a woman that wasn’t based in marriage, but in Nwapa’s novel, Efuru speaks to this man about private thoughts that otherwise are discussed only between women (in *Efuru*) and between men (in *Things Fall Apart*). (Nwapa 97). This view of friendship, especially friendship with a man who was educated outside of the native tradition, makes Efuru unique among female representations. She speaks to Difu as to an equal and by all intents and purposes it appears as though they treat one another as equals and value one another’s opinions. Even Efuru’s relationships with her two husbands do not contain similar equality—during Azidua’s absence, Efuru thinks, “He is the lord and master, if he wants to marry her, I cannot stop him” (Nwapa 55). The obvious inferiority suggested by the phrase “lord and master” definitely places Efuru into a much weaker position than that which she takes in her conversations with Difu. This could perhaps be due to Difu’s Western

education; however, based on the colonial patriarchal ideal we have seen previously this seems unlikely. The fact that Difu's mother was also Western educated is crucial (Nwapa 96), and it was probably she who instilled this sense of equality in him.

This position of the husband as "lord and master" and patriarchal overlord, obviously the favored view in the village of Umuofia, seems to be questioned far more in *Efuru*. This distinction is made primarily through the contrasting reactions of Efuru and her mother-in-law, Ossai, when their husbands abandon them for other women. Ossai chooses to wait for her husband, primarily for a sense of personal pride, for, as she says, "I gained nothing from my long suffering, so the world would think..." (Nwapa 61). Much of the village seems to consider this passive suffering excessive and pointless, although it seems that they do expect some type of waiting period—Ajanupu tells Efuru to wait for Azidua for a year and if she decides to leave him after that year, "nobody in this world will rise an accusing finger at you" (Nwapa 83). Women clearly are not expected simply to wait for their husbands passively for the rest of their lives; rather, society suggests that women should take their own initiative. The initiative is recommended to end in another offer of marriage, so that although abandonment allows women some freedom, this period should end in re-assimilation; however, once again, Efuru chooses to move back in with her father after the year is up, waiting a while before accepting another offer. These few sentences seem to sum up the attitude of Efuru: "Life for her meant living it fully. She did not want merely to exist. She wanted to live and use the world to her own advantage" (Nwapa 78). Both the fact that she "did not want merely to exist" and she wanted to "use the world to her own advantage" suggest that Efuru takes

a very active stance in her own life and her own destiny, something that many Western women can relate to and that Achebe's work did not convey as effectively. Taking charge in the world is something often associated with Western thought, and using the world "to her own advantage" actually echoes the colonial ideas of taking what is needed. It is interesting that Efurú's attempt to assert herself is somewhat tied up in the ideas of colonial exploitation.

However, even Efurú's sense of what we may think of as Western-type independence still has deep ties in with native Igbo traditions, specifically the one of the lake goddess, Uhamiri and Efurú's worship of this goddess. The village explains Efurú's "failings" as a woman through her chosen status as a worshipper of Uhamiri, who comes to her in many dreams. The traditions suggest that, very often, worshippers of Uhamiri bear no children once they begin to worship her (which explains Efurú's barrenness). These dreams and her chosen status also bring her much good luck in business dealings, complementing the wealth of all of the village worshippers of Uhamiri—it is said that "nearly all the storey buildings you find are built by women who at one time or another have been worshippers of Uhamiri" (Nwapa 153). This is interesting because it suggests that, in some ways, the power of the women of Uhamiri usurp the power of men—because nearly all of the storey buildings, a sign of wealth and status, are built by these women, not by the men. The people of the village considered Efurú a man because she could not bear children; although she has fewer tendencies of the female, she also appears to outstrip the male in terms of wealth and perhaps even power, so that she in some ways

outstrips the native patriarchy because of her chosen status as one of the goddesses of the Ibo.

The priestess Chielo in *Things Fall Apart* has a similarly high status, as well as Okonkwo's daughter, Ezinma, who is an *ogbanje*, or a child that is possessed with an evil spirit. Chielo possesses a lot of power within Umuofia, placing her in a similar status as Efurū; in fact, because a god chose her as his sole representative, she may in fact have a higher position of authority. However, both her power and the potential destructive power wielded by the *ogbanje* Ezinma are not quite equal to the power that Efurū possesses. Ekwefi herself thinks at one point, "...Chielo's voice rose again in her possessed chanting, and Ekwefi recoiled, because there was no humanity there. It was not the same Chielo who sat with her in the market...it was a different woman—the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves" (Achebe 107). The usage of the word "possessed" suggests that a separate being enters Chielo when she acts in her powerful, authoritative position and in fact takes away her own authority; this possession comes from the spirits who simply use her as a vessel for their power. Ezinma's status as an *ogbanje* is similarly "possessed"; she is "one of those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mothers' wombs to be born again" (Achebe 77). She is feared because she has the power to destroy her mother's life; however, once her *iyi-uwa* (the talisman *ogbanje* use to come back after death) is found and destroyed, she relinquishes this destructive power and the illness that comes with it. In the case of both Chielo and Ezinma, their power remains almost separate from their personal identity, while with Efurū, her kindness, likeability and generosity towards others seem inherent to her

personality and the fact that she is chosen by Uhamiri and made successful seems almost more of a reward for her good deeds than any sort of power that Uhamiri gives to her.

Patrick Hogan asserts that this power instilled in Efuru by the goddess is a story used by Nwapa to provide a place for native traditions to thrive over the patriarchy, both native-based and colonial. He states that Nwapa “looks for solutions to the problem of patriarchal oppression not in European ideas and practices, not in ‘modernity,’ but in alternative Igbo traditions” (46). This theory suggests that Nwapa has made a striking departure from the final impression given in *Things fall Apart*—that the native traditions cannot hold against the power of the white man. However, Efuru manages to become a respected woman—and popular with the white-educated members of the community—because a traditional goddess chooses her as one of her worshippers. Where the village declared Okonkwo’s *chi* to be very bad, it is clear that Efuru’s *chi* is very good and that the gods want her to succeed—and, as a woman, she can succeed as only men do thanks to Uhamiri. Therefore, for Nwapa, it seems that the power of Uhamiri—and native traditions—trumps both the power of the residual colonial patriarchy.

This residual colonial patriarchy perhaps accounts for most of the instances of female subordination we find in the book. Hogan says that, before colonialism, women had much broader economic, political, and cultural power, even within the primarily patriarchal Igbo society. He says that, in many ways, Igbo women “lost their livelihood, their cultural practices (replaced by far more rigidly patriarchal Anglo-Christian practices) and their political position” when the colonizers came (Hogan 47). This is only indirectly referenced in the book, primarily by the voice of the town, where people often

say of white schools that the only thing children learn there is “to disobey their elders” (Nwapa 195). Every instance of this “disobeying” of elders within *Efuru* occurs when a young person disobeys a woman, suggesting that perhaps a large part of this disobedience came at the expense of the female elders who were perhaps delegated to a second societal place within the minds of these newly Christian native children. As it says in *Efuru*, “When your parents sent you to school, you automatically became a Christian” (Nwapa 85), suggesting Westerners expected students to eschew all other belief systems including their native tribal traditions-- yet another example of the controlling hand of colonial religion.

A conversation between Efuru’s Christian-schooled husband, Gilbert, and his friend Sunday demonstrates the pervasiveness of this instilled patriarchy. Gilbert says “it is a waste sending [women] to school, you know...I mean really that boys should be given the preference if it comes to that.” (Nwapa 191). His friend Sunday seems to disagree with him, especially when Gilbert says that it is especially a waste because girls often get married before they finish school and Sunday replies, “But it is the fault of us men” (Nwapa 192). This very obvious sentiment is something that Gilbert, who seems very entrenched within the Western thought process, cannot understand, and this contributes to the lesser status of women in education and, subsequently, in many positions in colonial society. It is intriguing that in this situation the Western-minded man naturally assumes the position of the colonial patriarchy within their education system, turning deaf ears to the conjecture of his native-educated friend who seems to have more appreciation of the talents of the female mind.

Difu, the western-educated male doctor, successfully seems to blend native and Western cultures, but there are no Western-educated female doctors or professionals found elsewhere in the book. It is interesting to note, however, that Difu's mother "was among the handful of girls who went to school when parents frowned at sending their daughters to school" (Nwapa 96). This suggests the possibility of a much more Western-educated childhood for Difu, since women's stories are often the stories told to young children and his mother was Western-educated. This makes him a unique hybrid of cultures, in which his education is Western and yet he still lives in his native land. This hybrid nature, in which he contains part of both worlds, could also explain his acceptance and friendship with Efurú who, as mentioned before, is both very bright and very unconventional in that she doesn't fit into the traditional roles of either man or woman, but rather the role of someone chosen by a god. She has peer-to-peer conversations with Difu in which she can generally hold her own as well as in any place in Ibo society. Therefore, she seems to have usurped the power of the patriarchy and has become a universal equal of everyone in Igbo society, with both men and women, both rich and poor.

The importance of storytelling so evident in *Efurú* also supports Nwapa's potentially ultimate ideological goal: female triumph over the male structure on female terms. About halfway through the novel, Efurú asks a man, Eneke, to come tell her and some neighborhood children a story of their own choosing. The children request the story by saying, "Tell us about the woman whose daughter disobeyed her and as a result was married to a spirit" (Nwapa 106). The spirit chose the woman, Nkwo, near the udara tree

where she was picking fruits and he pursued her. He attempted to take her to the spirit world, but she said she first wished to visit her sisters. After singing to her first two sisters, her third sister took her into her home to “visit her relatives.” She cooked her spirit-husband food made with maggots, and they fell asleep together. When her husband was sound asleep, her sister removed all of their valuables from the house and then Nkwo put kerosene on the house, setting it on fire and destroying the spirit. This tale, which goes on for five and a half pages, is the longest story in the novel as well as the most striking. It is the most unique both for its fiery end as well as for the cleverness and wits demonstrated by Nkwo, who, with the help of her sister, manages to rid herself of both a spirit and a husband, conquering the spirit world as well as her forced, false marriage. The image of two sisters banding together and using their combined intelligence to defeat their enemy provides the foundation for the feminist reading of this story. Neither Nkwo nor her sister denounced the entirety of the spirit world or the entirety of the institution of marriage, but they did denounce this specific spirit and this specific marriage in such a powerful way that they felt they had to rid themselves of its overbearing control. They used the methods available to them to free themselves from that control and allow themselves to pursue a path that they chose, but that was still within the paradigm that they lived in.

While Achebe’s iconic *Things Fall Apart* provides a worldview of Ibo society that is extremely widely read and known, Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* in fact shows a much more nuanced and detailed picture of the female Ibo society and deals with the colonial influence in a different way.

