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**FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

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GRADE / DEGREE

School of Globalization and International Development

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

**From Paper to Practice:
The Potential of Haitian Women's Fiction as a Conscious Raising Developmental Resource**

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Globalization and International Development Master's Thesis

April 2010

**From Paper to Practice:
The Potential of Haitian Women's Fiction as a Conscious Raising Developmental
Resource**

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UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

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Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-65984-7
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-65984-7

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Acknowledgements

During the course of researching and writing this thesis I have been privileged with the guidance of individuals to whom I am sincerely grateful.

I am indebted, first, to Professor Andrea Martinez for her supervision of my work—for her encouragement, enthusiasm and receptiveness. In frustrating circumstances where I might have drastically changed courses she remained optimistic and allowed me to stay faithful to my vision.

I would also like to thank Professor Marie-Josée Massicotte and Professor Dominique Masson for being members of my committee as well as for their invaluable feedback during the proposal process.

Abstract

Within this thesis I explore the idea of using feminist fiction to further women's empowerment in the context of a developing area. Taking the use of feminist fiction as a conscious raising resource during the second wave of feminism in Canada, the United States and England as a starting point, I look to the canon of feminist fiction of Haiti as an unmined resource that may be used for similar purposes. I argue that texts within this canon may be used in the same way if it can be shown that they deal with the evolution or manifestation of feminist (oppositional) consciousness through the narratives of female protagonists. As such, I undertake the qualitative content analysis of five texts from five Haitian female authors using, as a measuring gauge, the four elements of minimal oppositional consciousness as put forward and defined by Mansbridge (2001). As oppositional consciousness plays an important causal role in the motivation to work for or act as agents within liberation movements, the potential within these feminist texts to rouse or crystallize such a consciousness within Haitian women provides the link between feminist fiction and the ultimate empowerment of Haitian women.

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I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth, the way a piece of fiction can be harder than the truth. The story of what happened or what did not happen but what should have---that the story can become a curtain drawn shut, a piece of insulation, a disguise, a razor, a tool that changes every time it is used and sometimes becomes something other than we intended. The story becomes the thing needed.

Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is what it means to have no lived version of your life but the one you make.

----- Dorothy Allison. "Two or Three
Things I Know For Sure

Introduction

This thesis rests upon the belief that within the field of development the approach to the empowerment of women must be holistic. As such, it should take into account political, economic and social development, be at least partly grassroots and focus on the agency of women to initiate positive changes to their lives. While there does not seem to be a consistently shared definition of “empowerment”, feminist research usually refers to Kabeer’s (2001) analysis of the ability to make choices. According to the author, empowerment is the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 2001:19). In other words, strategic life choices are choices that have greater significance than others in terms of their consequences for people’s lives. Examples of this are choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry and with whom, number of children and freedom of movement. These strategic life choices should be distinguished from other less consequential choices which may be important for the quality of life but do not constitute its defining parameters.

Such empowerment may depend, to a certain extent, upon “top-down” political, economic and social initiatives such as international and national laws and regulations, economic aid, health care, human rights and literacy programs. However, it is my contention that it must also focus on organic resources; resources that may have been overlooked as such, and the way that they may be used to equip women to initiate their own responses to whatever obstacles and oppressions affect their lives.

It is with the idea of exploring such resources in the context of a developing area that I chose to study works of fiction written by Haitian women, looking specifically at the potential that such texts may have as an oppositional conscious raising tool, galvanizing this

population into introspection about the political, economic, social and cultural constraints that stand as obstacles to their empowerment.

My choice of Haitian women's fiction and its potential for Haitian women's empowerment stems from my personal interest in Haitian women which in turn arose from my employment at Refuge Juan Moreno, a refuge for women and children that are seeking asylum in Canada. The refuge is a shelter that houses up to sixteen women and children at a time; the residents spend anywhere from two weeks to two months at the refuge before they are ready to leave and live independently.

During my four years of employment at the refuge the overwhelming majority of residents were Haitian women and it was through hearing their personal narratives and experiences with political and social oppression, conflict and ultimate flight and exile that I developed an interest in doing my thesis on Haitian women.

In particular I was interested in the manner in which many of these women viewed the freedoms of opposition, expression and action that Canadian women have and the way that they use them. Admiring their rights to these freedoms they nonetheless felt that such women and such rights existed on a sphere separated from their own by the strictly patriarchal culture and customs that they were a part of. Even after explaining the historical struggle of Canadian women for the rights that they enjoy today to these residents I was left with the sense that such struggles did not resonate with them because the experiences of oppression and even of patriarchy were so different from their own. It was within these circumstances that I began thinking of what kind of resource or approach could be used to engage these residents with the idea that women's movements and the aim for social, economic and political equality and justice need not be specific to women within the

developed world or to actions such as public protests, marches, etc. I thought it important for the residents to know that opposition to political, social and cultural oppression by women could be carried out in many different ways and that such oppositions, on a large scale or smaller ones, all begin with an individual realization of these wrongs and a belief that they must be changed. I wanted to show the Haitian residents within the refuge that even within the context of their own specific culture and histories such struggles and oppositions could and have taken place, albeit in different ways than in the Canadian context.

My premise of the way that women's development should be forwarded as well as my interest in such resources for Haitian women reconcile themselves through this thesis. Haiti is a country that has been plagued by decades of political instability and conflict and the culture is highly conservative and patriarchal. However, from these volatile and hindering conditions Haitian female authors have arisen to produce a body of fiction that is profound in its depth of content and breadth of expression. While there is research on the revolutionary, feminist nature of this fiction, there is a lack of work on what potential this revolutionary fiction written by Haitian female authors can have in terms of evolving the feminist consciousness of Haitian women within the Diaspora and in Haiti.

