Heralding Womenøs Cause without Trumpet Calls: Subtle Feminism in Paule Marshalløs Fiction

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Introduction

Marshalløs own comment concerning her female characters serves as an appropriate entry point to this exploration of her deployment of feminism in her art (Washington, 1981: 324; italics in the original):

> Iøm concerned about letting them speak their piece, letting them be central figures, actors, *activists* in fiction rather than just backdrop or background figures. I want them to be central characters. Women in fiction seldom are. Traditionally in most fiction men are the wheelers and dealers. They are the ones in whom power is invested. I wanted to turn that around. I wanted women to be the centers of power. My feminism takes its expression through my work. Women are central for me. They can as easily embody the power principles as a man.

Marshalløs ability to question social norms ó gender roles ó remains the most distinguishing characteristic of her craftsmanship. A trailblazer among African American female writers who have called for revising these gender roles as they operate in daily relationships, Marshalløs oeuvre advocates for those who are õborn the wrong color, the wrong sex, the wrong classö (*Daughters*, 143). Though her attacks on sexual and racial stereotypes are legion, this novelist ranks fairly low on the list of feminist/womanist writers, a disservice to this forerunner black female writer, who readily identifies herself with womanist novelists, including Alice Walker, who coined the term womanism. Thus, this essay examines her subtle but effective deployment of feminism, arguing how Marshall has infused her works with feminism õwithout militant proclamation or fiery denunciationö of patriarchal roles and rules, to use Darwin Turnerøs words (1988: xiv).

This study, which scrutinizes the poetics of the feminine principle and its consistency in Marshalløs literary production, is divided into two sections. The first one examines her initial two revolutionary short stories and underscores her thorough feminist outlook at the outset of her long literary career. Featuring female characters who confront patriarchal demands on women, the authorøs õbeginnerö stories explored in this first section foreshadow her determination to take up patriarchy in her subsequent novels. The second section, which decodes the attitudes/behaviors of some female

protagonists in her three of her novels, equally highlights her central preoccupation with feminist/womanist struggle. The thematic continuity in both sections locates Marshallø utmost concern with womenø condition throughout her literary career. Without trumpeting it, then, feminism threads its way through her art and definitely resonates throughout her fiction.

I) A Literary Apprenticeship Infused with Feminist Tenets: õThe Valley Betweenö and õReenaö

It is important to recall two events that have indelibly shaped the authorø artistic vision. While the first one has determined her stand on sexism and racism, the second experience has inspired her carving the power and place of women in her fiction.

First, Marshall encountered the sexist attitude of American society when she was looking for a newspaper job after graduating from college in 1953. She was surprised that even black newspapers were not interested in hiring women ó women of color were expected, back then, to be teachers or social workers. However, her determination paid off as she landed a position in a small black magazine, *Our World Magazine*. Being the only woman in menø turf, Marshall confessed later that she had the feeling that the men on the staff õwere waiting for her to fallö (Davis, 1984: 163; Baechler, 1991: 291). This episode has driven her advocacy for reforming social norms ó gender roles. Clearly, her feminist concern with the politics of womenø liberation derives from this personal experience of sexism tainted with racism. Her early battle against sexism and racism is surveyed by Barbara T. Christian, her biographer (1984: 162): õ[I]n her first novel Marshall attacked, head-on, sexual and racial stereotypes, from the mammies and Uncle Toms of the early twentieth century to the Amos nø Andys and Sapphyres of the 1940s to Moynihanø black matriarchs and weak black boys of the 1950.ö In sum, Marshallø first creative pieces confront racism and sexism and locate her as a convinced feminist/womanist and advocate for racial commitment.

Second, Barbadian womenø endless talk in her motherø kitchen exerted a powerful influence on her literary production: õI was always so intimidated as a little girl by the awesome verbal powers of these women. That might be one of the reasons I started writing. To see if, on paper, I couldnøt have some of that power,ö she commented later in an interview with Alexis de Veaux (in Christian, 1997: 105). To be sure, the everyday speech of the Caribbean women around whom Marshall grew up first taught her the art of storytelling. Women figure prominently in her writing as a tribute to these Barbadian women whose talk in her motherø kitchen has shaped her narrative art:

> True, I am indebted to those writers, white and black, whom I read during my formative years and still read for instruction and pleasure. But they were preceded in my life by another set of giants whom I always acknowledge before all others: the group of women around the table long ago. They taught me my first lessons in the narrative art. They trained my ear. They set a standard of excellence. This is why the best of my work must be attributed to them; it stands as testimony to the rich legacy of language and culture they so freely passed on to me in the wordshop of the kitchen (*Merle*, 12)

In honor to their artistic heritage, then, women have a lionøs share in her work, because her fiction owes a tremendous debt to the memory of their dazzling speech. Alexis de Veaux (in Baechler, 1991: 290) pins down the everlasting influence of these womenøs talk on her writing career: õThis strong image of the women in her motherøs kitchen, an image of women concerned not only with household chores but with the politics of world affairs [...] was later to be the impetus of Paule Marshalløs life-work.ö

Marshalløs continuing deploying of feminist/womanist ideology mandates a birdøs eye view of this concept and its binary opposite ó patriarchy ó for a better apprehension of the feminine principle at work in her fiction. Though female and racial oppressions are entangled in her artistic production, a testimony to her experiencing both, she particularly targets patriarchy, i.e., õthe omnipresent system of male domination and female subjugation which is achieved through socialization, perpetuated through ideological means, and maintained by institutional methodsö (Mitchell, 1973: 65). Because she purports to subvert patriarchy, women rank prominent in her fiction, right from the start. Compared to George Lamming whose paradigmatic shift relating to the role of women in his fiction is well established, among other male writers, females dominate Marshalløs novelistic production at the outset (Afagla, 1999: 374-381).[1]

Mary Wollstonecraft deploys feminist thinking to rid the world of male oppression in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), probably the inaugural feminist text (Oakley, 1981: 3). Adopted at the first American womenøs suffrage convention, the 1848 õSeneca Falls Declarationö stated the feminist grievance in straightforward terms: õThe history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of

[1] Lamming completely obliterates womenøs contributions to the nationalist struggle in his first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, where he has them fulfill traditional roles of childbearing and childrearing, associating them with domesticity and socialization. Subsequent novels reveal the authorøs self-conscious shift regarding the place of women in his fiction. While males and females are equally involved in exile in *The Emigrants*, his second novel, *Season of Adventure*, his third one, witnesses the emergence of a strong female character: Fola. Lastly, in addition to having the Lady of the House fund the Commandantøs enterprise in *Natives of My Person*, women dominate this sixth novel of his.

an absolute tyranny over herö (in Urofsky, 1994: 115). Feminists argue that the ideology of male protectiveness puts menøs interests first and actually debases women. Moreover, they contend that women õhave been defined negatively in relation to the culture into which we have been born: our experience has tended to be made invisible, and in the face of male definitions we have, until recently, kept quiet.ö This quote brings forth one of the horrendous feminist charges, i.e., patriarchy has wiped out womenøs questions so much so that women have not been able to formulate their own questions to meet their own experiences. As the Womenøs Liberation Movement claims, women have not been able to experience their own experience under patriarchy (Eagleton, 1991: 5).