For both authors, the colonial patriarchy remained, but thanks to the groundbreaking work of Achebe, Nwapa moved past engagement with the colonizer and begin to engage with dynamics within the Ibo culture itself. Achebe opened the doors into Ibo society (and postcolonial society in general) to the entire world, and then, seven years later, Flora Nwapa gave voices to all of the women who were rendered essentially silent in the world of Okonkwo, the patriarchal alpha-male, and who were silenced by a desire to appeal to a Western audience. Nwapa looked to the newly hybrid Western and native traditions and provided an arguably more successful figurehead to carry on the traditions of the Ibo people, a woman who did not despair over the changing of traditions and who did not allow the new patriarchy to destroy the power she held in her native-tradition life, but who embraced the beneficial aspects of the new while remaining predominately fixed in and supported by the old traditions and the old, powerful goddesses of the Ibo who could work alongside the power of both the native and colonial patriarchy.

In the next chapter, the focus will shift to the Caribbean islands, where native traditions are negotiated within a dialogue between inhabitants rather than through stories of ancient gods. I will also move forward to a slightly later time of authorship, although the colonization of these islands is one of the oldest in the world. V.S. Naipaul will present a new development, the story written by a native author and narrated by a Western narrator, which further complicates representation and blurs the line between the colonizer and the colonized. Additionally I will discuss the difference of agency for women who live in different locations and whether a woman living in the colonized

country remains more repressed than a native woman who moves into a Western nation and what this means for their sense of identity.

Chapter Three: The Caribbean

Of the four regions discussed herein, perhaps none has been more affected by colonialism than the Caribbean islands. These islands were, in essence, created by colonialism since almost none of the ancestors of the current residents could be called “natives”—in fact, the colonizers brought almost all of them over on slave ships from Africa to work in the plantations. This meant that, for the women of these nations, the “double colonization” entailed repression under a newly forming “native” culture as well as under the colonial power; however, because the native identity formed anew, the female role in the nation formed somewhat differently along with it. The power of the West affects these Caribbean nations even today due to their financial dependence on the loans available from the International Monetary Fund (“Life and Debt”). In this world of Antigua, so tied up to the colonial power of England, women play a very interesting role, one that is less well-defined than their role in other nations. In a country where their existence and character is still in many ways primarily constructed for them by the colonizing power, these women seem much less sure of their own past and, therefore, of their future. Three works specifically discuss this changing role: V.S. Naipaul’s short story “A Flag on the Island: A Fantasy for a Small Screen,” and Jamaica Kincaid’s essay *A Small Place* and her novel, *Lucy*.

V.S. Naipaul, a Nobel Prize winner, descends from three distinct cultures—Indian, Trinidadian, and British—and does not quite fit into any of them. He is also quite famous for his antagonistic personal attitude: James Wood refers to him as “the public snob, the grand bastard” in the opening section of an article which later chronicles the similarities between his books and his own childhood, a childhood which he appears

quite ambivalent about (Wood). His upbringing in the house of his Indian father in Trinidad and his subsequent move to reside in England makes him an especially interesting postcolonial author. As James Wood points out in his article “Wounder and Wounded,” Naipaul sees things from the point of view of both the colonizer and the colonized—

The Wounded, radical Naipaul burns with rage at the cramped, colonial horizon of his father’s life, and seeks to defend his accomplishments against the colonist’s metropolitan sneers, but the conservative Wounder has got beyond the little prison of Trinidad, and now sees, with the colonist’s eye and no longer the colonial’s, the littleness of that imprisonment.

This state—of seeing his home country both as an oppressor and as one of the oppressed—brings an interesting sound to his work and perhaps allows him to realistically enter the mind of the American narrator of “A Flag on the Island.” Naipaul tells the story through the eyes of an American soldier who returns to the island on a cruise ship forced to make port, and he relives his memories of life on the island years before when he served on an American military base there.

The perspective we get from this American is a unique one which contrasts distinctly with the opinions of the tourists and the other islanders throughout the story. When he and the other tourists depart from the boat, he describes the scene that awaits them: “In the smart reception building, well-groomed girls, full of selfconscious charm, chosen for race and colour, with one or two totally, diplomatically black, pressed island souvenirs on us: toy steel-drums, market women dolls in cotton, musicians in wire,

totem-like faces carved from coconuts” (Naipaul 153). This is the first description of women that we see at this early point in the story. It is striking that these girls, acting as first ambassadors to the people visiting the island, are not chosen for their personalities, but rather for their “race and colour”—and that only one or two are “totally, diplomatically black.” The use of the word “diplomatically” is an interesting choice here, one of its meanings being “artfully in reference to intercourse” (“Diplomatically”). When one looks at this meaning, the phrase suggests that the black girls were chosen “artfully” to provide the most pleasing interaction for the tourists. Does this mean that, if there were more than one or two totally black girls, that the tourists would be less comfortable? That they would perhaps take offense? This interesting first impression these tourists get is not natural, but rather contrived for *their* highest level of pleasure, showing that these girls were chosen for this job to help please the tourists (who are, predominately, Western and white)—and perhaps suggesting that the identity of the island, or at least the islander’s perception of themselves, must constantly filter itself through these white preferences to an extent that was not as evident in the literatures from Nigeria. Frankie (the narrator’s) suggests this filtering of perception through his assertion that “We brought the tropics to the island,” (169), suggesting that the idea of the “tropics”—the islands as an ideal, touristy place to go on vacation—was invented by the West and pushed upon the islands, probably without their consent.

Strikingly, Naipaul presents only three main women in this short story, and doesn’t even speak much about them, suggesting their lesser importance in the eyes of the American. The most important of these three is Selma, the girl who works at the bar

young soldier Frank goes to on the island. When he first meets her, Frankie describes her thus: “Selma was unattached and cool. I thought she had the coolness that comes either from ownership or from being owned” (176). It is odd that Frankie equates the attitude of ownership with the attitude of being owned, since these two attitudes are not usually seen synonymously. Why does he do this? Perhaps because he himself has never experienced the feeling of being owned by someone or something; perhaps the “coolness” he describes is indifference, an emotion that people who are owned could project. Perhaps he simply cannot interpret Selma’s emotion for what it really is. Selma and Frank also have very different views about money. Frank says, “I hate the poor and the humble. I think poverty is something we should all conceal. Selma spoke of it as something she was neither proud nor ashamed of; it was a condition which was soon to be changed” (177). Frank’s desire to hide the problem of poverty is in striking opposition to Selma’s idea of poverty as a fluid, moving thing, something that would change. It is important to note, however, that she is probably not in charge of her own poverty—rather than saying “something she would soon change,” Frank says that it “was soon to be changed,” suggesting that it would be done by an outside power.

However, Selma, as an employed woman, still seems to enjoy much more freedom than her married counterparts. As Frank says,

Her job in the store and Henry’s protection gave her independence. She did not wish to lose this; she never fell for glamour. She was full of tales of girls she had known who had broken the code of their group and actually married visitors; and then had led dreadful lives, denied both the freedom that they had had and the

respectability, the freedom from struggle, which marriage ought to have brought.

(189)

It is interesting that the girls who broke the code of the group had married “visitors,” (suggesting that they married outsiders who were probably white) and, through this marriage, their situation was degraded even further than their original one. These women are denied “respectability,” something that “marriage ought to have brought.” What is it about their situation that makes this respectability not come to them? Is it because they married outside of the island and couldn’t really fit into island life afterward? Or is it perhaps that their husbands never considered them equals within their marriage and thus they were never considered “respectable?” This, a more direct instance of double colonization, demonstrates that women under control of white men had fewer freedoms than they did without them (and that they also had fewer freedoms within the white version of marriage). Marriage denies them “freedom from struggle,” suggesting that struggle defines their marriage, but whether this is between the husband and the wife (abusive) or between the wife and society is unclear.

The interracial marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Lambert, a black man and a white woman (striking because it seems so unusual) also explores the issue of unequal marriage. Frank describes Mrs. Lambert as remaining “in the background,” someone who you never “exchanged words with” (Naipaul 192). It is interesting that even Frankie, as a white American, never really talks to Mrs. Lambert. Why Mrs. Lambert remains separate is unclear—Frank simply says that “She never became part of life on the street” (192). Here, the word “became” is crucial because it suggests that she was never part of life on

the street to begin with. This perhaps has to do with her foreignness, her lack of nativity—for everyone else seems to just belong there. Frankie appears to be a fixture, someone who mixes with Henry and Mr. Lambert and Blackwhite on a regular basis, but this could also be because he is a man and has business dealings with these men (selling government supplies to the native people). However, Frank's own interactions feature probably because he is the narrator of the story—perhaps Mrs. Lambert did have dealings with people that Frank did not attend; Frank's description is flawed because he only writes of things that have happened to him.

The fact that the story is told by an American and filtered entirely through the colonial gaze is telling, not only in this story, but in the field of postcolonial studies in general. Because Frank is the narrator, we see only what he, the Westerner, sees in the novel—he misses years between his first time at the island and his subsequent unexpected return. In that time, the people of the island kept moving, but in his mind this did not occur—he seems simply to have forgotten about them. This Western view echoes the perspective of Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness*, but complicates the Western view because the author, Naipaul, is technically postcolonial and presents the spoken opinions of many of the native characters as well. Naipaul addresses the reactions of the constant colonial presence through Mr. Blackwhite's discussions with his potential investors. Blackwhite (whose name is indicative of his hybrid identity, a man who lives in both the native and white worlds) broaches the idea of writing a story “about a black man falling in love...with a black woman” (219) that completely takes his investors aback. The investors respond: ““You might have the black man rescued from a bad white woman.’

‘Or the black woman rescued from a bad white man’” (220). This constant obsession with having the black person always in engagement with the whites serves to simply keep whites involved in the picture and involved with the history of every person in the country, even those false people in books.

Blackwhite suggests an elimination of-- and “emancipation” from— the pervasive white presence in native affairs, even native literary characters. His investors dislike it and pull out, and at the end of the novel Blackwhite finds himself unable to publish because he doesn’t have sufficient funds and cannot get funds without the help of the Western world. Blackwhite’s condition provides a startling example of how white tastes influence the production of postcolonial books and provides more proof that authors such as Achebe might have changed the behaviors of their native women in order to make them more acceptable to Western ears. Without money from the West, Blackwhite cannot write his books—so that the investors basically control his means of livelihood (and serve as masters in terms of what he does creatively and, in many ways, monetarily, since his job is dependent on this and therefore he cannot make a living without it).