It is out of an effort to bridge the gap between this fiction and its potential for Haitian women's development through consciousness raising that I have formulated my research question.

Research Question

During the second wave of feminism in Canada, the United States and England, works of fiction by authors such as Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Rita Mae Brown and Sylvia Plath, which dealt with the evolution of female consciousness to women's oppression

through their female protagonists, were used as a feminist conscious raising resource amongst women.

Within the canon of Haitian women's literature there are texts that address issues of cultural, political and social oppressions and injustices affecting Haitian women. Do these texts exemplify the evolution, crystallization or practical implementation of female oppositional consciousness through their respective female protagonists, thereby allowing for the idea that their potential for Haitian women's development may be as an oppositional conscious raising resource, similar to the way that feminist fictional works were used during the second wave of feminism within Canada, the United States and the UK?

Objectives

At a context specific level my objective within this thesis will is to raise and explore the possibility of a link between the body of fiction written by Haitian women and the actual empowerment of Haitian women; individual and/or collective. I will attempt to do this by reconciling the two through the expression of oppositional consciousness within the fictional texts and the potential influence that this expression might have in rousing such a consciousness amongst a Haitian female readership.

Using the Haitian context as an example, however, my larger objective is to extend the idea of searching for and analyzing such organic, overlooked resources for their potential at the broader level of women's development in developing areas.

I hope that my research may provide a stepping-stone for scholars, feminist activists and women's groups that are interested in the way that alternative resources and spaces such as art/literature may be used to further the empowerment of women.

Thesis Outline

In **Chapter 1** I will be providing a review of the literature on the particular use of women's fiction as a consciousness raising resource during the second wave of feminism, the specific way that feminist fiction influences its women's readership and the genesis and the revolutionary nature of Haitian women's fiction.

In **Chapter 2** I will be expanding upon the larger theoretical framework in which my work is embedded, focusing on Postcolonial feminism as a theory in which to contextualize my work and Oppositional Consciousness as a theory with which to frame it. I will also detail the methodology for my thesis as well as the sample of fictional texts that I have chosen.

In **Chapter 3** I will undertake the analysis of the five representative works of five Haitian female authors through the prism of oppositional consciousness.

It should be noted that my work was originally to take a different direction. Initially, it was my intention to explore whether or not Haitian women's fiction had influenced Haitian women by concentrating on self-proclaimed Haitian feminists within the Diaspora. However, after a few months of fruitless searching I realized that it would be very difficult to find a significant representative sample of such women within my restrictions of time and resources. I therefore changed course. While keeping to the intention of looking for developmental resources for Haitian women that might have gone unexplored or at least unnoticed, I scaled my ambition back a few steps. I decided to look at the specific content of texts written by Haitian women to explore exactly what *kind* of potential such fiction may have for Haitian women before looking to see if such a potential has realized itself amongst Haitian feminists of the Diaspora.

My finished work may be used as a kind of measuring gauge within the next step of looking at what the influence of such fiction has already been amongst its Haitian female readership.

I. Literature Review

I. Women's Fiction as a Feminist Resource

The possibility of women's fiction being more than an aesthetic and creative outlet is not a new one. That literature has changed the lives of women, that books have at various times and in various places given them a sense of collectivity, identity and movement and provided vision for social change is an idea that has been the subject of both theory and practice.

Anthropologist Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990) writes of the possibilities for women in storytelling. She contends that women whose identities have been plundered by patriarchal forces, colonialism and/or imperialism may reclaim the past by connecting themselves to a communal consciousness. In this context communal consciousness refers to that consciousness which binds women together who have a shared history or experience of either a particular place or time. While individual consciousness and experience differs from woman to woman (or individual to individual) communal consciousness is an affirmation and a realization that these individual experiences are embedded in a common experience (Minh-ha: 1990: 16). Minh-ha states that storytelling is a valid means of reclamation: Storytelling, the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community, constitutes a rich oral and written legacy, whose values have regained all importance recently, especially in the context of writings by women of color (1990: 148).

Michael Hanne (1994) argues that fiction can act in a politically and productively disruptive way for subordinate groups. Following his analysis, narratives that tell stories which have been discounted or ignored or which have been written out of history can "produce authority where there is no power and are a means of converting historical weaknesses into discursive strength" (Hanne, 1994: 8). He posits that in this capacity fiction

becomes a weapon against alienation, an instrument of self-assertion and an “oppositional practice” of great significance (1994: 26). Harlow (1987) reiterates this when she states that both the writing and the reading of feminist-resistance literature have always been a means for women to engage in political and politicized activity and that in this way literature is an arena of struggle (Harlow, 1987: 28).

Register (1975), in her influential essay on feminist literary criticism, argues that women’s literature can be used to advance feminist ideas because it could “augment conscious-raising” by providing “realistic insight into female personality development, self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and other ‘private’ or ‘internal’ consequences of sexism” that readers can then balance with “factual information about the status of women from other sources” (Register, 1975: 22). According to her these novels can provide personal narratives, more extended versions of the kinds of testimonies that women give when they meet and discuss their personal experiences. The novels are to function in the form of “testimonies” of the absent members.

Ohmann (1987) speaks to the idea of how such novels resonate with their audiences.

These novels tell stories of people trying to live a decent life in certain social settings, people represented as analogous to “us”, rather than as “cases” to be examined and understood from a clinical distance....a premise of the use of this kind of fiction for social movements is that individual consciousness, not the social or historical field, is the locus of significant happening. (Ohman, 1987:80)

Frye (1986) lays out the relationship between the reader and the text for women in the following way:

The fullest participation of the novel in feminist change derives from the reader, especially the woman reader, who might find through the reading of novels the growing edge of her own humanity, extending beyond available roles and categories into a renewed future. As she learns from female characters new ways to interpret her own and other women's experiences, she helps to reshape the culture's understanding of women and participates in the feminist alteration of human experience. (Frye, 1986: 191)

In the same vein Hogeland (1998) expands on the use of the "consciousness raising" novel for women's movements and feminists by arguing that novels that deal with women's issues aid with circulating the ideas of feminism and by personalizing them within specific female narratives.