The previous paragraph lists womenøs grievances and underscores feministsø quarrel with patriarchy. Additionally, feminists contend that a male-created system is a violent one; that men are the primary initiators and perpetuators of violence. From the foregoing, they locate the seat of social violence within the male psyche and deploy accusations such as õthe oppression of women starts in the homeö (James, 1990: 113), or men want õto be on top of their womenö (Firestone, 1972: 106). Since patriarchy disempowers women, feminists argue, heterosexual marriage remains the only way for them to access power and material goods. In addition to accusing patriarchy with defining motherhood as a womanøs true purpose in life and the pinnacle of her fulfillment, a charge leveled by Charlotte Brunsdon in *Aspects of Womenøs Subordination* (1978: 21-27), a study edited by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, feminists locate the heart of womenøs oppression in childbearing and childrearing, connecting marriage and oppression (Firestone, 1972: 72; Pettis, 1995: 24). The key term is *oppression*. Women are variously oppressed, according to Marita Golden (1983: 186) for whom female oppression entails many things: õThe point is that when you say oppressed, it connotes a lot of things. Oppressed by way of being overused; oppressed by way of being ill-treated; oppressed by way of being maltreated; oppressed by way of being discriminated against. But whichever way you look at it, there is a section of women that qualifies for that description.ö

As the foregoing development suggests, the concept of patriarchy is used within the womenøs movement to analyze the principles underlying female oppression; it is deployed to address the question of the real basis of the subordination of women, on the one hand, and to analyze the particular forms which it assumes, on the other. Politically, then, in the search for an explanation of feelings of oppression and subordination and in the desire to transform feelings of rebellion into a political practice and theory, feminists of different persuasions have seized upon this concept. Infused with a

variety of meanings and developed within feminist writings, patriarchy refers to the power relationships by which men dominate women (Beechey, 1979: 66-82).

Alice Walker (1984: 5), who coined the term womanism, defines her thematic concern stating that a womanist is preoccupied with the survival of the whole of her people. Rebuffing her categorization as a black feminist, Walker describes herself and work as womanist in *In Search of Our Motherøs Gardens: Womanist Prose*, her collection of essays, articles, reviews, and statements written between 1966 and 1982. She further states her preference for womanist in her following statement (in Smith, 1992: 1181; italics in the original): õI just like to have words that describe things *correctly*. Now, to me, ÷black feministø does not do that. I need a word that is organic, that really comes out of the culture, that really expresses the spirit that we see in black women. And itøs just thatí *womanist*.ö

Generally, black feminism ó womanism ó refers to a variety of feminisms which are identified by their opposition to the blend of racism and sexism encountered by black women. Black feminists combine the fight against sexism with the fight against racism by continuously calling the public attention to these issues. Because major systems of oppression create the conditions of black womenøs lives, black women see õBlack feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face,ö Barbara Smithøs *Home Girls* holds (1983: 272). In its various forms, then, black feminism õundertakes a sustained critique of racism and ethnocentrism of white-dominated systems and practices including feminismö (Andermahr, 1997: 23). Clarifying the goals of womanist writers, Valerie Smith (in Hirsh, 1990: 271) maintains that õBlack feminists seek not only to dismantle the assumptions of dominant cultures, and to recover and reclaim the lives of black women, but also to develop methods of analysis for interpreting the ways in which race and gender are inscribed,ö while Ketu H. Katrak (in Ashcroft, 1995: 257) connects womanist writing and post-colonial womenøs texts, pinpointing their joint fight against the dual oppression of women of color as their commonality. In addressing õthe concepts of womanhood, motherhood, traditions such as dowry, bride-price, polygamy, and a worsened predicament within a capitalist economic system introduced by the colonizers,ö Katrak contends, both womanists and post-colonial women novelists/critics take up the burdens of female roles in urban environments and challenge their õmarginalization in actual political participationí .ö As Pia Thielmann forcefully puts it (in Dieke, 1999: 6), although the (black) woman is the (black) manøs helpmate in the community-building business, the man remains õthe most important half of the two.ö Clearly, patriarchy relegates (black) women to an inferior position, womanists maintain.

Womanists seek womenøs freedom and strive to change menøs sexist attitude for a satisfying relation between spouses, but they equally maintain that marriage is not the only alternative for womenøs fulfillment (Nwapa, 1984: 119): õWomen have options. Their lives cannot be ruined because of a bad marriage. They have a choice to marry and have children, a choice to marry or divorce their husbands. Marriage is not the only way.ö Womanists speak their minds, because õthe lives of black women have been all too frequently misinterpreted ó most often to the detriment of black women,ö Dorothy H. Denniston claims (1995: 80). In any case, womanists/feminists have a wide variety of õchoicesö that can seemingly prop up patriarchy, or otherwise, a situation which raises the everlasting conflict between the quest for gender equality and the desire for sexual pleasure. The right of women to decide for themselves how to negotiate the often contradictory desires for both gender equality and sexual pleasure, Snyder-Hall (2010: 255-261) comments, has long been a challenge for feminism.

In general, despite womanistsø contention that feminism inadequately addresses black womenøs issues, they share most feminist tenets. For instance, Abena Busia (in Adell, 1994: 99-100), a Ghanaian poet and critic, acknowledges that feminism has secured for black women their right to talk about themselves in their own terms. Nevertheless, since feminism has come to mean the privileges of white women in academia ó against the continued marginalization of women of color in terms of publishing, hiring, and academic authority (Mane, 2012: 71-98) ó most black women writers/critics have adopted Walkerøs womanism for its distinctive thrust (Adell, 1994: 56; Kolawole, 2002: 92-98; Harnois, 2005: 809-828). According to Flora Nwapa (in James, 1990: 112), womanists are õconcerned about the fate of the black woman, whether she is in Africa, North America or the Caribbean. She faces many problems. I think the crux of these problems is economic. If the black woman is economically independent she and her children will suffer less.ö And, as Walker (1984: 5-21) stresses the point, womanists are geared toward the survival and wholeness of the entire black community.