After looking at Blackwhite’s powerlessness in the face of the Western world, we find that women have even less power. Selma says, “‘Oh, they are stronger than me. Blackwhite, Priest, you, even Henry—you are all stronger than me’” (228). If Blackwhite is unable to function without the help of the Americans, Selma both cannot work without the Americans (because she works in a shirt company) and also cannot stand up for herself in the way that the men do. This could be referencing her lack of agency or could be stating the fact that these men are monetarily more powerful than her. This seems to

suggest a pattern of double colonization—the men are less powerful than the previous colonizers, and the women are less powerful than both of them, put upon both by the colonizers and by their own men (the lack of freedom presented in the marriage of the women who married visitors mirrors this—they are trapped by a man who is a Westerner, but they are also trapped because of marriage and traditional forms of living).

In the postcolonial world that Kincaid's essay *A Small Place* presents, the inability of the women in Naipaul's short story to escape the colonial power and the double colonization does not come as a surprise. Jamaica Kincaid's embittered descriptions of a tourist's impression of the island versus the reality of the island presents a world in which the natives are literally trapped in a web of economic fraud, governmental ineptitude and corruption, and the tourist traps. Kincaid says, "Have I given you the impression that the Antigua I grew up in revolved almost entirely around England. Well, that was so. I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England" (33). By saying that she "met the world through England," Kincaid provides an image of England as a kind of chaperone who introduced Kincaid to the world—a chaperone that told her how the world worked in the chaperone's view, and subsequently described her to others only in the way they viewed her. This meeting the world exists in a process of translation, where England translates what Kincaid thinks and shares it with the world in the way they see fit—which could not be accurate in any way, as we know it generally was not. Kincaid later says of England, "you loved knowledge, and wherever you went you made sure to build a school, a library (yes, and in both of these places you distorted and erased my history and glorified your

own)” (36). The use of the second person address here suggests that Kincaid feels very separated from the people—the “yous”— who build the schools and the libraries. These people created a Western patriarchal knowledge system through which they colonized the natives, including Kincaid. The colonizers distanced themselves and created their own history with no official channels for natives to learn their own history (just as there were very few in India or Nigeria), which drastically changed the natives opinions of themselves.

However, even in this world of constant “representation” by the English, powerful women who say what they mean still exist within the country. One of these people described is the mother of the narrator (arguably Kincaid) in *A Small Place*, whose character Kincaid describes at length. A short passage from this paragraph illustrates the general point: “It so happens that in Antigua my mother is fairly notorious for her political opinions. She is almost painfully frank, quite unable to keep any thoughts she has about anything—and she has many thoughts on almost everything—to herself” (50). The mother proves this in the subsequent story where she talks back to a government official—and makes him retreat into his house with a well-placed comment. This power that this woman could have just through her words allows her to serve as a portrait of a politically active woman, something we didn’t see in “A Flag on the Island” and who is probably most like Ajanupu, the strong-minded healer aunt in *Efuru*.

Kincaid also seems to condemn submissiveness, both in men and in women, as a byproduct of the colonial system. After speaking about the bad manners of the British, Kincaid says, “We felt superior, for we were so much better behaved and we were full of

grace, and these people were so badly behaved and they were so completely empty of grace. (Of course, I now see that good behavior is the proper posture of the weak, of children)” (30). This suggests that Kincaid does not approve of mindless good behavior, either in subjects or, probably, in women. It is striking to note that she says “of the weak, of children” making children the only weak ones—she clearly does not see women as weak (and with a mother like that, who would?)

This image of the not-well-behaved, very opinionated woman that is exalted but not well-developed in *A Small Place* (other than in the voice of the genderless narrator) is in full force in the title character of Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*. Lucy is a nineteen year old girl whom a New York City family brings over from her home island so she can be a nanny for their children. Lucy represents a new type of postcolonial woman (or person)—the colonized woman who travels into the very land of the colonizer and finds the relations between races very similar to how things are at home. First, although her employers call her one of the family, only a short while after she begins there she is already othered by the family—“...they began to call me the Visitor. They said I seemed not to be a part of things....for look at the way I stared at them as they ate, Lewis said. Had I never seen anyone put a forkful of French-cut green beans in his mouth before?” (13). In this instance, Lucy the family sees Lucy as an “other” because of her ignorance and singles her out because she watches the father in a way that makes her seem different (or perhaps in a way that makes her seem ignorant). The idea of the Visitor is also interesting because the family only begins to use it after they first tells her that she is “one of the family,” and it isn’t until they feel that she does not achieve this distinction

that they begin to point her out. In essence, when she does not assimilate into their culture at the speed they would like, they immediately begin to point her out as different from them and turn her into a person whose status becomes her title (they call her the Visitor rather than by her name).

No one should expect a person to put their entire past behind them in a few short days, but Lucy seems to attempt to, even though she finds she cannot escape it. After a letter from her mother arrives, Lucy says

The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events described in the letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles...and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face? (31)

By trying to abandon and forget her home, Lucy attempts to forget the history of the island, her own history, “hundreds of years” of the bloody, plantation past of her ancestors, years of oppression and subservience. This past seems to have changed her way of thinking so strongly that she sees the entire past in “every gesture, every word spoken, every face”— America constantly reminds her of this past, with white people surrounding her in her position of service to a white family. The interactions between Lucy and Mariah-- the bitter, confused love from Lucy, the blind love of Mariah-- also provides a very interesting portrait of the colonizer and the colonized post-colonization, a white woman and a black woman interacting daily, sharing secrets and fears, in a way we

have not seen in any of the other literature, where white women played a peripheral role if they played a role at all.

In this world, Lucy sees a definite separation between the world of men and the world of women, especially in terms of what they can accomplish easily. Mariah takes her to the museum where Lucy sees a painting by a French painter. She says, “Of course his life could be found in the pages of a book; I had just begun to notice that the lives of men always are...he had the perfume of the hero about him. I was not a man; I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left my home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant” (95). At this point, Lucy makes clear the dilemma of representation that makes her story so important—the world is full of representations of great men and not as full of representations of average women (and especially average women from “the fringes of the world”). Her experience of underrepresentation does not lie only in books, however; she was even marginalized within her own family. Her three younger brothers were exalted and told they would go to university in the future and become important people, while Lucy’s potential for accomplishment was essentially ignored. Her mother’s part in this hurt her especially—“...my mother knew me well, as well as she knew herself; I...thought of us as identical; and whenever I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought of how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me...in a remotely similar situation” (130). Lucy began to both hate and love her mother when her mother began to marginalize her. When her fellow woman turned against her and ignored her potential,

she became bitter about the world in general; she knew that if she couldn't be equally represented within her own family, she couldn't be represented within her own country and, perhaps, in the entire world. The opportunity for her brothers to go to England helped to promote the sexism found in her family and in the native patriarchal system because of the high prestige and high cost associated with going to England; because of the money, her family did not feel as justified sending their daughter as they did sending their three sons.

Although her mother had a hand in her limited representation, Lucy also still sees women as a general ally and friend, more important to her upbringing than men. Lucy says "My past was my mother; I could hear her voice, and she spoke to me not in English or the French patois that she sometimes spoke, or in any language that needed help from the tongue; she spoke to me in a language anyone female could understand" (90). This role of this unspoken female language in her past draws her to Mariah, because Mariah reminds her of her mother. It is striking that she says "anyone female," not "anyone female in my country" or something similar, because this assumes a universal sisterhood, a universal idea of womanhood and shared experience that we also haven't seen in the other books (but also one that Kincaid, feeling separate from the colonizing power, would probably not agree to extend to people outside of her oppressed situation).

However, even in spite of this ancient separation of histories, Lucy feels so close to Mariah that she even tells her the intimate details of her sex life with her boyfriend Paul (113). These seem too private a conversation to have between employer and employee—rather, it is a conversation between equals, and it seems that Lucy and Mariah

are just that. Lucy speaks of their friendship multiple times and the subjects they speak about seem to support that. This provides us with yet another first—interracial female friendship, still colored a bit badly due to the employer-employee status, but the closest thing to a friendship of equals than we have yet seen. Does this suggest that it is possible to move past the racial boundaries, the boundaries of colonizer and colonized, and form real friendships, or is this constantly simply reinforcing the control of oppressors? It may have been alright for Lucy (who is obviously very outspoken about her beliefs) to be friends with an American, but perhaps it would not be as ok with her to be friends with an English person (since they were her true colonizers).

After her earlier obsession with her past-- with the “hundreds of years” in every glance—and a year in Mariah’s employ, Lucy seems to have a different outlook: “Your past is the person you no longer are, the situations you are no longer in” (137). This attitude seems much more willing to separate the past from the present—in fact, it assumes a separation, that the people that occupied them were two different people and, perhaps, cannot be compared. Does her friendship with Mariah lead to this? Is this attitude the right one to take, considering the history she was so obsessed with before? Or is this phrase just in reference to her personal past and not to the past of the country, which she still cannot escape? Perhaps; she says, “History is full of great events; when the great events are said and done, there will always be someone, a little person, unhappy, dissatisfied, discontented, not at home in her own skin, ready to stir up a whole new set of great events again” (147). This phrase still references Lucy’s uncertainty, an uncertainty tied to her gender just as much as to her postcolonial native status. Perhaps she desires to

remove herself from her past of double colonization under the Western regime, her “skin” which ties her back to her home of the West Indies in this world of white Americans; however, she also has a small confidence in the idea that the “dissatisfied, discontent” people of the world can make big change—that perhaps others will notice her country will one day if they speak out, that one day the world will notice her if she speaks out.

If we look at the Caribbean (specifically Antigua and Trinidad) through the lens of these works, it seems as though we cannot get a definitive picture of womanhood, although we do get some previously unexplored insights. Women do appear to come second in the pecking order—men are important and therefore representative of the native patriarchy; however, the ways in which women choose to assert themselves seem very different. In “A Flag on the Island,” Selma asserts herself by buying a house, but still says that the men in her life are stronger than herself (although she owns just as much property as they). In *A Small Place*, we do not get much context for the mother character—we only know she is politically active and willing to stand up to authority, but these two facts about her stand alone, providing us with an anecdotal rather than full picture of her. Finally, in *Lucy*, we see the first-person workings of the mind of a young woman—the first novel that uses the female first person voice, which makes it feel much more personal (and gives us full access into the somewhat bitter thoughts of the main character). Most strikingly in *Lucy*, Kincaid provides us with insight into a woman’s perception of her own sexuality and her decision to exercise that sexuality to the fullest extent: as Lucy says, “I reminded [my mother] that my whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut; I then gave a brief description of my

personal life, offering each detail as evidence that my upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable, thank you very much” (127). This statement, of course, references the various lovers Lucy has while she works as a nanny, none of them with men whom she loves, but rather simply with men whom she finds interesting. She does not seem at all ashamed by this behavior, although her mother would be.