Hogeland (1998) notes that it is not necessary for an author to identify herself as a feminist in order for a work to be feminist in nature. Authors such as Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing, whose respective works (among others) *A Handmaidens Tale* and *The Golden Notebook* stand as iconic examples of feminist fiction which have influenced generations of feminists since their publications, have nevertheless vehemently denied being "feminist writers", mostly in order to escape their work being pigeonholed as feminist fiction. According to Hogeland then, we can define and identify a text as feminist for "its analysis of gender as socially constructed and its sense that what has been constructed may be reconstructed---for its understanding that change is possible and that narrative can play a part in it" (Hogeland, 1998:6). This is an important distinction that I apply within my own analysis as well. However, she also points out that what constitutes feminist fiction has always been hotly contested. She notes that feminism is specific to context, group and time

and differs from individual to individual so that there is a constant shaping and reshaping in two ways: from reader to text and vice versa (1998: 12).

In addition, Hogeland (1998) states that consciousness raising through feminist novels does not always have to be directly related to action or social movements but that these novels may work to provide the rudimentary and starting points for feminism which *ultimately* lead to action and/or opposition (1998: 12).

A similar idea of novels as conscious raising tools has been expanded upon by Lauret (1994) in her analysis of the use of feminist fiction during the second wave women's movement in Canada, the United States and England. Lauret considers the way in which feminist fiction aims to target its female readership, defining such fiction as distinctive within the arena of women's writing in that it consists of texts which deal with the themes of female oppression, female consciousness of this oppression and underlying discourses of female agency and social change. She notes that these works address their readership in ways which seek to challenge prevailing cultural definitions of gender so that at the same time that they construct the reader as a gendered subject in conventional ways, they also offers the possibility of new and transgressive positions (Lauret, 1994: 88). She points to the role that feminist literature played during the second wave of feminism in Canada, the United States and England during the 1960s and 70s as a prime example of this.

Feminist fiction transformed the literary arena and willfully made it a gendered, political space in which women's issues could be discussed and a feminist readership constituted. In the works of Marilyn French, Marge Percy, Alice Walker, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing and a host of other writers, the political discourses of

Women's Liberation and Black feminism informed imaginative reconstructions of the condition of women in American society. (1994: 3)

According to Lauret (1994), novels such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*, Rita Mae Brown's *Ruby Fruit Jungle* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, had, by virtue of their material, politicizing designs upon their readers, and these designs were to generate and then mobilize anger over the situation of women and to use this anger for the cause of radical change (1994: 95).

These, as well as a host of other female writers that brought forth feminist texts, explored the obstacles that women faced every day in a male dominated society (if not world). These included restrictive sexual mores, the stifling aspects of middle class suburbia, abortion, premature marriage and female disenchantment with the limitations of life.

Lauret (1994) explains how women's liberation movements in the 60's and 70's, feeling that they were excluded from the representational democratic system, had to create their constituency rather than finding it ready made in the traditional world of politics. This required the crucial work of raising women's consciousness not only about the movement, but also about the *need* for the movement. It was this crucial and critical junction that was filled by the women novelists and the feminist texts that they produced. Lauret notes: "Such books were fictions of subjectivity, trying to give a voice, shape and form to a story which can bring a notional feminist self into being" (1994: 96).

II. Haitian Women's Revolutionary Feminist Fiction

While there is a lack of research on the way that Haitian women's fiction may be used as such a resource for women's movements amongst Haitian women, which is a gap that I hope

to be able to address, the literature on Haitian women's fiction does highlight how this extrapolation may be made in terms of the nature and content of certain texts within this canon.

Haitian women's fiction, by mere virtue of its existence, is subversive. The perception of female writers as deviants has been a long-standing Haitian (and patriarchal) norm. It is one that persists until today. The idea that for women the very act of writing (not even taking into account the content of the writing) is an act of resistance against Haitian social and cultural norms and resistance against the roles women are relegated to is threaded through the literature.

Chancy (one of the foremost scholars within the field of Haitian women's literature) (1997) states that Haitian women writers, since the end of the American occupation in 1934, have had to contend with the legacy of occupation, with the anti-women, anti-feminist practices of the Duvalier regime (a regime marked not only by censorship but also by unmatched violence directed against women) and all the regimes that came after, as well as with rigid cultural norms that make outcasts of women that express even an ambition of such a career (Chancy, 1997:13). This partly accounts for the far fewer numbers of Haitian female authors compared to male authors; only eighteen female writers from Haiti have been published, compared to over four hundred male writers (1997:12).

However, Chancy further posits that what Haitian female writers of fiction lack in the number of texts produced, they more than make up for in the potency of their work and its reach. Haitian women writers occupy an important place in the canon of Postcolonial literature written by women. This includes francophone authors such as Nadine Magloire, Jan J. Dominique and Ghislaine Cartier and Anglophone authors such as Edwidge Danticat

and Anne-Christine D'Adesky. These authors (among others) have written from both within Haiti and from the Diaspora and their work spans a time period from the early twentieth century until the present day. Some of them, such as Danticat, have achieved international fame and recognition while others, such as Madame Virgile Valcine, are better known within Haiti and the Haitian Diaspora (1997:15).