Challenging gender roles ó or questioning male biases ó is part and parcel of feminist/womanist project. In this vein, feminists encourage women to become õactors in the world on their own termsö (Andermahr, 1997: 13). Thus, while David Turner reads Janieøs speech to Jody in the deathbed scene as the cruel conduct of a vindictive woman, and one of the õcrudest scenesö Zora N. Hurston ever wrote, womanists celebrate this very speech as õa victory for a woman denied her right to speak for herself and in her own voiceö (Adell, 1994: 110-1). Feminist criticism is a form of praxis that enables women õto break their culture of silenceö (Donovan, 1989: xiii). To be sure, women believe that their

narratives can subvert patriarchy and improve their lives. Womanist criticism definitely seeks female liberation: õThe way is not the rule of men. The way is never women ruling men. The way is reciprocity,ö womanists claim, rejecting the social construct made for women by patriarchy. Nwapa (1984: 13) heralds the news, forewarning men: õThere is going to be another war, the war of women. You have fooled us enough. You have used us enough. You have exploited us enough. When this war is ended we will show you that we are a force to be reckoned with.ö

Unlike the above critics who bark feminism, Marshalløs feminism does bite: it shows through her challenging social norms and conventions via her portrayals of female protagonists (Giffort, 2011: 569-588). The women who populate her fiction (and their roles) cast an insight into her feminist practice. Clearly, the behaviors and deeds of Marshalløs female characters speak volumes to her vision of a social reformist ó of gender roles. Ultimately, they reveal her message concerning a new social order she is promoting through her fiction.

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989: 174-5) connect women and colonized peoples via their common õexperience of the politics of oppression and repression.ö Women, like colonized peoples and races, õhave been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors,ö they claim. Marshalløs intimate conviction that worldwide women have been relegated to the position of the õother,ö marginalized and metaphorically õcolonized,ö has enabled her to so finely articulate female oppression in her early short stories. Thus, in õThe Valley Between,ö she makes a frontal attack on sexual/patriarchal roles and rules that determine a womanøs place in America. In the headnote to õReena,ö for instance, she affirms that the African American woman is always in õ*the face of the triple-headed hydra of racism, sexism, and class bias*ö (*Merle*, 71; italics in the original). Her acknowledgment of this social reality has driven her addressing this social problem early in her fiction.

A full understanding of patriarchal demands on (black) womenøs lives mandates a succinct summary of this first short story under consideration ó õThe Valley Between.ö

Published in August 1954 in the now defunct *The Contemporary Reader* and which later appeared in different literary magazines, Marshalløs first short story, õThe Valley Between,ö is available in her collection of short stories, *Merle*. Examining patriarchal diktats on womenøs place in the United States and confronting their restrictions on womenøs lives, this story presents a conflict between Abe and Cassie, husband and wife. Abe opposes his wifeøs continuing education and frustrates Cassie, a college-trained female character whose only fulfillments are marriage and motherhood per patriarchal definition. In other words, his opposition to Cassieøs college education and

professional life means that she cannot õrealize herself apart from her role as mother and wifeö (*Merle*, 15). So, this young wife and mother is pressured into giving up college education to stay at home with her baby daughter. When the story closes, Cassie is left defeated.

This story, which raises womenøs dilemma when it comes to choosing between self-fulfillment or serving the interest of their husbands and families, presents the nature of marriage and gender oppression which, at best, discourages female personhood. Cassie is left defeated at the end of the story, because when Abe asks her to choose between staying home or leaving altogether, she is convinced that the decision is already made for her: õI only pity both of us for having lost so much simply because you want me to be happy on your terms. I havenøt got the strength to defy you anymore ó you and your male strength! Letøs not talkö (*Merle*, 24). This ending corroborates views by critics who locate womenøs oppression in marriage, childbearing, and childrearing (Firestone, 1972: 72; Murphy, 1995: 1).

Arguably, the widespread belief ó that married women belong at home ó accounts for Cassieøs resignation in the story. Career-wise, feminists have traditionally pressed for womenøs admission to *male spheres*, but women mostly prefer their own domain ó the home ó once they are admitted there. Cynthia F. Epstein (1970: 1) substantiates: õThe home is their first concern, loyalty, and interest ó and it is, they agree, their place.ö Betty F. Kirschner (1973: 1051-54) definitely nails the point: a staggering number of people think that women belong at home when it comes to marriage.

As the above brief summary might indicate, õThe Valley Betweenö deals with one of the central themes of feminist discourse. Marshall explains, in its headnote, that she writes it to express her dismay about the future of bright college girls who are doomed to become housewives, because patriarchy strongly encourages it. Abeøs firm opposition to Cassieøs willingness to return to school and resounding NO to her desire to realize herself apart from being mother and wife substantiate this point. Because Marshall addressed, in a synopsis form, the most important theme of the feminist discourse of the 1970s in her 1954 short story, it has been dubbed a õ[19]*50s story twenty years ahead of its time*ö (*Merle*, 15; italics in the original).

If the theme of õThe Valley Betweenö anticipated by some twenty years a major concern of American womenøs literature and situates Marshall as a forerunner of a future trend in womanist/feminist writing, this novelistøs personal experience as wife and mother also accounts for her ability to address these issues in her first piece of fiction, as she readily admits:

> That the characters are white also served to camouflage my own predicament because by the time I wrote õValleyö I was married also ó an early, unwise first marriage. I wasnøt brave enough back then to deal directly with my unhappiness, or perhaps instinct told me that as a fiction writer I should try to transform the raw stuff of personal experience into art. Whatever, Cassie who couldnøt possibly be me with her gray eyes and fair hair was a convenient device behind which to mask my pain (*Merle*, 15-6).

Despite the authorøs deliberate choice of white characters as its protagonists, this short story remains an autobiographical one in all respects. It bears many resemblances with her experiences: like Cassie, Marshall encountered similar difficulties in squaring marital life with self-realization. In effect, she completed *Brown Girl, Brownstones* after she was wedded to Kenneth E. Marshall. She became a mother while she was writing *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*. In an interview with de Veaux, she commented on her husbandøs strong opposition to letting her hire a baby-sitter for a time during the day so that she could write. But unlike Cassie, Marshall is not defeated. To the objection of her husband, she shows resolve, carrying on the writing of *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (in Denniston, 1995: 37): õI went ahead and did it. There were, he sensed it, I knew it, my need and determination to be my own woman. To do my own thing. I think this is something women have to acknowledge about themselves ó their right to fulfill themselves.ö

Of course, the husbandøs opposition to her professional fulfillment is grounded on some social considerations. The cultural themes and the value system that bear on the role of women in American society can explain the problems faced by professional women in their personal lives. For Epstein (1970: 18-20), the social images and values of American culture conflict with occupational images and values which help to define some kinds of work as appropriate or inappropriate for women. Given that all societies define sex roles according to their images of the ideal man or woman, each society has boxed itself in ó and is affected by ó these gender-assigned roles. American patriarchal society, for that matter, tended to define womenøs potentials to childbearing, limiting their creativity to childrearing. Accordingly, the role of parenthood has been more valued for women than any other consideration in America: õThere was a strongly held view in American society that mothers damage their children if they attempt any other serious form of self-fulfillment,ö Baechler and Litz hold (1991: 296).