Does this then suggest that perhaps she has escaped the traditional confines of her life at home and has become free from traditional social standards? Or, looking at the image of the sexualized female presented by the idea of Orientalism, does this simply confirm Western perceptions of women like her as inevitably sexualized beings? She seems to have escaped in more ways than her sexuality—one of the most powerful examples of Lucy’s true feelings come when her mother’s goddaughter, Maude, comes to inform Lucy her father has died. Maude tells Lucy that she seems very much like her own mother, especially in her moment of grief, and Lucy replies ““I am not like my mother. She and I are not alike. She should not have married my father. She should not have had children. She should not have thrown away her intelligence. She should not have paid so little attention to mine. She should have ignored someone like you. I am not like her at all”” (123). Lucy clearly denounces the decisions of her mother, a woman who embodies the traditional mother of Lucy’s home culture, who took care of Lucy’s father and her brothers in a way that Lucy does not seem willing to endure. Lucy is unwilling to “throw away her intelligence,” even though at the end of the novel she has abandoned nursing as a profession and has no plan. She still considers this better than life at home because, in

America, she owns her own roof (or rents it) and takes complete charge of her own life and her own decisions. This attitude seems strikingly similar to that of Efurū; however, while Efurū, living within the postcolonial nation, accepted both the native and Western traditions, Lucy completely throws away the native culture and fully embraces the Western, while simultaneously professing her dislike for Western colonialism. She embraces significant aspects of Western culture which she finds to be important, and asserts herself within the Western patriarchal paradigm by adopting the very abilities put forth by the Western educational tradition.

Perhaps Lucy values her independence over her intelligence, for only by being independent can Lucy exert her intelligence at the level she desires. This similar desire for independence, for having one's own home, is also demonstrated by Selma in "A Flag on the Island" when she sells the original house she and Frankie shared and instead buys one of her own in a new area, in many ways giving herself a fresh start. In *A Small Place*, the author seems to desire a fresh start in a better government, specifically a government that could rebuild her library so that she could regain this aspect of her childhood. In each of the three books women move toward self-direction, but they only achieve it at varying levels. Selma achieves it somewhat, but only after she is no longer with Frankie, the American; in contrast, Lucy's independence is dependent on the lifestyle she can live while working in America. These continuing economic ties between the Caribbean islands and the Western world cause much impoverishment within the countries, but also opportunity for advancement—but only if the natives can get out of the country and achieve independence from their pasts.

The next chapter will focus on India and the heavy female influence that seems to pervade that culture. While the characters in Kincaid seem to try to remove themselves from their traditions, the characters in these Indian stories seem drenched in it and are drowning, unable to escape the heavy weight of a past infused with colonial as well as native ideals. Salman Rushdie's novels explore the pervasiveness of the female in the lives of the male narrators, narrators whose lives and worlds are shaped and molded by the women around them. Arundhati Roy, on the other hand, seems to focus much more on the political in her stories, somewhat turning the tables on the previous assumption that female authors are more likely to write about women than male authors.

Chapter Four: India

This final nation has a colonial history longer than that of either Nigeria or Antigua. European control of India, in many ways the jewel of colonialism, began in 1498 when Vasco de Gama first established a trade route there, but it did not officially become a British colony until the late 18th century. From that time until India's independence in 1947, British culture heavily influenced the culture of India, affecting everything from their school systems to their religion. During this time, the British provided India with new technologies such as the telegraph and railroad and later more modern conveniences ("Colonization"); these technologies were inserted under the auspices of helping the Indian people, but, of course, these also helped the British to control the area more effectively. The deep connection to Western culture is still felt throughout India as it is in most post-colonial nations.

Within this very typically British, patriarchal history, women have played a large, but rather silent, role. This role was, of course, first described by a British woman, Katherine Mayo, in her 1927 book *Mother India*, so titled because of a chapter in which she contrasted the great nationalist image of Mother India against the actual treatment of Indian women. She did this not to promote the rights of Indian women, but rather in order to convince the world that India could not rule itself and must remain within the imperial regime. She hoped to get the support of Indian women, but they turned against her idea and further supported Indian nationalism, a move that turned Mother India into a more effective national image that eventually helped India to gain independence (Sinha 623). The image of "Mother India" was later brought to life in a 1957 film, an image of an

upstanding woman who always keeps her morals in the face of poverty and trial, a role model for the cohesive idea of India as a nation.

Regardless of the power of this image as a figurehead, and despite the women's movement that began in India about the time of the movements for independence, real-life (and especially lower-class) Indian women were expected to remain within the home and not assume public roles, a process known as "purdah, or the seclusion of women" (Weickgennant 67). According to Nicole Weickgennant, "The nationalist image of the essential Indian woman was usually only concerned with the middle-class Indian woman..." (66), thus excluding huge numbers of the country's population of women. This nationalist image therefore assumed homogeneity for Indian women that did not exist in any way. Besides this, any movement in terms of women's rights depended "upon a predominantly male-dominated nationalist movement" (Sinha 624) in that the image of the independent, strong woman would supposedly be achieved in the new world that would come into existence if India received independence. This implies that, without independence, women would never achieve a rights movement, possibly because the limited rights of men under the colonial regime would make them unwilling to share any of those limited rights with women.

This tension between women's role as leaders and free-thinkers and their role as housebound mothers and wives fills the writings of both Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. Rushdie studied at Cambridge and has lived in England since the orthodox Iranian leadership placed a fatwa (order of death) on him in 1989 ("Salman Rushdie"). Roy left home at 16 and lived as a homeless person in Delhi before training as an architect at the

Delhi School of Architecture. Although they lived different lives, both have won the Booker prize in Literature (a British award) and thus have been recognized for their work by the once-colonizer, which is somewhat ironic.

Rushdie's third novel, *Midnight's Children*, details the story of a group of children all born on the eve of Indian independence, and who find themselves possessed with magical powers as a result. This novel portrays women in an almost magical, fantastic way; Rushdie presents them as mortal women who transform others (especially men), an idea reminiscent of the priestess Chielo in *Things Fall Apart*, but taking place in a much more everyday and powerful context. The first instance in which we see this behavior is Amina Sinai's transformation of her husband, Ahmed. This transformation is very special because it is not simply a mental transformation (or one of naming, as he had done, changing her name from Mumtaz to Amina) but a physical one. Saleem, their son and the narrator, says that "...Ahmed, without knowing or suspecting, found himself and his life worked upon by his wife until, little by little, he came to resemble—and to live in a place that resembled—a man he had never known and an underground chamber he had never seen" (Rushdie 74). The phrase "worked upon" suggests that Amina makes a conscious effort to change Ahmed, and the fact that she does it without his "knowing or suspecting" suggests that she did this secretly and subversively. This suggests that she did it almost by magic—Rushdie himself in fact says that it was "a painstaking magic so obscure that Amina was probably unaware of working it" (74). Perhaps this 'obscure' magic lies in the power of Amina's love for Nadir Khan, a love so strong that she could only love a man who resembled him—with his haircut, his weight, and his living

conditions. This love is what changes him, and it is not until later in the narrative that Amina begins to love Ahmed for who he really is, only after she has left Nadir in her past and has looked fully at her husband.

Amina's power over her husband is transformative, to be certain, but it only occurs because of her initial inability to choose her own partner (due to the marriage customs in India). After her husband Nadir leaves her, Ahmed Sinai simply decides he will marry Amina and change her name. Since Amina has no choice in this matter (her response to the name-change is "Whatever you say, my husband" (Rushdie 68)), she must instead exert her power through this much smaller avenue—since she cannot have Nadir Khan, she will instead create a home-life that is as close to the one she had with Nadir as it could possibly be. Her love for Nadir also leads to her exploration of her own body witnessed by her son Saleem hiding in her laundry hamper (Rushdie 183). This image—of a woman masturbating over the thoughts of a lover that is not her husband—is something that hasn't been depicted in any of the other novels discussed in this paper. This intimate moment with a woman perhaps shows Rushdie's willingness to explore even the smallest details about the lives of the women surrounding Saleem. However, it is important to note that this is not a fully private moment—Saleem is there, a male witness to the female action, and the story is only available to us through his re-telling of it, so that we only see this female representation through the eyes of the male. We depend on his reliability as a narrator (a male narrator) to ensure the truth of the story. Thus, the female is still transmitted through the male even though it may appear that she is more truly rendered.

In Mary Pereira's case, her love for Joseph leads her to commit the action of switching the two babies; she did this "for Joseph, her own private revolutionary act, thinking He will certainly love me for this..." (Rushdie 130). Mary hopes that her action will change Joseph's attitude toward her, that he will love her "for this"—she notably does not hope he will love her for herself, suggesting that she feels that he must love her for her action instead, the action that changes the identity of two children and gives the poorer one (Saleem) a chance at a grand life with his new family, the Sinais. The phrase "revolutionary act" accurately describes the actions of both Mary and Amina. Mary's revolution is obvious: changing the law of birth in hopes of winning the revolutionary Joseph's love—however, Amina, too, engages in her own revolution, subverting the idea that she should love her husband and instead making her husband into someone that she can love. Both women exert their power to alter the essence of others, a power that may seem unusual if one looks at the image of the submissive woman.

Women in India, however, are chiefs of the household realm. Amina Yaqin explores the changing role of the woman in post-colonial India, saying that "Participation in the outer 'material domain' of politics was deemed to be a necessary move towards modernity...but with the retention of an authentic, inner 'spiritual self'...essential for the preservation of a true Indian identity" (69). Thus, Amina and Mary, as "modern" women of India, serve as these two models, the bearer of tradition and the woman involved in politics, respectively. Amina, in trying to be a good Indian wife, simply uses her husband to make her traditional role as wife more bearable (by turning him into her rather more untraditional lover) and Mary has moved into the 'material domain' of politics through

her small revolutionary act—an act to try to equate the classes, to change the political and social status quo of India through the exchange of two children. However, both have retained their “Indian identity” with these small shifts, never stepping outside of the roles both were initially given, never blatantly going against the form of things (until Amina leaves her husband, but that is only at her mother’s orders) (Rushdie 325).