The literature of Haitian women can be termed revolutionary, according to Chancy, not only because the authors have written it in the forbidding social and cultural circumstances discussed above, but because it *contests* the accounts of the “other” Haitian history that has denied female existence and experience in spheres ranging from class, race and sexuality to Haitian nationalism. She notes the unifying themes of subversion and opposition to traditional historical, political and cultural narratives, as well as the attempt by these authors to “rewrite” these narratives. She also argues that the reframing of history in so many of the texts of Haitian women writers has resulted in a distinct literary tradition, characterized by attempts at subverting patriarchal and colonial narratives and representations of Haitian history and the role and representation of Haitian women within that history. (1997: 48)

Marie Shelton (1992) reinforces these ideas of Haitian women writers not only contesting and protesting against traditional narratives, but providing answering narratives as well. She claims that women writers in Haiti have borne the burden of reframing history to reflect the true experiences of not just Haitian women but of all Haitians whose experiences were discounted or lost. (Shelton, 1992:96)

Charles (1995) argues that the majority of the fictional texts published by Haitian women are concerned with a redefinition of the self, that Haitian female self which is always defined by and in relation to Haitian males (Charles, 1995:137). Moreover, she addresses

what she believes is “covert feminism” within many books written by Haitian women, noting that there is a tradition within the canon of expressing covertly ideas that cannot be expressed through overt and heavy handed feminist messages.

The most transgressive aspects of women's lives --- their tenacity, their use of violence to attain liberation, their expression of sexual desire, to name but a few --- are therefore told at a slant, as if there are secrets to be whispered and preciously preserved. (1995: 137)

She reiterates further that Haitian female authors have sought to use discourse in order to redefine themselves outside of the dominant male discourse that has sought to silence them and that in doing so they have created a protected space within which to challenge political, social and patriarchal oppressions and the stereotypes concerning themselves. (1995: 142)

III. Conclusion

It is this idea of women’s literature as a consciousness raising resource amongst a female readership, as well as the example of the way in which this resource was used by and aided the women’s movements during the second wave of feminism¹, that I will be using as a starting point from which to look at the potential of Haitian women’s literature for similar purposes.

The feminist and revolutionary nature of Haitian women’s literature already established, my research will focus on determining whether or not there are texts within this canon that deal with the evolution/formation of (Haitian) female oppositional consciousness as it engages with the oppressions, social injustices and gender issues that (Haitian) women face. If it is possible to establish that Haitian women’s fiction deals with the evolution or

¹ This refers to a period of feminist activity which began during the early 1960s and lasted throughout the late 1970s in the US, Canada and England.

formation of such consciousness within Haitian women, then it will be possible to use the historical precedent to argue for its potential use amongst Haitian women as a consciousness raising resource and, as such, a possible tool for women's empowerment as well.

It is necessary to locate these ideas about the empowerment of Haitian women through a feminist oppositional consciousness within a larger feminist framework. Such a framework will be established within the next chapter.

II. Theoretical Framework & Methodology

I. Feminist Theory

This work is informed by feminist practice and theory. Such a theory is defined by Shohat (1999:2) as "... the critique of masculinist ideologies and the desire to undo patriarchal power regimes" (1999: 2). In the context of this paper, 'patriarchy' refers to those systems---political, material and imaginative—which invest power in men and marginalize women. Patriarchy is also understood to manifest itself in both concrete ways (such as disqualifying women a vote) and at the level of the imagination (McLeod, 175:2000). Furthermore, gender is categorized as a multilayered term defined in relation to other power variables such as class, race and sexuality and the female subject of feminism is constructed across multiple discourses.

The particular feminist theory that I have chosen to contextualize my work within is postcolonial feminism.

(i) Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Franz Fanon (amongst others) consider that there existed a range of different colonial and imperial relations during the nineteenth century which still have a major effect on the way that colonized cultures and people see themselves. It is this concern with the present day legacy of colonialism that is the fundamental focus of postcolonial theory (Mills: 1991).

Postcolonial theory covers a broad range of theoretical concerns, from the challenges of developing a national identity after colonial rule to the ways that the present day political, economic, and social dynamics in different countries have been directly shaped by laws and regulations that were imposed during their colonized histories.

Postcolonial theory is a widely debated and contested field. Some critics claim that postcolonialism is a concept which is embedded in identity politics (political arguments that focus upon the self interest and perspectives of social minorities, or self-identified social interest groups). According to such critics, basing group politics on marginalization is problematic because it creates a perpetual (and damaging) sense of victimization amongst members of the group. In addition, some strands of postcolonial theory have been criticized for being too simplistic. Ann Laura Stoler (2002), in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, argues that the simplistic oppositional binary concept of *Colonizer* and *Colonized* is more complicated than it seems, since these categories are fluid and shifting.

That said, postcolonial theory can broadly be defined as an intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and an analysis of the economic, political, social and cultural legacies of colonialism. It is focused not on the analysis of economic and political structures, but also on the examination of the development of particular structures of thinking and behavior. It is concerned with analyzing and theorizing the enduring impact of nineteenth century European colonialism, both in the countries that were colonized and in the countries that colonized (Mills, 12:1991).

It is important to note that the nature of the field is widely variable given the fact that colonial discourse and experience can and has functioned in different ways for different people at different times. As such, it is characterized by heterogeneity and diversity of experience and discourse.

(ii). Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Postcolonial feminists (like postcolonial theorists) are not a unified group. In the most general terms, however, postcolonial feminists are those feminists who have reacted against

the lack of address to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial theory and also against the universalizing tendencies within Western feminist thought. (Mills: 1991)

Postcolonial feminism has been influential in a number of ways. First, it has brought about a “worlding” (1991: 98) of mainstream feminist theory. Under the influence of postcolonial feminism, theory has moved from a parochial concern with white, middle-class women to a focus on women of different national and cultural contexts. In the same vein it has forced a change in mainstream white feminist thinking, prompting western feminists in particular to think about whom they are speaking for when they speak of “woman” or “women”. It has made them subject to scrutiny that very act of “speaking for” someone else.