The above widespread belief made it difficult for professional women to fulfill themselves. Furthermore, to crown female subordination in American patriarchal society, the 1950s women were indoctrinated to believe that females do not become professionals; instead, they got married. Indeed,

Epsteinøs study (1970: 21) reveals an overwhelmingly widespread assumption: after becoming a wife ó a basic component of the female role ó the woman is naturally expected to become õthe center of the home, crowned with the virtue of faithfulness and responsible for harmonious coordination of house and family.ö In sum, women were encouraged to believe that their place was in the home with their fulfillment being limited to finding the right person to marry and raising a family. Marshall relates her dilemma resulting from this brainwashing in a May 1990 interview she gave in Richmond, Virginia (in Denniston, 1995: 2): õI was caught in a kind of dilemma: on the one hand, wanting to pursue whatever I wanted to pursue professionally; on the other hand, feeling the pressure from the community, from my mother, to find someone to marry ó that no matter what you accomplished professionally, it really was not enough if you were not also married.ö

This quote raises the image of the perfect woman, the values and norms revolving about the female role, and the very participation of women in the professions that are contradictory, ambiguous, and sources of strain for them in the United States. It equally illustrates individual socialization. Sociologists have abundantly demonstrated that values, ideology, and image form much of the context in which the socialization process shapes occupational and family life. Children derive, from their culture, a set of expectations about themselves that become a crucial point of their self-image. They equally learn, from the value system, what to dislike and like, what to disdain and cherish, and what are (un)acceptable occupational and family-social patterns. Likewise, some specific types of work are encouraged, tolerated, or tabooed, depending on their social class, race and sex (Epstein, 1970: 19; Strinati, 1995: 181). Rooted in õthe cult of true womanhoodö (Welter in Martin, 1972: 243-256) that preached women submission as true virtue, these views and societal pressures have beaten most women down. Marshalløs drive for career (and determination to be her own woman) has been instrumental in her battle for agency. Her awareness of womenøs subordination has driven her demand for self-fulfillment. So, instead of depriving herself of her career, she divorced Kenneth Marshall in 1963. In 1970, she was remarried to a Haitian businessman, Nourry Menard, a union she describes as õan open and innovative marriage,ö allowing her time and freedom to fulfill her dream of woman-artist (in Christian, 1997: 115). This results in a different outcome from Cassieøs case.

Also, Cassie emulates Marshalløs thirst for bookish knowledge. Though the college curriculum featured only a few writers during her days, Marshall was drawn to books written by renowned authors, among whom Joseph Conrad, Thomas Mann, Jean-Paul Sartre, John Updike, Richard Wright,

Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. As a college trained-girl, Cassie, like Marshall, knows the power of literature. Best, she has been feeding herself with learning since childhood. Reminding one of Frederick Douglassøs moments of epiphany (Douglass, 1982: 78-79), Cassieøs decision to go back to school is motivated by Marshalløs awareness of the transformative power of knowledge to the self (*Merle*, 20):

> The library had been her sanctuary, not only against the rainy world, but against all that was incomprehensible and ugly in lifeí And along with the joy of reading had come, with the years, the desire to learn ó to have all muddled ideas made clear, defined in words and images, and thus made a part of her. It was a never-ending search, giving sustained pleasure, making her life, for that moment at least, meaningful.

This quote hits one of the fundamental cornerstones of feminist discourse. As the co-authors of *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (1997: 27) ó Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz ó have noted, knowledge and power are enmeshed in feminist and Foucauldian epistemologies. Foucault (1977: 27) believes that knowledge is always a form of power and forever connected to it: õWe should admit that power produces knowledge; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.ö Therefore, Cassieøs õwill to knowledge,ö viewed as a primary passion of the inquisitor, will generate power. Paradoxically, however, this thirst for learning genuinely kindled in this young woman is not enough in itself. It must be approved by her husband; it õneeds validation from a man,ö to use critic Dennistonøs formulation (1995: 4). Thus, Cassieøs defeat comes from her husbandøs refusal to validate her quest/thirst for knowledge. A bitter disappointment tainted with resignation follows her defeat: õYes, Iøm selfish and self-centered, just as you are bull-headed and blind [í] I should have finished up one phase of my life before starting another. I wasnøt ready for the kind of life you have to offer me, and I couldnøt give you much [í] Itøs strange, the strong always win somehow. All the cards fall their way ó theyøre the victors even though theyøre wrongí .ö (*Merle*, 23-4).

Cassieøs anger is directed both at her husband and patriarchy, because the rule of the fathers is the root cause of womenøs oppression ó an oppression which is intimately connected with motherhood as a patriarchal institution (Figes, 1971: 35; Nnaemeka, 1997: 1-25). Male oppression in marriage, the above quote entertains, is so insidiously pervasive as to convince women that they are somehow

selfish, deficient, unworthy of love and respect. Cassie, like many worldwide women, is confronted with the subtle functioning of that male-created and male-dominated system: she is forcefully denouncing its evils.

Abeøs opposition to Cassieøs education ultimately purports to marginalize her. A beloved concept deployed by feminists, marginalization refers to the process whereby a subject is rendered marginal to the center. Thus, Abeøs opposition to Cassieøs knowledge-acquisition suggests the insidious ways women are made powerless within patriarchal cultures, despite their numerical majority. Though she resents her marginalization, Cassie cannot flex her muscle and challenge the social constructions made for her by patriarchy. Despite her disappointment, she cannot defy conventions; she is unable to overthrow those old assumptions and beliefs that define her subservience.

Not only does Cassieøs resignation show Abeøs power over her but it equally validates Sylvia Walbyøs feminist-sociologist definition of patriarchy (1990: 214): õa system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.ö Women, for Golden (1983: 186), are thought of entirely in the context of the role society has created for them. They are stereotyped, and society rejects anything outside that traditional role crafted for them. Females have been enjoined to sacrifice that part of them which craves fulfillment, a fate they have traditionally accepted in most societies. Therefore, Cassieøs õresignation to a status secondary to that of the male has not only been expected but demanded by all social patterns of acceptance,ö critic Denniston claims (1995: 6).

As Sally Miller has argued in Hoffman Baruchøs *Women in Search of Utopia* (1984: 302), Cassieøs story credits feminists who locate the seat of social violence within the male psyche. In effect, the story buys into some of the old arguments between socialist-feminists and radical/cultural feminists. While the former categorize male violence among the ills which will disappear with the restructuring of economic principles and power, the latter represent it as the heart of societyøs ills and consider its elimination as key to establishing a revolutionary society (Schneiders, 1991: 24). Casieøs anger implicitly validates these assumptions and paves the way for the second short story ó which equally deals with male domination and female subordination.

õRe*e*na,ö the most anthologized of Marshalløs short stories, equally addresses the problem of the North American gender construct, with its traditional view on female subordination. Re*e*na, the

protagonist of this 1962 short story bearing the same title, is a college-educated and politically active black woman. She is married to Dave, another macho man completely molded by patriarchy. In addition to using a college-educated and politically active black female as its protagonist, this õmixed-bagö story (*Merle*, 72) provides the novelist with the opportunity to illuminate the political and domestic aspects of violence as they affect life in American society.