Saleem’s fellow *Midnight’s Child*, Parvati-the-witch, contributes one of the most significant changes in Saleem’s life, in a sense performing a rebirth for Saleem, not through any sort of magic but because “Parvati-the-witch saw me, and gave me back my name” (Rushdie 436). By telling him his name, Parvati gives him back his past and his identity. Catherine Cundy says that, for Rushdie, “woman can therefore confer and destroy the sense of a man’s identity” (14). Parvati the Witch provides the greatest evidence of this, for just minutes after she gives Saleem his name back, she takes away his identity by placing him in her “basket,” described in language suggesting a state of death, or being in the womb. Saleem says that “I returned, cloaked in invisibility, to the land of my birth... I hung in a sphere of absence” and he further says that he had “acquired the characteristics of ghosts...that ghosts, too, begin to forget...” (Rushdie 438). The fact that Parvati can not only take away or give him his identity (much as Mary Pereria gave him his identity by switching him at birth) but can also erase the memories of his past shows that she has significant power over him. Later in the same passage, Saleem says that “Transformations spring upon him in the enclosed dark” (Rushdie 439). The idea that each of his transformations occur in these womb-like spaces suggest literal rebirths—again, inextricably tied to the image of womanhood and motherhood, as though

each life-changing moment occurs through and because of women, making his history tied up in the histories of the women around him and not removable.

This important but silent role of women in the history of the nation is demonstrated most effectively by Aunt Alia, a striking character specifically because she manipulates not only one person, but hundreds of people, which puts her on equal power-footing with the terrors of the Widow, who holds a political office. She is possessed (like Chielo, like Ezinma, like the Widow), except where the Widow is possessed with this fear of other ‘gods’—a fear of her power being usurped by the power of others—Alia is possessed with frustrations, with vengeance, for “Having allowed her old-maid frustrations to leak into the curricula...she had raised a tribe of children and young adults who felt themselves possessed by an ancient vengefulness, without fully knowing why” (Rushdie 378). Saleem uses this “leaking” imagery earlier in the book when he speaks of Padma “leaking into him,” which seems to suggest that women possess some sort of liquid force (the water of the womb comes to mind) that just waits for a crack in the shells of others so they can slip in unannounced. This slow leakage contributes to the children not “knowing why” they have this vengefulness, just like Ahmed Sinai didn’t know why he was changing (or even the fact that he was changing).

These transformations that are wrought by women are slow, steady ones, ones that may pass nearly unnoticed to the casual observer, but that Saleem picks up in an instant (and may, in fact, resent). Saleem himself possesses some of these powers—he has his Aunt Alia’s ability to “impregnat[e] food with emotions” (378) and he uses it to his advantage in his later work at the pickle factory when he jars up his life. However, he

finds his infusion of emotions somehow noble, while he seems to regard hers as something intrusive, as something that she forces on others without their knowledge—and as something perhaps much more powerful than his own ability, for indeed she changed the minds of not only her own family out of her vengefulness, but also an entire generation of her students—a contribution to the future of India that Saleem could never hope to achieve. Perhaps he resents this power and for this reason regards it as less noble than his own power—a fairly typical move that would have been understandable considering Saleem’s overriding concern with his own centrality. As he says, “Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I’m prepared to distort everything—to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?” (190). This constant desire to be the central character may be distorting his perception of the women in his life, placing all of their actions in relation to himself and perhaps leaving out some of the actions that did not involve him, again placing the depiction on shaky ground.

And, of course, the most intrusive of all, The Widow—the woman whom we never physically meet but whose Hand and Son act with such destructive tendencies that she cannot be ignored. She physically embodies this transformative power both in her actions and within her own self; she sends the order to destroy the slums and sends the order to sterilize the Midnight’s Children, but she can also change her own appearance by simply turning her head, changing from “snow-white on one side and black-asnigh on the other...she resembled either a stoat or an ermine” (Rushdie 460). Snow-white, although it initially seems a sign of purity, also suggests a weakness, a femininity and

victimization, like that of Snow White, who was betrayed by the evil Queen (perhaps her black-as-night side). The references to the stoat or ermine (for they are the same animal, called different names depending on the season and thus the color of their coat) suggest a two-facedness. The stoat or ermine is also called a weasel, further suggesting an unpredictable, backhanded, sneaky nature, a monstrosity which becomes unmanageable (“Stoat”). This is perhaps what makes The Widow—and all of these women—most feared by Saleem—because he cannot predict what they will do, he cannot control and classify their actions in the way that he classifies his own. Saleem is unsure of their power, unsure always of what it means for him, and this makes him feel as though he does not have control.

Saleem is very aware of the power of these women, yet he constantly tries to place himself above them (as in the case of the emotional food). He says this himself when he states, “From ayah to widow, I’ve been the sort of person *to whom things have been done*; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist” (Rushdie 272). This suggests that he, in fact, holds a secondary position to the women in his life—however, he refuses to reconcile that, afraid of not being in control because this invalidates his “claim to a place at the center of things” (272). This very action seems to be the one that the postcolonial narrative, beginning with Achebe, attempted to achieve—in order to provide a cohesive narrative of the nation, as many variables as possible were removed, and women were one of these variables, even for a young man as affected by them as Saleem Sinai. Nicole Weickgenannt suggests that “women’s alleged monstrosity is... a patriarchal strategy to discredit their attempt to lead a more self-determined life”

(80). This places Saleem's depictions into the patriarchal category and therefore on a similar side to the colonizer. Where it does seem that Saleem describes women more truthfully in this novel than in some of the others, perhaps they are just presented in more detail and Saleem interprets these detailed actions as something much more sinister than reality. Their actions come from either a desire to or a result of claiming a place for themselves: Amina trying to create happiness, Mary trying to make a definitive action for the cause, Parvati finding a place with the boy she has loved since childhood, Alia achieving power in the classroom where she never had it in the home, and, of course, The Widow, working to protect her own godlike state. Saleem at various times admits to his potential delusions of grandeur, and perhaps these depictions of women result from a fear that they, in their quest for place and power, will attempt to usurp him. These delusional placements of extreme power (which could be a creation of his own paranoid mind) are immediately shot down by Padma, who says, "They are just women, that's all."

So perhaps women are not simply transforming Saleem- perhaps they control the very narrative itself and thus create not only Saleem's world but the very way he describes it. These women don't simply change the narrative—they are the narrative. The actions of women push along the plot and make the narrative possible. Whether Saleem depicts them as sinister or as enterprising, the über-importance of women in Saleem's personal history (and thus the history of this book and of India) shows that the subversive women's history, ignored in much postcolonial writing, truly cannot continue to be so. For, even if women did not engage in politics, they raised politicians, they raised the children of politicians, and they kept the culture and molded the young minds of the

future leaders. Most simply, and yet most importantly, they were *there*, a fact which Rushdie brings up most emphatically, and they did not sit passively, but they changed the thoughts and minds of the people around them, whether they did so through witchcraft or not.

Rushdie further subverts the traditional male-female role in his novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, creating female characters that not only possess the power to change their husbands, but are in fact able to control them as the dominant figure in the partnership. The relationship between Francisco and Epifania de Gama demonstrates this tendency of binary separation of power within the marital structure. We see this power change occur after Francisco begins to abandon his convictions after his Transformational Fields of Conscience (networks of spiritual energy that affect everyone in the world) become a joke. As he falls in power, Epifania begins to glory in it, saying "For love or what else I gave in to your fancies? But see where they have brought you. Now for love you must give in to mine" (Rushdie 22). In this quote, we see two things happening. We first see Epifania taking the reins in the family, saying that now her fancies will be law just as Francisco's were (when he was "all bustle and energy" (Rushdie 18), and constantly moved his family between impractical backyard homes despite Epifania (and the household's) protests) and she takes Francisco's place in the 'masculine' tradition of forward thought and action. She, in fact, absorbs his masculinity and makes it her own, as suggested by Moor when he says that "Epifania swallowed the news of his death without a tremor. She ate his death as she had eaten his life; and grew" (Rushdie 24). This suggests that Epifania can only exert power in the absence of her husband's power, that

she must possess both his will and her own—there is no chance that both Francisco and Epifania could exist as equals. One must have ‘consumed’ the other in order to gain power—and thus Epifania grows in her domestic role by filling the place of two parents. Additionally, Rushdie says that “now for love [Francisco] must give in to [Epifania’s fancies]” (Rushdie 22). This important fact shows that this power is not consumed through a hostile takeover; rather, Epifania takes this power from Francisco in a way that seems as though he gives it, as though Francisco must pay his dues in the form of love, the same love which she gave to him.

Francisco and Epifania’s peaceful power takeover sets the tone for her subsequent relationship with her sons, whom she raises in the sphere of her great domestic power, and for their later relationships with their lovers. Camoens and Aires are born into a sort of a vacuum where, as Belle says, “Somebody [in your house] is casting a spell and sucking life out of you and your poor dad” (Rushdie 23). The placid males that this Epifania-made spell creates leaves an open door for Belle, another strong woman who soon sucks Camoens into a more life-giving, but still controlling, vacuum. After the Lobos-Menezes duel and the imprisonment of Camoens and Aires, Belle takes charge—in a different way, however, than Epifania. She certainly takes charge of the house, splitting it in half and claiming her power much as Epifania had, but she also saves the company (failing under the weak guidance of the downtrodden Camoens and Aires). She, even more so than Epifania, becomes a man, wearing pants, becoming the powerful one in the relationship in both the public and private sphere. She takes the existing weakness of Camoens de Gama and becomes not only someone whom he loves, but essentially his

savior, influencing both his home life, his political ideals and his economic prosperity in a way that Epifania never did for Francisco. While this sort of behavior would have seemed fairly normal at the time (it was expected that Indian women would keep the family business while the men were away) (Jung 93), the behavior with which Belle did it went directly against the traditionally feminine Indian woman, who, as Anees Jung says, “should not show special interest in [her husband]...[or] address him directly” (93) a rule that most Indian women probably break, but Belle completely destroys, when she says (on her deathbed, no less), “Damn it, Camoens... If you fuck up what I unfucked for you once, you better hope I’m around to unfuck it for you twice” (Rushdie 49). She fixes his irrational mistakes (especially regarding the company), and he knows it, for after she says this, “beside himself with anxiety, [he] bursts into tears boiling with his love” (Rushdie 49). The fact that he cried may have seemed weak, but the idea that his passionate love warmed his tears to the ‘boiling’ point shows an aspect of her power over him, for if he loves her this much, there is probably little chance that he would ever try to cross her.

This same process of female strength leading to male adoration may seem to have brought Aurora and Abraham together, for once Aurora’s heart decided that she loved Abraham Zogoiby (weaker than her both personality-wise as well as economically, considering he was one of her employees) no one could stop her. Abraham’s initial admiration (and his visible feelings for most of the book) for Aurora seems similar to the Belle-Camoens relationship, with Aurora pushing him along, saying of their initial tryst, “Seems to me I was the puller, not the pulled. Seems to *me* that Abie was the know-nothing, and I was one smart fifteen-year-old cookie” (Rushdie 89). Abraham is, like

Camoens, the “know-nothing” to Aurora, the one who knows little about the world (especially the sexual one), and Aurora must teach him and show him and save him. All three men—Abraham, Camoens, and, later, Moor-- have been brought up with this idea that the women do the talking and the saving. Thus each of these relationships with the dominant female and the subservient male, have an element reminiscent of the previous mother-son relationship, with the dominant lover now replacing the dominant mother.