Second, it has forced postcolonial theorists to think about the issue of gender. Postcolonial theory was concentrated on analysis of the issues of race and difference but gender had, for the most part, been neglected (1991:96).

Third, postcolonial feminist has established itself as a form of analysis in its own right, rather than being simply seen as a critique of western feminism or postcolonial theory. As Mills states: “It has developed both a position from which to speak, and a set of issues to be addressed” (1991: 98).

Although the field is filled with many feminist academics whose range of interests are as varied as those of postcolonial theorists themselves, I will be focusing on the work of those postcolonial feminist theorists whose ideas are most pertinent to the issues that I raise within my own work, i.e. “Third World” women.

(iii.) “Third World” Woman, Subaltern Voices & Subjectivities

As already noted, one of the cornerstones of postcolonial feminist theory is its critique of the homogenizing tendency of Western feminist discourse in its treatment of “third world” woman/women.

This issue is central to Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s influential essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse” (1984). In this work Mohanty explores the production of a singular category of ‘third world’ women in western feminism, which, according to her, damagingly creates the discursive homogenization, and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world” (Mohanty, 1984: 334). She also points out the danger of replicating unequal power relations between the “first world” and the “third world” due to these presuppositions or assumptions made in western feminist discourse about “third world” women.

Mohanty’s interests are in the textual strategies employed by western feminists which reinscribe and legitimate the power imbalance through western feminism, limiting and demarking “third world” women in ways that reproduce colonist attitudes. As she states: “.. it is both to the *explanatory potential* of particular analytical strategies employed by such writing, and to their *political effect* in the context of the hegemony of Western scholarship that I want to draw attention to here” (1984: 336).

She considers the way in which certain texts produce a “third world” woman as someone who leads a limited life based on her gender and the assumption within these texts of such a third world woman as being ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized etc.” (1984:337). By conceiving of “the average third world woman” (1984:337), western feminists construct a template for female identity in the third

world with little regard to context. For Mohanty, this is tantamount to a colonial act, in the imposition of a homogeneous identity or “third world” woman without regard to the historical and cultural differences which inevitably exceed this category.

Mohanty also addresses the implications of this kind of homogenous representation when it comes to the political agendas that are assumed by western feminists. She argues that certain western feminists, in their theoretical work, have focused on an (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently all women are to organize. (1984: 334). She goes on to argue against this type of universalizing by western feminists, according to which it is assumed that women are “an already constituted coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions”. This “implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy...which can be applied universally and even cross culturally” (1984: 335). This type of theorizing, which focuses on the oppression of women globally, has the effect of constituting women as a powerless, mistaking the “discursively, consensual, homogeneity of “women” as a group.... for the historically specific material reality of groups of women” (1984: 338). Context in such cases is always secondary to the universal assumption of the same kinds of oppression and hence universal victimization under male violence, the structure of the family, economic structures and so on.

For Mohanty, within western feminist discourse there is little attempt to consider the different types of social relations between men and women or to look closely at the relations between men and women social and ethnic differences. Furthermore, the assimilation of this homogeneous “third world woman” within western feminist discourse suggests that western feminism speaks for and remains the primary means by which oppression against women in

the form of patriarchy, chauvinism and sexism are challenged. As objects of western feminist analysis, “third world” women are robbed of their agency.

Mohanty’s critique of western feminism has been central to a rethinking of the essential bases of feminist thought; it has contributed to the postcolonial feminist idea of bringing into questions of who is speaking for whom and to what end into the forefront of discussion (Fuss 1989; Butler 1990).

Another giant within the field of postcolonial feminism is Gayatri Spivak. Like Mohanty, she argues against the idea of an essentialist “third world” woman with a uniform life and outlook that is so prominent in Western feminist discourse. She points out that to define diverse women as some kind of composite entity is to replicate labeling found under colonial paternalism (Spivak: 1993). Spivak has developed a critique against the inadequate representation of the lived realities and the histories of women of the “Third World” within western discourse, most famously in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak”.

Within this work, Spivak’s emphasis is on certain types of colonized subjects rather than others. In particular, she contrasts the elite colonial subjects, who were complicit with the colonial authorities, with the non-elite colonial subject, or the subaltern. When discussing the subaltern female subject within her influential work she notes:

Both as object of colonial historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history, and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak, 1993a: 91)

According to Spivak, in order to speak of this subaltern female subject, the western feminist critic therefore has to “unlearn female privilege” (1993a: 91), in the sense that she

has to think about the history of her position in relation to the subaltern. Central in importance is the idea that feminists must learn to speak to women and not for women. They must be willing to learn the limits of their methodologies through an encounter with women in different contexts, rather than assimilate differences within a grander design.

In her article “Three women’s texts and a critique of imperialism” (1985), Spivak significantly reorients postcolonial feminist criticism in forcing a re-examination of some key literary texts in women’s studies. In her analysis of texts such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Spivak argues that the colonial subjects within the books are marginalized and made tangential to the narrative. She writes of the maid from Martinique, Christophene, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: “She cannot be contained within a novel which rewrites canonical English texts within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native” (1985:253). Therefore, even though Rhys’ book was hailed as a book in which “the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister’s consolidation” (1985: 251), this novel is still written from the point of view of the colonizer and marginalizes the colonized subject. Using these texts as examples, Spivak points out how because the focus is on the white, central female characters, feminists and readers are unable to examine the production of other subject positions, or even, more importantly the marginalizing of other subject positions. (Mills, 1991: 107)

It is important to note that Spivak avoids the possible charge of ethnocentrism in her arguments by refusing the logic that only Indian women, for example, can speak for other Indian women. What is central to her arguments about the homogenizing tendencies amongst western feminist discourse and the representation of “third world” women, where they are represented, is that women, no matter where they are from, must always look to the

specifics of their own positions and the positions of others and must recognize the political, cultural and institutional contexts within which they work.