Though male domination takes center stage in this story, the author moves a step further to show the determination of her female character as well. Like Abe in õThe Valley Between,ö Dave is threatened by his wifeøs interest in *things outside home*. He considers her interest in *these things* as õa way of pointing up his deficienciesö (*Merle*, 88). The plain truth is that Re*e*naøs higher education and professional advantages over Dave are, in themselves, threats to his male ego. (Black) women who want education and better jobs are at a disadvantage, because their male professional peers are afraid of them in private life. Instead, they prefer to marry õyounger women without the degrees and the fat jobs, who are no threatö (*Merle*, 85).

Often, highly educated and career-driven women ó the Cassies and Re*e*nas ó are regularly accused of being too threatening, too castrating, too independent and too impatient with their husbands for not being more ambitious. Also, they are labeled as contemptuous, not supportive, and unwilling to submerge their interests to those of men (DøAlmeida, 2013: 69-88). They are equally blamed for their õlacking in the subtle art of getting and keeping a man.ö In fact, they are confronted with the dilemma of being persons in their own right, on the one hand, and fully woman and wife, on the other hand (*Merle*, 86-87). Divorce ensues: õI couldnøt bear the pain of living with him ó the insults, our mutual despair, his mocking, the silence. I couldnøt subject the children to it any longer. The divorce didnøt take longö (*Merle*, 88). Indeed, divorce is the heavy price tag of Re*e*naøs independent spirit and self-fulfilling drive (*Merle*, 71).

Marshall intends to show, through the character of Re*e*na, how gender roles jeopardize marital (and social) relations. The reader witnesses, through this story that bears resemblance to everyday life stories, the inevitable breakdown in Re*e*na and Daveøs marriage, because social demands have taken precedence over individual human needs that are sacrificed on the patriarchal altar. Re*e*naøs divorce is hard evidence that patriarchy renders marital life unbearable, at best, and a hell, for many women. The chaos in their marital life is a microcosmic illustration of patriarchal supremacy in marriage.

On the aggregate, Marshall seems to suggest in both short stories that if gender roles remain unquestioned, they will poison male-female relationships. The novelist is, therefore, calling for their

redefinition as they operate in contemporary American society ó and by extension, in all patriarchal societies. In õThe Valley Between,ö writes Denniston (1995: 6), õMarshall searches for new values, new modes of thought that enhance gender distinctions by extending priority to individual human needs.ö

Feminists have overused the discourse of female victimization to unveil the systematic character of gender domination. One of the goals of feminism being to see to it that women become õagents,ö that is, õactors in the world on their own termsö (Andermahr, 1997: 13), Marshallø theorization of male domination endemic in American society in her early woman-centered stories has anticipated an analysis of the later feminist movement. As Chandra T. Mohanti (in Ashcroft, 1995: 262) claims, feminists have ended up embracing the theorization and interpretation of male domination within specific societies as the most appropriate approach to better understand patriarchy and change it.

õThe Valley Betweenö and õRe*e*naö represent Marshallø early portrayals of female determination to fight against imposed social norms; both underscore a major concern of American womenø literature and locate her as a forerunner of the womanist movement. The authorø theorization of female oppression in her early woman-centered stories has served as a role model for the later feminist movement, a model which has inspired an insightful theorization of male domination to understand the poetics of patriarchy (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986). Moreover, and as they permeate her three novels under study, Marshallø inaugural short stories have prefigured her treatment of the possibilities for women to combat economic, social, political, and cultural constraints. In all respects, she has propelled women toward renewed levels of feminist consciousness in *Brown Girl, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* and *Daughters,* the subject-matter of the following section.

II) Her Mature Novels: Feminism at its Height

Marshallø treatment of women in her mature novels heightens feminist concerns: while she promotes their self-awareness and economic independence in *Brown Girl,* she increases their political participation in *The Chosen Place* and *Daughters*. The mouthpieces for her feminism, Marshallø female characters are gifted with awesome economic and political capitals.

Set in New York City during the Depression and World War Two years, *Brown Girl* relates the enduring story of a young woman, Selina Boyce, the daughter of Silla and Deighton Boyce. This daughter of Barbadian immigrants is caught between the struggles of her hard-ambitious mother (who wants to buy a brownstone house at any cost and educate her two daughters) and her father (who longs

to return to Barbados). In the midst of these two antipodes, Selina, the teenage girl, seeks to define her own identity and values as she struggles to overcome the racism and poverty surrounding her.

A passionate champion of the individual search for personal identity, Marshall, is lauded as one of the first authors to have explored the psychological trials and concerns of black American women (Draper, 1992: 1363). Actually, prior to *Brown Girl,* novels dealing with the process of black women growing in strength as they develop consciousness of themselves were scarce pearls. Mary H. Washington (1981: 319; bold in the original) reports Marshallø statement on their scarcity:

> Marshall says that until Gwendolyn Brooksø novel *Maud Martha*, it was rare to see a black woman in literature with a conscious, interior life. We have seldom seen black women characters struggling over such questions as suicide, or racial violence as a means to freedom, or feminism in conflict with racism, or their call to public ministry, or their need to transform their lives into art, and that is because the women who raised these issues have been silenced, omitted, patronized, made invisible.

Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, however, the growing up of black boys had received attention in African American literature: examples include Richard Wrightø *Black Boy* (1945) and James Baldwinø *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953). Further, attention was paid to their precarious journeys as they become men in the 1960s, the years of the Civil Rights Movement. On the other hand and except when it related to men, little emphasis was laid on how black girls became women in literature.

Marshallø choice of a brown girl as the protagonist of a novel was a groundbreaking event in the 1950s. Her deliberate artistic decision to focus on Selinaø adolescent years in an entire novel ó a thing that Brooks has not attempted ó is a clear indication of Marshallø seeking to move the marginalized to the forefront. According to Baechler and Litz (1991: 292), before the publishing of *Brown Girl*, a commonly held view popularized in contemporary American literature was that black women õjes grew,ö like Topsy in *Uncle Tomø Cabin*. Therefore, with its intense focus on Selinaø journey from budding adolescence to womanhood, *Brown Girl* was, at that time, a cogent rebuttal to that assumption. The novelø heavy emphasis on the development of an intelligent and complex woman represented a robust denial of that misconception about black females. In all likelihood, Marshallø tracking the development of a black female protagonist accounts for her first feminist revolution in her full-fledged novel.

Moreover, female characters radiate power in *Brown Girl*. The authorøs characterization of females in this novel ó particularly her representation of Silla ó clearly indicates her artistic and feminist preference to make women the center of power in her fiction. In effect, portrayed in this novel as pioneers in a hostile world, the Barbadian women in *Brown Girl* are quite prepared to chastise people, waging war with their lashing tongues: õTalk yuh talk, Silla! Be-Jees, in this white-man world you got to take yuh mouth and make a gunö (*Brown Girl*, 70). They draw power from their use of language, with a strong sense of community connectedness which makes it hard for Selina to dissociate her mother from the other Barbadian women: õShe could never think of the mother alone. It was always the mother and the others, for they were alike ó those watchful, wrathful women whose eyes seared and searched and laid bare, whose tongues lashed the world in unremitting distrustö (*Brown Girl*, 10-11).