Anees Jung says that “Between a mother and son there is everywhere in India a strong, tender, unchanging, dependable bond” (104). Neither in this book nor in *Midnight’s Children* do we see such an idealized and sentimental bond forming between any of these men and their mothers—the love is not tender, nor, with the mercurial attitudes of the women, is it particularly dependable, and although it may be very strong while it lasts, the relationship between the mother and son undergoes a huge change when one major thing happens: love. Flory Zogoiby sees it when she says to the walls, “‘At least he fell for a pushy girl’ ... ‘I had that much influence while he was still my son’” (Rushdie 83). The wife replaces the mother as the mother—so, in a way, that feeling of adoration and tenderness may be very dependable, and may never change; just the object of affection changes. No matter the change of person, however, the men still desire this type of powerful, domineering woman.

This desirability may come from this combination of extreme power and extreme beauty found in these women. The power they hold does not seem natural—in fact, multiple times in the book, Moor ascribes an almost mystical quality to the power that women possess (similar to the qualities of the women in *Midnight’s Children*). Looking

again at Belle's statement to Camoens, we see that she believes that "Somebody [in your house] is casting a spell and sucking life out of you and your poor dad" (their mother, Epifania) (Rushdie 23). This witch-like power is not limited to family members, however. Later, when Aurora does her famously subversive 'Chipkali' lizard paintings, Kekoo Mody puts them in a hall and, when he is arrested because of them, he doesn't care, "for he had been under her spell from their first meeting" (Rushdie 131). Yet later, Aurora says of Uma to Moor "You must break her magic spell,' my mother said, 'or you are done for...'" (Rushdie 267).

This theme of spells and spell-casting provides a different idea of womanhood than appears in the rest of the text, the idea of a strong and decisive womanhood. The idea of spells evokes trickery and witchcraft, a rather more feminine association and one closely tied with sexuality. This element of the mystical within these otherwise rather masculine women keeps their power somewhat ambivalent, the same ambivalence found in the characters of Chielo and Efuru in the earlier Nigerian novels. Efuru's powers manifested themselves in personal wealth and an inability to bear children; Chielo was only powerful when possessed by the spirit of her god. Rushdie's women possess a power that is much more innate and physically tangible, at least as seen through the eyes of Saleem, who believes that these powers to change and control truly really exert influence.

If one looks at these spells as something a bit less supernatural, less like the witchcraft of *Midnight's Children* and instead analogous for the inordinate amount of affection that these women seem to evoke in men, one can see that this witchcraft

actually undermines the masculine traits of the female. Although it seems that it is nearly impossible to escape from this strong female domination, they do require one thing to retain this power-- the love and adoration of the men surrounding them. Amina Yaqin, when speaking about overall trends in Rushdie's works, says that "Love, in these novels, often appears fragile and its tender affections are frequently overturned or even crushed by the machinations of power and authority" (69). In most instances of this struggle within relationships in the novel, power does win out. But which characters truly hold the power? We have seen that the beautiful woman who speaks her mind (Aurora and Belle) usually pulls the subservient man into love, into a relationship where the woman serves as a goddess and the man simply one of her many worshippers (for both Aurora and Belle are rumored to have had many lovers.) But it would be illogical for the women's power to crush this love, since their power depends on it. And in many ways, they do not possess the power to destroy this love. As Moor says of his mother, "If she trampled over us, it was because we lay down willingly beneath her spurred and booted feet...It was when I finally realized this that I forgave my father, for we were all her slaves, and she made our servitude feel like Paradise. Which, they say, what goddesses do" (172). The goddess quality of the women makes the men feel good about their weaker state; however, at the same time, this desire to "lay down willingly" provides a crucial aspect of the relationship. What would occur if the men chose not to lie down? Could the woman then trample over them? No. What, then, would make these men choose to no longer lie down? What is powerful enough to replace their love for their goddess-woman? It is their love for power itself. This lust for power is most fully articulated in the character of

Abraham, who, in all of his efforts to keep Aurora wealthy enough so that she can paint, is eventually consumed by the underworld that he has created; he becomes more interested in his power than in Aurora, and thus their love disintegrates.

Aurora's downfall is brought about by this absence of this love. Abraham, who had given up Judaism for his wife, in his quest for power gives up his history, made even more terrible because through this refusal he seeks to destroy his own past in the form of Israel and family. When Abraham begins to desire power over both past and love, he must desire to bring down his wife, for Abraham, like Epifania, can only be in his greatest power capacity once Aurora is dead and he can finally, as Moor says, "take over Eden in the absence of Aurora and God" (Rushdie 187). Thus, Abraham in many ways controls the very worlds that Aurora seems to control with a somewhat special power not evident in the previous couples. First, in this relationship, Aurora actually relied on Abraham to keep her wealthy, and although she may have downplayed it, his money was in fact necessary to her survival as an artist and thus as a person (and just as equally his duty in society, for, even though in traditional India Aurora may not have had many written rights, one of those was "entitle[ment] to maintenance by [her] male kin") (Jung 92).

The fact that it is Abraham's duty does not make Aurora any less dependent; in fact, because of this dependence, we see Aurora making a very atypical choice of inaction (just as she had done with her dying grandmother), the only instance we see inaction regarding Abraham and her marriage. Aurora silently lets Abraham cheat on her, something that surprises Moor, for he knows that his mother "was not one to take

anything lying down. She was a confronter... Yet, when faced with the ruin of her life's great love... [she] never offered her husband an angry word" (Rushdie 223). The fact that Moor uses the word "offered" suggests that Aurora's anger at his infidelity could have been used as a sort of gift, something to remind Abraham of her power and keep him out of his underworld, offering him the opportunity to adore her yet again. But no- she takes the inactive route, and instead of rising in power through inaction as she had done when Epifania died (for Epifania's death meant that Aurora could consume her life and grow just as Epifania had done to Francisco) she instead allows Abraham's power to grow, that same power that consumes her, her existence as the "Young Lady of Thread-Needle Street" (the woman who constantly kept her lips from speaking the truth, almost as if she had sewed them shut) eventually leading to her death (Rushdie 107), for, of course, this "Thread-Needle Street" had deeper implications than finances.

Moor exposes that the "feeling of being pursued" that he and his mother often felt "was true...Abraham Zogoiby had had us both followed for years" (Rushdie 310) and Abraham, although he had told Aurora of Moor's doings, never told Aurora that he had her followed. This secret watching, this underground network of spies, was a benefit of his Mogambo self and allowed him to see things (such as Aurora's potential infidelities, and thus flaws) that none of the previous men could have been sure of. Although Belle cheated on the imprisoned Camoens, he really had no way to know, and Moor himself says that "in spite of all her screwing around, I insist; what existed between Camoens and Belle was the real McCoy!" (Rushdie 48)--real, perhaps, because Camoens loved blindly, loved the goddess rather than the woman. Although Moor admires his parents' "pepper

love,” he never exalts their love for one another quite in this fashion, perhaps simply because pure love could not exist in a relationship where there was knowledge of each others’ shortcomings and a conflict (and thus a overriding sense of distrust) between the visible power of the woman and the palimpsest male power underneath.

This underground world of male power is perhaps the most striking part of this novel, finally showing that, although women may have the power to transform (in *Midnight’s Children*) and to visibly control (in *Moor*), the men always have the final word because they control the most important things—the money and the government. This shows that, although Rushdie may portray his women as having a lot of power, it is limited to the sphere of the home and the family business and cannot be fully liberating. Inderpal Grewal suggests that Rushdie places Moor “...in a peripheralized position similar to that of women” (26). Even though the women seem to call the shots, they, like Moor, are separated from the palimpsest underworld where all of the real power lies. Thus, the struggle for power in this book is not just between men and women, but between their associated underworld and overworld. Although they can both exist, only one can have the real power. The back-and-forth movement of power, of consumption of wills, defines the gender relationships of these characters and, although the interactions promote an emancipated womanhood, they also show that at least where true power is concerned, the key lies in the corrupt underworld of India, the terror below the great mother, the secret men that keep the idea of India afloat.

Arundhati Roy wrote more recently than Rushdie by only a few years, and her experiences are unique. She lived as a homeless person by choice in Delhi from the time

she was sixteen until she studied architecture and met her husband. Unlike Rushdie, she wrote only one novel, but it too won the Booker Prize (“Arundhati Roy”). This novel, *The God of Small Things*, tells the story of twins, a boy and a girl, growing up and trying to find their place in Karala, India in the late 1960’s. In this novel, Roy seems to depict women as less powerful than Rushdie does; generally, the depictions lie more in the realm of the everyday than the magical transformative abilities of Rushdie’s women. In fact, these women seem unable to achieve or escape their situations. The children’s grandfather beats their grandmother, Mammachi, throughout their entire marriage, brutally, so much that “On her scalp, carefully hidden by her scanty hair, Mammachi had raised, crescent-shaped ridges. Scars of old beatings from an old marriage. Her brass-vase scars” (Roy 159). However, it is only through the death of her husband that she escapes this, not through any action of her own. Although she does own the pickle factory, this occurs only after her husband dies, because before that he would shut down any of her attempts to achieve—while they lived in Vienna, Mammachi took violin lessons which Pappachi stopped when Mammachi’s teacher “made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and in his opinion, potentially concert class” (Roy 49). He does this because he does not wish Mammachi to succeed and thus controls her actions so she cannot have any freedom or self-confidence.

Rahel, although much freer than her grandmother, also cannot achieve happiness. Her marriage with the American fails miserably (mostly because she does not love him) and she seems to have had a dismal time in America. It is unclear why she is so unhappy, but one reason is the destruction of Velutha, the man whom she and Estha and Ammu all

loved, the “God of Small Things.” The last definitive action she and Estha made was to go across the river, which led to Sophie Mol’s death, Velutha’s beating and arrest (on false counts of kidnapping) and his eventual death. After that, a series of actions were done to Rahel and Estha—Estha was sent to his father and Rahel was left with her grandmother and Baby Kochamma while her mother tried to get a job. Perhaps this inability to make her own decisions after this period has made her aimless and confused, without any sense of urgency or direction.