Trinh Minh-Ha (1989) is also concerned with the idea of monolithic terms in Western feminism and the repercussions. For Minh-Ha, Western feminists, using the generic “third world” woman, effaces difference. The danger in this is that the third world woman remains unrepresented. Minh-Ha’s argument revolves around the complexity and the power politics of subject positions. She states “first world” academic feminists retain a superior subject position through effacing difference among “third world” women. In this way the “third world” woman becomes a subject of “special” (marginal) interest. Her work adds to the stance of the academics above who decry the use of “third world” women as marginal and marginalized subjects within the discourse of Western feminism. She puts it bluntly by stating: “It is as if everywhere we go we become someone’s private zoo” (1989:80).

Patricia Hill Collins (2000), an iconic representative of black feminist theory, puts forward an idea of understanding and recognizing the contextualization of individual lived experience through the idea of *intersectionality*. Intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination (2000: 299). As these oppressions intersect in different ways in the life of each individual, so intersectionality creates different kinds of lived experiences and social realities not only in people from different marginalized groups, but amongst individuals within the same group as well.

Sandoval (2000) has named a particular kind of theorizing within this field as “US Third World feminism” to describe a feminist theory which sets itself in opposition to the dominant or hegemonic feminism of white, middle-class Anglo-Americans. She argues that in some senses a position of a third gender is being developed in US Third World feminist writings and that these feminists reiterate their inability to fit into the categorization of gender which western feminist have formulated. She suggests: “women of color somehow exist in their interstices between the legitimated categories of the social order” (2000:4).

She maintains that rather than responding to this “differential consciousness” of US Third World feminism, “hegemonic feminists” or mainstream Western feminists have, in fact, characterized it as a problem to be solved through theories of difference.

For Sandoval differential consciousness should not be seen as a dividing force between feminists of the “first world” and the “third world”. Such a consciousness is not something that forces white feminists to admit implicit racism, rather, it is a productive way of thinking through the changes necessary for more recognition of heterogeneity without forcing difference into an oppositional categorization.

(iv.) The Postcolonial Context of Haiti

Postcolonial theory grounds and provides a theoretical “backdrop” to my work which is pertinent given Haiti’s history of (very brief) Spanish and (to a larger and longer extent) French colonization. From the period of 1915-1934 Haiti was also under American military occupation.

The legacies of colonialism can be used to understand the history of authoritarian rule and political turbulence---only 7 of its 44 presidents have served out their terms, and there have been only 2 peaceful transitions of power since the beginning of the republic---as well

as the related dynamics of underdevelopment and the politics of class and color within Haitian society (Randall: 2007).

For example, French colonialism generated an authoritarian political tradition rooted in the legacy of the plantation economy. Based on slavery, this economy created a real dilemma for Haiti's founding leaders, a dilemma that was never resolved satisfactorily. Immediately after gaining independence in 1804, the country's founders were confronted with a crucial choice. They needed to restart a devastated economy and yet the material foundation on which emancipation could flourish obviated against individual freedom. Material recovery depended on agricultural exports--primarily sugar--based on plantation production, which in turn required coercive forms of labor. Haiti's founding fathers, Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion, were all bent on revitalizing this mode of production, but this posed a crucial dilemma: how to reconcile the safeguard of emancipation and the former slaves' aspirations to become an independent peasantry with the labor discipline that the plantation economy required. If they preserved emancipation by supporting the former slaves' aspirations to become independent peasants, they would ultimately condemn the country to material underdevelopment. If they promoted an immediate economic recovery, Haiti's rulers would be compelled to impose a military-like discipline on the newly freed masses and they would thus emasculate emancipation itself. Fearing the weakness of the state to external imperialistic forces and also fearing a re-colonization, they chose the latter. Thus, in spite of ending slavery, the Haitian revolution and its subsequent defense reinforced militaristic patterns of behavior and a hierarchical social structure.

The plantation system, the hostility of western imperial forces, and the class aspirations of

Haitian leaders created a historical fissure between a militaristic state of the few and the wider society of the many. In this sense, at the very beginning of independence, a real class society crystallized (2007: 84)

In addition to the issue of class, there is also the question of color. During colonial rule mixed race, lighter skinned individuals (or “mulattos”) historically enjoyed more status, privileges, and wealth than the black majority who were direct descendents of the slave population brought from Africa to work within the plantations. The mixed race elite lived in towns, controlling the government, military, and trade; they imitated a European lifestyle, using the French language for government, commercial affairs, and education. The peasants, on the other hand, lived in the *peyi andeyò*, or "the country outside" (2004:12). They farmed small plots of land, having little to do with the mechanisms of government and commerce. Although the peasants paid taxes, the government did little to improve conditions in rural areas. Conducting their lives according to African-based traditions and speaking only Creole, they were effectively disenfranchised and totally isolated. The majority peasant population remained outside the formal political, educational, and economic structure. With the exception of a very small minority of the peasantry that has risen to power through military channels, this pattern of power, education, and wealth remains unchanged to this day and has generated political tensions and conflicts between the two groups throughout the postcolonial history of Haiti. This reflects the persistence of racial divisions and inequalities inherited from the colonial period.