Equally, the author describes them as hard-working women who are familiar with factory machines. In particular, Sillaøs indifference to their negative effects on her body suggests a masculine physical build-up. Nothing can intimidate this woman whose õown formidable force could match that of the machine.ö Thanks to her uncommon strength, Silla õcould remain indifferent to the brutal noiseö of these machines (*Brown Girl*, 100). Her physical strength and inner determination to pave the way for the future generation sustain her dreams and efforts. A hard-ambitious woman whose vision is shaped by the power of the almighty dollar in a capitalist America, Silla is unwaveringly resolved to fight whatever nasty battle to earn life in the United States. She confides to the reader:

> If you let little noise and dirt øpon your hand keep you from making a dollar you should starve. I tell yuh, to make your way in this world you got to dirty more than yuh hands sometime [...] I read someplace that this is the machine age and itøs the God truth. You got to learn to run these machine to live. But some these Bajan here still don understand that ó that Suggie and yuh father and them so that still ain got a penny in their nameí (*Brown Girl*, 102-3).

Deighton is among those who cannot assert such a mastery over the machines. While Silla fully understands the õmasculineö gender politics of the United States, a nation dubbed õthis man countryö (*Merle*, 6), her man/husband, Deighton, fails to comprehend it. The first among those who could not õlearn to run these machine to live,ö Deighton is a negligent person, unable to learn any trade. Additioanally, Silla blames Deightonøs work accident on his carelessness. After factory managers had started up a new machine, Silla reports to Ina and Selina, their two daughters, they told Deighton õnot to work the machine till he had learned it good but he wun hear [í] But thatøs his way. He does only

half-learn a thing. The same with the blasted trumpet and the course he was taking for all those yearsí ö (*Brown Girl*, 155). Definitely, negligence is the dominant feature of his character.

The foregoing illuminates the authorøs subtle but powerful feminist strategy consisting in maximizing economic opportunities for women and denying men the same privileges. While females are chasing the almighty dollar and have literally become money hunters, the men are complete failures in *Brown Girl*. Deighton, a representative of every male character in this novel, is deprived of job opportunities and properties: the novelist presents him like a man with no ambition and a disgrace to her daughters (*Brown Girl*, 55). In the meantime, women are waging õa good war job pulling down this good war money;ö they are allowed to own brownstone houses, to be õhouse-hungry Bajansö (*Brown Girl*, 131). Exception made of Percy Challenor, no Bajan man owns a brownstone house in New York City: Bajan males are deprived of the American Dream.

Above all, the domineering power of these Bajan women, which arises from their fierce determination to better life for themselves and their families, looms large in the novel. This claim to power drives their despising fellow women who submit to their own husbands. Gert Challenor, Percyøs wife, is a case in point (*Brown Girl*, 54). Washington (1981: 311-2) underscores their strategic claim to power with a carefully conceived plan: õwork night and day to buy house; rent out every room, overcharge if necessary; sacrifice every penny to maintain property; keep strict vigilance on the children so they will enter high-paying professions.ö Moreover, Selinaøs calling her mother õthe motherö ó instead of õmy motherö ó is a power symbol, according to Washington (1981: 313; italics and bold in the original): õSilla is ***the*** mother much as someone might be called ***the*** president.ö To crown it all, this daughter goes an extra mile by hailing her mother õHitler.ö Besides stressing Sillaøs totalitarian nature, this appellation brings forth her cynical role in Deightonøs deportation and his ensuing suicide (*Brown Girl*, 183-4).

Sillaøs inclination to economic power fleshes out a feminist concept of womenøs economic freedom, a view stated in Nwapaøs previously quoted passage concerning womenøs economic independence (in James, 1990: 112). By radiating Sillaøs economic power and flashing out her financial success, the author has empowered the millions of economically exploited women by the oppressive patriarchal system. These economically secure women and financially independent females are security havens for their families.

Some critics consider Marshall's characterization in *Brown Girl* as a replica of racial stereotypes, a simple portrayal of those stereotypical images of black people dating back to slavery days. They argue that by making the mother appear formidable and domineering and the father delightful but ineffectual, Marshall has simply recast images known to slavery times and popularized via "Amos 'n' Andy" radio shows, featuring Sapphire dominating her lazy and weak husband with her lashing tongue (Davis, 1984: 162; Baechler, 1991: 293-4).

Whether her characterization in *Brown Girl* reflects distortions of black (wo)men or not, two things remain certain. First, these images arise from the novelist's experience growing up in the New York City Barbadian community. Second, this portrayal serves well her goal: Silla has fully demonstrated how women are power centers in her fiction.

In its emphasis on the integrity of women and their roles in the black community, *Brown Girl* prefigures the major themes of black women's fiction in the 1970s. Thanks to its heavy accent on feminist issues, this novel ushers in a new period of female characters in the development of African American literature (Christian, 1984: 161). Consistently, its author has augured new roles for (modern) twentieth-century women in *The Chosen Place* and *Daughters*, where politically astute and committed females serve the cause of their communities. In an interview with de Veaux (in Baechler, 1991: 300), Marshall admits that she "wanted the women in *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* to embody the whole power struggle of the world." Her portrayal of Harriet Shippen and Merle Kinbona, two power brokers in this large-scale novel, is telling in all respects.

A wealthy, authoritative, and white lady, Harriet is vested with power in the pages of *The Chosen Place*. Critic Denniston (1995: 117) aptly writes in relation to her will to power: "Marshall reveals the true nature of Harriet's need to control. Symbolically, Harriet represents colonial and neocolonial powers attempting to assert authority and domination over the lives of others." Actually, Harriet is the symbol of the West itself: she holds power not only over her husband, Saul Amron, but she equally controls the Bournehills residents. As a result of her manipulation of the Center for Applied Social Research (the sponsor of Saul's Bournehills project), the latter is called back to Philadelphia for other duties, causing him a great deal of anger (*The Chosen Place*, 473). Harriet's hegemonic attitude in Bournehills is shown on many occasions, the latest being her directive to carnival celebrants who, refusing to heed her efforts to redirect their passage, literally threw her "from their midst against the warehouse door" (*The Chosen Place*, 318). As a black feminist, Marshall understands that not ***all*** women are equally oppressed; Harriet's will to dominate is not unlike Silla's,

but her alliance with the colonial power structure gives her greater amplitude for harm and self-destruction.

Besides Harriet, Marshalløs most beloved character and favorite creation by the novelistøs own admission (in Draper, 1992: 1371), Merle, is another key power center in *The Chosen Place*. A õhopelessly muddled, mildly psychotic, middle-aged colored woman who talked incessantlyö (*The Chosen Place*, 20), Merle deploys a verbal outpouring ó her powerful weapon ó to chastise Bourne Island authorities, or to advocate for the improvement of the lots of Bourne Island residents, her countrymen (*The Chosen Place*, 69; 104). She has volunteered her pieces of advice on occasions. In any case, Merle signals her interest in the governance of Bourne Island at the outset with her urging Lyle Hutson to welcome Saul and his team of western developers who are there to effect change in the place:

> See to it that that so-called expert whoøs here from England helping you people in government cook up the new development plan comes. I am sure theyøll want to talk to him. And I suppose youøll have to ask the Honorable Member for Bournehills, even though as far as Iøm concerned we could do without him. And you had best invite one or two chaps from the Opposition, as hopeless as that is, so they can at least have their say (*The Chosen Place*, 12).