The character perhaps most like a Rushdian woman—specifically, like Aunt Alia—is Rahel’s great-aunt Baby Kochamma, who, as a young girl, fell madly in love with Father Mulligan, a priest friend of her father’s, and continues to love him into old age, even after his death. This lost love has instilled the same bitterness in her as it did Aunt Alia. At one point, Roy says that “Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less Woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma” (Roy 45). The idea that a woman without a man is “wretched” shows the culturally accepted idea of female dependence on the male, although none of the women in the novel experience this. However, regardless of her marital status, Baby Kochamma is manipulative, using her power over Mammachi as well as Estha and Rahel, forcing them to falsely implicate Velutha in order to prevent her from telling (lying to) the police and saying that Estha and Rahel murdered Sophie Mol (Roy 300). Her need to be right (and her need to assert her class influence over Velutha, whom she really wants gone because Ammu has engaged in sexual relations with him) causes her to hurt others whom

she deems beneath her, an interesting class aspect that we have not yet seen—“Baby Kochamma’s fear...was an ancient, age-old fear. The fear of being dispossessed” (Roy 67). This is striking because this fear of being dispossessed motivated many of the colonizers, and now Baby Kochamma (a native) hurts her fellow natives in order to preserve her own caste-order. This tension between the classes was hinted at in *Midnight’s Children*, but was not presented as clearly or focally in any of the novels except perhaps Kincaid’s *Lucy*. This tension essentially leads to the downfall of the family because of Ammu and Velutha’s relationship, showing that, at least in this case, power is repressed just as effectively by both gender and social status.

Ammu is perhaps the most independent and simultaneously dependent character in the story. She leaves her husband because of his alcoholism (similar to Amina Sinai in *Midnight’s Children*); however, while this emancipates her from him, it throws her back into the power-structure of her family. Of Rahel and Estha, “For the Time Being they had no surname because Ammu was considering reverting to her maiden name, though she said that choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give a woman much of a choice” (Roy 37). Ammu, by expressing this not-yet-discussed sentiment, has perhaps aligned herself most similarly to the Western feminist ideal. She resents her place in the family because it means that she has no autonomy and so she would rather have no last name (and no identity) than have to bear the name of an alcoholic husband or a father who beat her. Her views on marriage seem similarly cynical: “Ammu’s soft mouth would twist into a small, bitter smile at the memory—not of the wedding itself so much as the fact that she had permitted herself to be so

painstakingly decorated before being led to the gallows. It seemed so absurd. So futile” (Roy 43). The idea of marriage as “futile” is new in the literatures discussed—all of the other women depicted, even if they disliked their husbands, had not given up on the idea of marriage as a whole, or even given up on their marriage.

One could argue that knowledge of Western feminism (and the feminist movement) may have led Ammu to have this bad attitude toward would-be typical Indian (patriarchal) institutions. However, this is proven incorrect by a scene that happens when Margaret and Sophie Mol arrive.

‘Must we behave like some damn godforsaken tribe that’s just been discovered?’ Ammu asked....Leaving everybody to wonder where she had learned her effrontery from. And truth be told, it was no small wondering matter. Because Ammu had not had the kind of education, nor read the sorts of books, nor met the sorts of people, that might have influenced her to think the way she did. She was just that sort of animal. (171)

This suggests that this rebellion against the patriarchy (as well as the rebellion against colonial “othering” of the Indian people embedded in the opening statement) is something that Ammu inherently knows and does not need to be taught. However, she has not had the opportunity to be taught these ideas, suggesting that if she had been educated she might have had more of the tools she needed to escape the home life and patriarchal system which confined her. This inability to escape her familial role is blatantly evident in her name, Ammu—which means, of course, Mother. No one calls her by any other name at any time in the book, showing that although she can avoid the name

of her father and her husband, she cannot avoid the title that makes her a permanent part of the family—mother.

Since none of these women seem able to achieve much in terms of action, it is clear that someone must, and the men who are in charge of the government and civil groups do so. One of these men in Comrade Pillai, leader of the Communist movement, who uses the arrest of Velutha to blackball Chacko as an anti-communist, and the other is Inspector Thomas Mathew, head of the police force, who deals out the warrant for the arrest of Velutha. Rahel says of these two men that “they didn’t trust each other. But they understood each other perfectly...Men without curiosity. Without a doubt...They looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, because they knew. *They worked it*” (Roy 248). These are the same men who run the underworld-power of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, but they do not hide their power from the women and men around them—in fact, they flaunt it. Comrade Pillai’s wife “referred to her husband as *addeham*, which was the respectful form of ‘he,’ whereas ‘he’ called her ‘*edi*,’ which was, approximately, ‘Hey, you!’”(Roy 256). The women in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* would not have allowed their men to get away with such behavior, but for Comrade Pillai it is normal (and Chacko does not seem to mind much either).

The policemen that Inspector Mathews sends to follow Rahel, Estha and Velutha are described as being

“...only history’s henchmen... Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear; civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s

fear of powerlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify. Man's Needs" (Roy 292).

The final phrase, "Man's Needs," effectively sums up the actions of these policemen and suggests that this description doesn't just apply to the policemen, but rather to the greater umbrella of thought and action that qualifies as "Man's Needs," which could be representative of the patriarchy as a whole—the control of the heads of Okonkwo's tribe, the control of the Americans in *A Flag on the Island*, and the underworld control of Abraham in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The fact that the men work from fear again suggests the colonial situation and the fear that Baby Kochamma experiences, the "ancient, age-old fear. The fear of being dispossessed" (Roy 67). Roy explores this contempt that comes from fear much more fully than Rushdie. It is this fear—especially Inspector Mathews' fear that he has imprisoned and beaten an innocent Velutha—that leads to the story that comes out in the papers—"The Official Version" (Roy 287). This official version is not found only in the papers, however.

The story of the History House demonstrates this displacing and covering-up of the truth. The house, in its present, tourist-location state, is referred to as "the Heart of Darkness" (Roy 120), a clear reference to the othered world presented in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, perhaps echoing Conrad's suggestion that the darkness lies in the heart of the colonizer. This house is where the policemen beat Velutha and Rahel and Estha tried to escape, where "in the years that followed, the Terror (still-to-come) would be buried in a shallow grave. Hidden under the happy hummings of hotel cooks. The humbling of old Communists. The slow death of dancers. The toy histories that rich tourists came to play

with” (Roy 290). This suggestion that the nation has hidden the real, bloody history of this place under the façade of a nice tourist facility is a wonderful metaphor for how the real, bloody, complicated history of India itself—of the caste system, of the decimation of families, of the colonial regime—is hidden underneath the “official” history that is told to tourists and Westerners throughout the world, showing that perhaps the real India cannot be felt except by the women who experienced it and that they cannot really have much of a voice, or much power, other than what they can achieve on their own.

And even this limited female attempt at power cannot last. This fragility of power is evidenced in the final scene of the book, in which we finally see Ammu and Velutha together, having sexual relations and simply talking—but only about the Small Things. “...they knew they had to put their faith in fragility. Stick to Smallness. Each time they parted, they extracted only one small promise from each other: *Tomorrow? Tomorrow*” (Roy 321). Not only a small hope for these two lovers, this could be womanhood’s one small hope for the future, which they take one day at a time, hoping that something better will come but knowing that it very well could be something worse. The idea that they must “Stick to Smallness” suggests the powerlessness that this couple feels, trapped within the machines of men like Comrade Pillai and Inspector Mathews, unable to make their own future and instead reliant on the action or inaction of those around them.

It seems then that although womanhood does occupy a special place in the culture of India, the representations of that womanhood vary drastically, showing that perhaps the multitudinous and diverse scatterings of cultures and religions and classes all over India have made it impossible to pinpoint any sort of realistic female archetype. Certainly

women exhibit power within their family structures, but with varying degrees of success and, beyond that, their level of achievement seems scattered. Regardless of their power, however, it seems that in the end they still cannot escape the palimpsest underworld of male power that their power is in many ways dependent on—the male-run economy, the male-run police force, the male-run government, very much like the women in *Things Fall Apart* and “A Flag on the Island” They can achieve their little successes, but even if they take power over all or some of the men in their household they will never achieve the total power needed to be equal because men are always in control of those facilities, placing them under the constant power of the patriarchy of their nation that is inextricably tied up with the patriarchy of their once-colonizer. Women are incapable of achieving full representation because they will never be able to control the Official Story of India and thus will never be able to make all of their secret stories heard.

Even with these most recent authors, the representations demonstrate that the roles of women may have changed over time, but they have not changed significantly enough to constitute a challenge to the patriarchal system. These women in these three areas have made great strides in many different directions, but the two patriarchies have also held them captive in such a way as to make their full freedom impossible. Women may have mystical powers, either inherent or given by the gods; they may have the power to choose their employment and leave their nation; they may start their own businesses and boss around the men in their lives; however, regardless of all of these things, women are still tangibly constricted by both their native governments and their previous colonizers, whether through issues of actual representation, experiences with racism, or

through the further suppression of their struggles in order to promote more general political and nationalistic goals. Women in postcolonial nations will and must continue to strive; perhaps someday their double veil will lift and they will be able to meet the world on their own terms, in their own words.

Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to address a few important objectives. First I wanted to establish whether or not native depictions of native people were more mimetically accurate than the colonizer's depictions of the native people. Second, I wished to determine whether male or female authors provided a more mimetic depiction of native women specifically. Finally, I wished to discuss these two in tandem to attempt to answer the ultimate question: are native depictions of native women actually reinforcing the colonial opinion of those women because of continuing colonial involvement? To what extent does this behavior promote the double colonization evident throughout the world?

If mimetic representation is determined by length of discussion or dialogue, then the native literatures clearly outpaced *Heart of Darkness* in terms of accurate representation. The African woman never spoke in *Heart of Darkness*; in the native literatures, native women carry on at least a conversation, and in many cases speak at length. Due to the lack of representation in *Heart of Darkness*, determining whether the depiction of native women was accurate is difficult, but overall the novel often seems tinged with hints of racism and discriminates heavily against women. Determining what an accurate depiction of Nigerian, or Antiguan, or Indian womanhood entails is difficult for a Western white woman, but the native authors seem to provide much more material to analyze and discuss, thus giving more room for a more humanizing and detailed description, one that can be analyzed more as a representation of a person than a representation of an object.