In 1915, Haitian political instability, American trade and investments, growing U.S. concern over German interests and influence in Haiti, and Haiti's strategic importance to the United States led to a U.S. invasion and occupation that would last almost 20 years. In the

previous 72-year period Haiti had experienced 102 revolts, revolutions, civil wars, and coups. This political volatility itself was a result of the above-mentioned authoritarian nature of government (inherited from the French) and the extremely unequal division of wealth, which created dissatisfaction and resentment amongst the population.

It can be argued that the twenty-year imperial rule by the US was a re-colonization of the island. Under the American occupation, Haitian figureheads were installed, but the United States had veto power over all government decisions, and the Marine Corps served as administrators in the provinces. The United States declared martial law, took control of Haiti's finances, and passed legislation permitting foreigners to own land in Haiti for the first time since 1804. It also established the Haitian National Guard (*Garde d'Haïti*), Haiti's first professional military force, which would later be harnessed by Duvalier to create a repressive regime that would last thirty years. During the American rule all Haitians, whether mulatto or black, were excluded from real positions of power in both the government and the new, U.S.-trained military force (2004: 60).

When the United States withdrew from Haiti in 1934, the United States left behind a legacy of anti-American feeling and a well-trained national military force. In the absence of any political or social institutions, the military remained the only cohesive institution in the country, becoming the only tool by which a government could rule.

After the American withdrawal, a series of leaders came and went, all under the control of the U.S.-trained military force, which held virtual veto power over election results. After a particularly chaotic period, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, a doctor who had served as a rural administrator of a U.S.-funded anti-yaws campaign, was elected president in 1957. Duvalier's rise to power was unlikely; in short, it appears that foreign influences and American

intervention, whatever the intent, may have created the conditions for dictatorship. Tyrants like Duvalier generally only appear under certain conditions: lack of cohesive national culture, increased disparity between the wealthy and the poor, heightened degrees of local and national poverty, high unemployment, limited opportunities, and political unrest. All of these were present following the American exit from Haiti; in fact, it appears self-evident that, even if it can be assumed that the American actions in Haiti were taken for solely benign reasons, those actions directly contributed to the prevalent economic and political conditions. These conditions set the stage for the infamous brutality and oppression of the Duvalier era. The Duvaliers ruled from 1957-1986 and the degree of repression they imposed on people in Haiti and the brutality of their dictatorship has made them infamous. During this period it is estimated that more than thirty thousand Haitians were killed and tortured by the secret police force, the *Tonton Macoutes*, which Papa Doc Duvalier had created in order to consolidate power (Chancy, 1997: 6).

The above described conditions also set the stage for the acute economic underdevelopment, civil conflict and instability that remain to this day. Haiti is now considered one of the poorest countries in the world. After the devastating earthquake in January 2010, it was estimated that about eighty percent of the population lives in poverty. Foreign aid makes up thirty to forty percent of the governments national budget. Haiti has consistently ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world and the richest one percent of the population owns nearly half of the country's wealth. (2002, UN Country Profile: Haiti) Millions of Haitian have fled the conflict within the country, especially since 1957, and live within Diaspora communities in North America and Europe. (2002, UN Country Profile: Haiti)

It is against this historical backdrop of postcolonial circumstances (political volatility,

poverty, authoritarian rule etc.) that the oppressions that Haitian women face in the form of sexual violence as a political weapon, exclusion from economic and political spheres, class and color conflict and dynamics as well as flight/exile from Haiti can be contextualized.

(v.) Haitian Women's History: The Context of Female Oppression

The long history of political instability and subsequent conflict and poverty in Haiti has affected the dynamics of life for Haitian women who form the majority in its population of eight million inhabitants.

Chronic unrest and violence have had a severe impact on women's ability to improve their political and economic security. According to the National Coalition for Haitian Rights, many Haitian women and men do not consider violence against women a serious offence. This belief has led to a culture of impunity and tolerance of gender-based violence, which is exacerbated by frequent episodes of political unrest (UNIFEM: Haiti Gender Profile 2000: 2).

During the repeated episodes of political instability and upheaval, the rape of Haitian women has commonly been used as a tactic to repress, frighten and terrorize Haitian people, regardless of their political affiliation. This was particularly prevalent under the Duvaliers, especially for women living within the rural areas (UNIFEM: Haiti Gender Profile 2007: 3).

According to the 2007 UNIFEM report on the situation of women in Haiti, Haitian women suffer what is termed "structural violence," meaning that structural inequalities based on gender, vulnerability and poverty disparately impact Haitian women and make them susceptible to physical violence and alienate them from various forms of protection. It is estimated that ninety per cent of Haitian women experience gender-based violence in their lives. The vulnerability of Haitian women to this gender-based violence is highlighted in times of natural disasters. For example, after the earthquake in Haiti on January 12th 2010, a

number of women's organizations have alerted the UN mission in Haiti to the fact that there is widespread rape occurring within the makeshift camps as well as increased trafficking of women (official numbers on sexual assaults and trafficking are not available). (CBS News, March 17th: 2010)

Haitian women do not receive equal protection under the law. Harsher punishments are meted out to female adulterers and judges can excuse men who murder "adulterous" women.

Haitian women have the highest maternal mortality rate in the western hemisphere, with 523 deaths per 100,000 births. Haiti has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in all of the Western Hemisphere; women account for a higher number of people living with HIV/AIDS than do men. Women head forty per cent of Haitian families, a number that has increased since the unrest of the early 1990s. These families are over-represented in the large numbers of Haitians living below the poverty line. Female-headed households in Haiti have an average yearly income of US\$38 (2004:6).

In addition, Haiti is an extremely patriarchal society and the strict codes of conduct under patriarchal codes compounds the political and economic oppressions that they face. The social structure reserved roles for women in relation to their sex. Their purview is the home and the role of mother and wife.