Moreover, Merle has violently criticized the mismanagement of Bourne Island government whose officials are preoccupied with serving themselves in lieu of striving for the well-being of the population. She has come to know, for instance, that the governmentøs different economic development schemes disregard the well-being of Bourne Island citizens but offer tremendous facilities to outsiders. Clearly, officials are selling out the country. As an example, Merle discloses their squandering policy to Lyle, her former boyfriend, now a government official:

> Signed, sealed and delivered, I say. The whole place. Is that what we threw out the white pack who ruled us for years and put you chaps in office for? For you to give away the island? For you to literally pay people to come and make money off us? Fifteen years without having to pay a penny in taxes! All their profits out of the island! A whole factory for ten dollars a year! Why, man, Bourne Island comes like a freeness to them [...] Is that all thatøs possible for us in these small islands? Is that the only way we can exist? Well, if so, itøs no different now than when they were around here selling us for thirty pounds sterling... And the Little Fella is still bleeding his life out in a cane field. Come up to Bournehills some day and see him on those hills. Things are no different. The chains are still on... (*The Chosen Place*, 225-6)

Her above virulent criticism of the governmentøs give-away economic plans is grounded in light of its latest development plan cooked up by Waterford, a British economic expert sent in at the request of the government. The tax-free period for new business, under the new development plan, õwas being extended from five to fifteen years, and all customs duties for them were also being waived for the same period.ö Further, the governmentøs plan õto build at its own expense a huge industrial park, so that when an investor arrived he would find a plant awaiting him ó and this for only the most nominal rentö is another clear invite to foreigners to take advantage over Bourne Island. The government is definitely inciting developed countries to exploit Bourne Island via its enticing development schemes. The final disposition of its current development plan corroborates this statement: it allows expatriate business owners not only to send all their profits out of the country but also to repatriate their õcapital in full should the business failö (*The Chosen Place*, 222-3).

Like Silla in *Brown Girl*, Merle does not only imagine her own point of view, but she speaks her mind as well. As Merle freely confesses to Saul, she belongs to the category of talkers: õSome people act, some think, some feel, but I talk, and if I was to ever stop thatød be the end of me. And worse, I say whatever comes to my mind and the devil with itö (*The Chosen Place*, 69). Marshalløs women do the talking job to right the wrongs done to them and their communities. As a woman, Merle will not remain silent. Arguably, because (black) females have been rendered alien and inarticulate within Western discursive systems, the novelist uses Merle to break their code of silence and invisibility in literature. Marshall is waging a war on a particular patriarchal concept of women as silent subjects. In a cogent argument fraught with a tour de force, William John Thomas Mitchell (1994: 162-3) captures the spirit of subordination typical of social expectations by compounding children, women, and colonized people in a single box: õ÷Children should be seen and not heardø is a bit of proverbial wisdom that reinforces a stereotypical relation, not just between adults and children, but between the freedom to speak and see and the injunction to remain silent and available for observation. That is why this kind of wisdom is transferable from children to women to colonized subjects.ö And, as I previously stated, in many societies, women, like colonized people, have been relegated to the position of the õother,ö õcolonizedö by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with colonized people an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression. It is not surprising, therefore, that the history and concerns of feminist theory have paralleled development in post-colonial theory. Early feminist theory, like post-colonial criticism, was concerned

with inverting the structure of domination, substituting, for instance, a female tradition for a male-dominated canon.

In enabling Merle to use her talk/tongue to divert, subvert, and attack her enemies, Marshall reinforces this tradition for women in literature. Hurston inaugurated it in African American literature, with Janieøs talk in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Though Janie is initially silenced by her husband before she can publicly take the floor, she permanently fastens Jodyøs mouth. Merleøs talk is both a defensive weapon and a strategic device that reinforce this trend in African American literature, because black women traditionally consent in fiction. Merleøs verbal power is instrumental in her assaulting colonial structures that have inflicted wounds on her and other colonized ó the people and the place. õBecause a part of Merleøs fragmentation may be attributed to her recognition of active colonialism,ö Joyce O. Pettis (1995: 100) entertains, õher talk often becomes a calculated public weapon with which she flogs individuals and a world that thinks reductively of the Bournehills residents.ö

While Merleøs verbal power dominates *The Chosen Place*, Marshall moves a step further in her characterization of females in *Daughters*, where modern women are concerned with the political issues affecting their communities, be it in the United States or the Caribbean Islands. Women are not only õfloggingö with their tongues but they partake in the political problems plaguing their communities as well. Variously described as õstars in the politically and culturally changing universeö (Denniston, 1995: 165), or as spiritually whole women who õenvision and work for sociopolitical and economic improvement for their communitiesö (Pettis, 1995: 137), *Daughters* is rife with politically active females who defy gender, race and class restrictions to serve their communities torn by neo-colonialism (in Triunion) or engulfed by white hegemony (in the U.S.). This new generation of women carries out pivotal political roles. Thus, while Ursa-Bea and Estelle play a leading role in Primus Mackenzieøs campaign for re-election to parliament in the tiny island of Triunion, Mae Ryland is committed to improving the plights of African-Americans through her active participation in the mayoral campaign of Sandy Lawson, an African-American (*Daughters*, 281). But this mayor dismally fails his constituents once elected to office.

Like in the United States, Triunionian women work to elect alleged reformist men who betray their principles afterwards. Estelle, the politically astute and energetic wife of Primus, is supportive of her husbandøs initially progressive political goals. Primusøs political objective was to effect political and economic change and to terminate the stasis of political subjection in Triunion. This praiseworthy

political platform has drawn Estelleøs unwavering support of her husbandøs plans. Believing that Primusøs election will enable him to implement his political program, Estelle is always on his side: they even spend their honeymoon campaigning (*Daughters,* 132). Particularly, at re-election time, Ursa-Bea, their beloved and only daughter, a politically astute woman, returns to Triunion, at Estelleøs written request, and õsilently offered herself for whatever would be required of herö (*Daughters*, 363).

Very disappointed in the wake of rigged elections, Primus lost sight of his initial political goal and completely metamorphosed into a corrupt opposition leader by the time he is finally elected. Though Triunionians are still poverty-stricken, he became active on the Planning and Development Board (*Daughters,* 363) and changed to a ferocious defender of the government project to make a resort on public land, adjacent to his land. Estelle narrates her utter disappointment to Ursa-Bea:

> í No experimental farm, Ursa-Bea. No agricultural station. No small farmerøs cooperative such as your father and I talked about for years. No model village, housing scheme or hospital. No cannery or sisal plant or any other kind of factory or plant. Instead, Government Lands is to be a playground for the Fortune 500 and friends (*Daughters*, 357).