I found it even more difficult to determine whether men or women more accurately described native women in their respective countries, especially considering that my entire opinion of the “true” woman of these countries is in many ways dependent on the literature that I am analyzing and I have no control subject to compare the literary figures to (as if a singular control subject would be in any way indicative of the whole). One criterion that I determined was to count the number of instances in which two women spoke to each other without a man present—since this is something that invariably happens between women and is thus a critical part of their daily life. In the two pieces of Nigerian literature, *Things Fall Apart* contained only one moment in which two women spoke to one another—the scene where Ekwefi and Chielo discuss the very ill Ezinma. However, this was not wholly a woman-to-woman moment because, at the time of the conversation, Chielo was acting in her capacity as high priestess and thus was not acting as a woman of the village but rather as the messenger of a god. On the other hand, *Efuru* abounds with conversations between women—conversations between Efuru and her mother-in-law, between Efuru and her friends, between Efuru and her young female servant. Nwapa explores many more types of relationships between women in the conversations throughout the book, giving a much fuller picture which, although perhaps not empirically “true,” is definitely more all-encompassing and provides much more insight into the typical relationships that existed between women within the Ibo culture.

When looking at the authorship and narration of *A Flag on the Island* and *Lucy*, it is interesting to find that the author’s and narrator’s gender are often the same, which further changes the process of women’s representation within the stories. Although it is

possible for authors to write in the voice of a narrator with the opposite gender this does not happen in any of the texts explored, which suggests that perhaps the authors prefer to represent their own gender within the text. These Caribbean texts are the first to introduce a first-person narrator, which adds far more personal detail but also introduces direct subjectivity—Naipaul, although technically a native of Trinidad, chooses to use an American soldier as his narrator, which changes the narrative in such a way that it almost becomes a blend of the colonial and native perspectives, the stance that many have accused Naipaul of taking (to the chagrin of many postcolonial authors). On the other hand, Kincaid's choice of the bitter Lucy as the narrator places Lucy's island home (an unspecified Caribbean island) in a position of subjectivity because Lucy views it with such a prejudiced lens—she rarely sees the good in her home because she desires so much to escape from it. Furthermore, Naipaul's narrator Frank tends to talk mostly about men, while Kincaid's Lucy tends to mostly talk about women, a similar pattern to that found in *Things Fall Apart* and *Efuru*, due probably in part to the fact that authors tend to talk about what they know and write in a comfortable voice, which promotes the matching gender of the author and the narrator. Because these present the point of view of individual characters, it is more difficult to ascribe a universalism to the stories told in these pieces, which is perhaps intentional, proof that the experience of the native cannot be universalized due to the danger of further stereotype. However, these two pieces, which seem to both embrace and reject nativism, provide a marked contrast to the pure nativism of *Things Fall Apart* and the easy compromise that *Efuru* achieves between the native and the Western world.

However, in the works of Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, the gender of focal characters no longer necessarily matches the gender of the narrator. In contrast to Achebe and Naipaul, Rushdie and his narrators, although all male, seem fairly obsessed with the women of the story, giving them the majority of the plot-moving actions and much of the page time, especially regarding discussions of their physical selves and their motives. Rushdie's narrators seem to exhibit a near-obsession with the women in his life, with everything that happens to him either caused by women or involving them in some way, oftentimes ending with a tragic, grand finish for one or more of the women involved. On the other hand, Roy does not seem as concerned with the plight of women. The main tragic figure in *The God of Small Things* is, instead of a disenfranchised woman, an impoverished male, and overall Roy's work seems more concerned with the issues of politics and class than the issues of women and their interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, she describes women in a much more realistic way that avoids the mysticism and almost godlike description of women that Rushdie provides. Perhaps Roy is a realist because she is a woman and thus the actions of the women in her story are mysterious to her than to Rushdie. Or, alternately, perhaps her realism results from her time of authorship, which is the most recent; in this era, she may see role of the class system and the inequality and unfairness that this creates among the people of India as more important than the question of gender. Perhaps the middle-class Indian women in Rahel's family become important only within the greater class movement in India—perhaps Ammu's affair creates Ammu's importance because it places her within this class conflict rather than because it provides proof of her actions as an independent woman.

However, it is only when she feels the freedom to act independently that she is able to engage in the class issues. Therefore, perhaps Roy suggests that middle-class Indian women have already achieved a good level of independence and that they should now put that independence to work in achieving independence for other groups of people. Thus Roy shows that women can be concerned with the greater picture of the country's status, and raise a national call to arms rather than a gendered one, a narrative that is reminiscent of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which writes against the problems facing society as a whole.

My initial thesis contested that, although these native authors may move ever closer to a mimetic depiction of their women, Western biases placed onto these literatures result in the literatures being used against the women of these nations to justify Western "assistance," thus perpetuating double colonization. The role of commerce and its ability to make the situations of women better was crucial to many of the stories, and also serves as an example of how Western perception of this phenomenon could lead to perpetuated "assistance." Most of the narratives took place in rather urban settings; the novel that was not, *Things Fall Apart*, women were placed in a heavily subservient position, a position which some of them hoped to improve by joining the white people's church. Efurum traded predominately with her own native people, but it was still commerce, especially her ability to trade with white people at a larger market, that made her a powerful figure. Does this suggest that one could argue that Westernization and cosmopolitanism can be used as tools of empowerment for native women? While Efurum's success was mainly assisted by her adherence to native values, her friendship and close ties with the Western

world (especially in the form of Difu, the Western-trained doctor) also helped to increase her status.

In Naipaul's *A Flag on the Island*, Selma's independence is directly facilitated by the fact that she works at the American-owned shirt factory. Frank implies that without this factory she would have very little opportunity to get a job. Kincaid's Lucy can only achieve independence (or what she hopes will be independence) from her family and her past once she enters America and works for an American family long enough to buy an apartment in an American city. This independence would be impossible without the assistance of America (although she seems to dislike most of the people she meets and still blames them for her misfortunes). Rushdie's women only make themselves powerful outside of their home circle when they engage in business, such as when Belle runs the business and Aurora sells her paintings or when Mary Pereria opens her pickle factory. Roy also places Mammachi in a position of power, but again this power depends on her status as head of the family's canning business.

These direct correlations between women's status within their own culture and their connection to Western-based commerce and trading practices seem to suggest that women can only better themselves through the Western paradigm. However, for many of these women, the West serves as both their route to betterment and their ultimate downfall. Naipaul's Selma does not seem completely happy with her life, saying that all of the men in her life are ultimately stronger than her, a fact that seems unchanged by her comfortable financial status. Kincaid's Lucy achieves the independence she desires, but with it comes a rejection of her mother and her native island—although she pines for

them initially, she seems to miss them less and less as she becomes more acculturated to the American way of life. This lack of native identity is one of the downfalls of Westernization. Aurora, while a powerful painter, is eventually murdered by the order of her own husband, the man who provided all of the wealth (and was involved in Western commerce), resulting in not only her death but a breakdown in the family structure, simply because Abraham's true control of the situation rested in his control of commerce. In many Western trade systems, the entity that ultimately ends up with the money is the West, thus placing it in a similar position of power at the expense of the Auroras of the world.

It is interesting that, other than commerce, the only other real explanation given for a woman's increased power is found in mystical and witch-like practices, which effectively others the success of the female and places it into a spiritual entity that takes the initiative away from the woman. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chielo is the only female of any great influence, and only great when she acts in her capacity as the high priestess of Agbala, the greatest of all the village spirits. Efuru's great success can be attributed in part to her own brains and intelligence, but seems to ultimately originate in her status as a worshipper of the goddess Uhamiri, the entity who gave her the ability to trade effectively as well as her empathy and intelligence. Thus the good traits that we would normally attribute to Efuru's womanhood and humanity become attributable to a goddess who selected her and made her smart and kind and beautiful, thus suggesting that only women chosen by this goddess could ever achieve the status of Efuru. In the same way, Parvati-the-witch's powers serve to give her an increased sense of purpose in the eyes of

the male narrator—however, her power is usually exercised to assist the male narrator, limiting her power to tasks such as hiding friends and giving people their names which suggests an inability to do bigger things such as assist in mass political movements or other such activities.

The Widow is the most effectively othered, probably because she holds the highest seat of power and thus the patriarchy must limit the truth of her power in the highest possible way. She is described in a dehumanizing manner, described as a mass of colors and feelings rather than an actual person, almost as though she were a spirit rather than a woman. This is intriguing, especially considering that of all the characters in *Midnight's Children*, the Widow is the most real; she is in fact patterned directly after Indira Gandhi, the first female prime minister of India. The far-reaching nature Indira's power created this omnipresent spirit of fear, but it also removed her womanhood, removing the more positive image of a woman who achieved great power and replaced it with an omnipresent, devil-like figure that does her will upon the meek and helpless. Regardless of the politics of her rule, this discounts the ability of women to rule by showing an extraordinarily negative picture of what happened in the world when the patriarchy allowed a woman—and a no-longer-married woman, to boot—to make decisions for the country. It personifies women as arbitrary, rash and temperamental—not exactly the most flattering views to take, but views that many held about the real Indira Gandhi. Having this real-life “terror” of a woman gives heavy weight to Rushdie's depiction. By othering female power, it makes it seem like something that is more of a spell or a joke than something to be taken seriously, and the Western eye could see this as

evidence that the native beliefs in magic or spirits cause people to place incorrect levels of power into the hands of native women.

Based on these two themes, the general attitude gleaned from the readings suggests that women can only gain power either through their involvement in Western commerce or through native beliefs in magic and witchcraft. The first seems to follow along very well with the idea that the “native” people, especially women, need the West in order to succeed; the second mystical aspect would be easily dismissed in the Western episteme, which leaves the first as explanation most valid. Therefore, according to the Western view of womanhood, the current pattern of double colonization and Western assistance appears to be “helping” native women; however, if the West had never entered these countries, would these women eventually have achieved higher status within their own societies by their own means? It is this complex relationship that is so crucial to the studies of postcolonial literatures and underscores their importance. It is essential that all readers of postcolonial fiction, but especially Western readers, understand the levels of complexity of these native cultures, a complexity that very much includes the leftovers of Colonial rule. Accepting postcolonial literatures at face value is misguided, and assuming that they portray their characters, and especially their women, in pure “native” truths actually does a disservice to postcolonial authors by not recognizing the colonial power and influence evident in their day-to-day lives. Colonialism is irrevocably bound up in the fates and fortunes of these women in such a strong way that their representations continue to be filtered through this lens, a “double colonization” that affects far more than their day-to-day life. It is crucial to recognize all of the forces that still work to shape

these societies and their women. It is an unlikely leap from the bejeweled, barbaric remoteness of the African woman in *Heart of Darkness* to the higher-rank commercial women of the native postcolonial literatures, but it is a leap that effectively suggests one thing—that, in some way, without continuing Western colonial influence in their day-to-day lives, women would simply stalk back and forth along the bank of the river and mourn the fall of Western commerce whose departure left them right back where they started.

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