Primusøs endorsement of this project that will divest the islanders of prime beach property forces Estelle and Ursa-Bea to adopt strategic methods to circumvent its exploitation by Western investors.

But earlier, Estelle protested against Primusøs corruption, refusing to accompany him to the P and D Board give-away parties to entertain visiting firemen: õDid you hear me, Primus? I said Iøm not going to the P and Døs little affairs this evening for the visiting firemenö (*Daughters*, 226). Completely disgusted with the mismanagement of Triunion and fully fed up with Primusøs political betrayal, Estelle told her husband the reason behind her refusal to take part in those gambling parties:

> õAnd I said Iøm not going. Not tonight, or any other night. Iøve had it with the boardøs brand of planning and development.ö She was thinking of the new section of the main road they had recently built to bypass Armory Hill. To spare the firemen and the tourists the sight of that eyesore. It had cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to cut through the far side of the hill (*Daughters*, 228).

Dreading the huge task of convincing her husband to return to his good initial intention, Estelle invites Ursa-Bea to come back home so that both can rescue him from his political blindness. She sends the following SOS message to Ursa-Bea, their back-and-forth daughter, in the United States:

> Itøs just that this Government Lands thing has really hit me hard. This is the worst to have happened since the elections were stolen that time. Itøs gotten so Iøm afraid of my own thoughts when it comes to the P and D Board and your father. I feel positively murderous some days. Thatøs why I wrote you. I needed you here...
> Because something has to be done to stop those people on the board and to bring your father to his senses. I donøt know what, exactly. Worse, Iøm not sure I could do it, even if I did know.
> ... I donøt think I can manage this one on my own. You have to come down here, Ursa-Bea. Maybe you can think of something. And you have to come right away! (*Daughters*, 363, double line in the original).

In order to sabotage Primusøs plan, Ursa-Bea must deliver to his opponents the previously uncirculated prospectus that outlines the development of resort public lands in the Morlands District. This scheme would potentially give personal gains to Primus, but would bring no benefit to his constituents. Because Ursa-Bea is politically instructed, she is able to politicize the personal and mobilize against her father to assist Triunionians. Though Ursa-Beaøs decision was not easy, because õPrimus has practiced fatherhood with all the seriousness that the role deserves,ö her social conscience can no longer allow her to õignore the deterioration that plagues the island in spite of her fatherøs political office and his rhetoric about changeö (Pettis 1995: 146-7). While her decisive move to abort her fatherøs plan seals her destiny as a useful member to her community (Denniston, 1995: 165), the mother-daughterøs courageous act of privileging the community perpetuates the legacy of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe, an enslaved couple who resisted oppression during the heyday of slavery on the island.

Besides rescuing Primus, Ursa-Bea and Estelleøs plan will offer him a chance for rebirth, as he can be persuaded to õresign his seat in the House, quit the P and D Board, and join whatøs left of the NPP with him and the Independents,ö the NPP being the main opposition party headed by Primus.[2] He could then become õthe honorary head of the party and their principal adviser,ö because people feel õhe still has a lot to offer the countryö (*Daughters*, 361). The women in the novel become the revolutionaries who must lead their men in the right direction. Here again, men are failures and traitors, while women are stars who save the community from social and political chaos. Indeed, as Susan Ann Kay (1985: 476-484) has argued, in the world outside the traditional home, feminism should increase the relevance of political action to the life of women and encourage their participation

[2] The National Progressive Party (the NPP) is the opposition party to the Democratic National Party (the DNP), the ruling party in Triunion ó the Do-Nothing Party, as Primus used to call them.

in politics. Marshall has achieved this feminist goal by pushing for womenøs active involvement in the polity.

Through her description of political life in Triunion, Marshall is urging a need for cooperation between men and women for political and communal well-being. The collaboration between Will Cudjoe and Congo Jane who once fought against the oppressor as õcoleaders, coconspirators, [and] loversö (*Daughters*, 138), the political commitment of Primus and Estelle as well as the team work of Mr. Beaufils and his wife ó who are giving out flyers of their new political party and holding meetings in Triunion (*Daughters*, 360) ó are key instances exemplifying her vision. As Denniston (1995: 155) sees it, Marshall õinsists upon a strong moral imperative: that for the sake of communal progress, black men and black women must stand together in mutual support.ö

Definitely, the daughters in *Daughters* recognize that the õsonsö cannot be trusted to liberate the people. As one critic claims (in Davis, 1996: 198), õThe daughters may well have to sabotage destructive activities and politics in order to move to a more positive world. The revolutionary couple of Cuffee Ned and Congo Jane may be an ideal worth struggling for, but it is not the only revolutionary possibility.ö For Marshall, men and women are to collaborate for a better political, economic and socio-cultural management of the world. Only through this process can we achieve a healthy society.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown the centrality of feminism to Marshalløs fiction. As both of its sections have argued, while her inaugural short stories examine womenøs attempts to overcome sexual discrimination and patriarchal exigencies, her large-scale novels prominently feature women as power centers. Unlike some male novelists who have been forced to shift to a feminist perspective, the author of *Merle and Other Stories* has weaved feminism into the tapestry of her fiction at the outset. So, womanism/feminism looms large in her novelistic writing, with females radiating power in both her early short stories and mature novels. Moreover, this study has revealed a crescendo in Marshalløs feminism: from her preoccupation with womenøs domestic struggles that dominate her first short stories, she moves to addressing communal and political issues in her novels. This movement, which is a testimony to her seeking the survival of the whole of her people, centrally locates Marshall as a womanist.

Additionally, this essay has reviewed some of her major feminist strategies. Re*e*naøs defeating male domination (by demanding and obtaining her right to self-fulfillment) represented a laudable

feminist achievement. Her vindicating the need to be recognized as a person in her own right, entitled to respect and fulfillment, in every aspect of her life, was a ground shattering feminist event. Equally, countering the inaccurate theory that black women õjes grew,ö Marshallø meticulous tracking the development of an intelligent and complex female protagonist in *Brown Girl* was a groundbreaking womanist revolution in her full-fledged novel. Likewise and consistent with her ideological propensity to make women the center of power in her fiction, her female characters are not only fighters who flog the world with their lashing tongues but they are equally gifted with renewed levels of feminist consciousness. Furthermore, by showering them with economic power and financial success in *Brown Girl*, Marshall has symbolically reinstated the millions of women disempowered by patriarchy. These economically secure and financially independent women are security havens for their families. Also, by portraying them as politically astute women who are committed to serving the cause of their communities, on the one hand, and by having the men betray the aspirations of their peoples in *Daughters* and *The Chosen Place,* on the other, these females have become the revolutionaries who lead their men in the right direction. In sum, while men are failures, women are stars who save their communities from social and political chaos. Marshall is, at the end of the day, a thorough feminist writer: no wonder that her earlier works were rediscovered during the decade of feminism.

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