Formal political space remains, with very few exceptions, the domain of men. Despite their numeric superiority (over half the population in Haiti is female), women are still marginalized from decision-making spaces, notwithstanding the struggles led by feminists. Women who are active in Haiti's women's movement are from a small minority of highly educated middle class and upper class Haitian women.

It should be noted that while Haitian women within the Diaspora may not have to face

the realities of conflict that women in Haiti must face, they must still reckon with the power of a patriarchal culture whose oppressive arms do extend outside of the country and into the Diaspora.

(vi.) Postcolonial Feminist Theory and Haitian Women's Fiction as a Feminist Resource

While the legacies of colonialism, its enduring impact and the social and political dynamics it has given rise to provide a context for the content of the texts I will be analyzing, the larger significance of postcolonial feminist theory within this work is in the way that it informs an understanding of the very existence of such Haitian women's revolutionary fiction and provides a framework within which to explore how they contribute to postcolonial feminist practice and discourse.

I will be analyzing texts that have been written by "third world" women that have been marginalized in colonial, patriarchal and western feminist discourse. To borrow Spivak's terms and to alter them slightly as well, these books are about the subaltern speaking through the *triple* silencing of colonial, patriarchal and Western feminist hegemonic discourse.

The significance of these books in terms of postcolonial feminist theory may also be understood at the level of literary discourse and narrative. Spivak, in her analysis of texts such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, points to the marginalization of "third world" female characters. The texts that I will be exploring for manifestations of feminist oppositional consciousness bring these marginalized characters front and center and therefore also act against the silencing of the "third world" woman in western feminist literature as well.

Postcolonial feminist theory and the concerns that it raises also allows for an evaluation of these texts in terms of their value and context within postcolonial feminist practice or discourse. Taking Mohanty's statement about the textual strategies of Western feminists in which she states: "...it is both to the *explanatory potential* of particular analytical strategies employed by such writing, and to their *political effect* in the context of the hegemony of western scholarship that I want to draw attention to here" (1984: 336) and inverting it to apply to the texts chosen for my own work, the question becomes: What is the *explanatory potential* and the (potential) *political effect* of these texts in the context of the hegemony of western scholarship as critiqued by postcolonial feminists?

In other words, if one of the concerns of postcolonial feminists is with the lack of a voice of the subaltern or "third world" woman in postcolonial theory and western feminist discourse, and if these books have been written by such "third world" (Haitian) women and are about "third world" (Haitian) women as well, what is the explanatory potential of this writing and its (potential) political effect in the context of counter hegemonic or postcolonial feminist practice?

Even while using the framework of oppositional consciousness to analyze these texts and focusing on the potential of these texts as an oppositional resource for Haitian women, the question of the value and the place of these texts as they relate to Western feminist hegemonic discourse does, I believe, connect it within a larger context of postcolonial feminist theory.

II. Oppositional Consciousness

While the exact nature and constitution of oppositional consciousness varies according to different theorists, most scholars agree that it plays an important causal role in the

motivation to work for or act as agents within those social movements that are often called “liberation movements” (Mansbridge, 2001: 6).

Much of the theoretical work on oppositional consciousness is based upon the idea that there are hegemonic ideas and counter-hegemonic ideas and that oppositional consciousness is forged when the counter hegemonic ideas “win” in the struggle between the two. The genesis of such an idea can be seen in such ideologies as put forward by Marx and Engles (and later by Lenin) in which the idea is developed that through false consciousness, the working class is duped into working against its own objective interests (Eagleton: 1991, Lenin: 1969). More recently, theorists such as Jane Mansbridge have posited that not only is such an idea of false consciousness an over simplification but that oppositional consciousness is not “one point on a binary” but rather a historically-contingent spectrum.

Traditional literature on social-change and liberation movements has under-theorized the role of consciousness, relating it to a position in which it has little more than a peripheral role that may or may not play itself out in the context of a social movement (McCarthy and Zald: 2001). However, more recent work within the field has identified it not only as a central resource to be mobilized by social movements but one that can definitively shape the strength of participation and the outcome (Snow and Benford: 2000).

Black feminist theorist Bell Hooks (2009, 1994), expounding on oppositional consciousness as it is formed amongst African Americans against the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” of the United States, defines it as: “ways to think about life that could enable one to have self esteem even in the midst of harsh and brutal circumstances” (2009: 43).

Within black American feminist practice, Hooks envisions such an oppositional consciousness to work for a radical transformation of the self, in that women may use it to move beyond the oppressed/oppressor relationship that lies hierarchically within the female consciousness. For Hooks, such an oppositional consciousness is one part of an “oppositional world view” which will, down the road, given the right circumstances, turn into a feminist pedagogy in opposition to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. This consciousness is developed within and from their marginal positions. Hooks writes of these margins as spaces where language can be formed that opposes hegemonic practices, where a culture of resistance can forge a “space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies---different ways of thinking and knowing that were crucial to creating a counter-hegemonic worldview” (1994: 171).

To expand upon the idea of oppositional consciousness and to examine its applications in the context of women’s social movements as it relates to my own work I will be focusing on the work of two important theorists within the field: Chela Sandoval and Jane Mansbridge.

(i). Sandoval and the Topography of Oppositional Consciousness

Chela Sandoval states that the aim of her work in *The Methodology of the Oppressed* is “to consolidate and extend what we might call manifestos for liberation in order to better identify and specify a mode of emancipation that is effective within first world neocolonizing global conditions during the twenty-first century” (Sandoval, 1991:2). As such, she articulates an idea of oppositional consciousness which she believes can be effectively used as a “mode of emancipation” by oppressed groups in such conditions.

Sandoval proposes a topography of oppositional consciousness onto which all forms of oppositional consciousness and activity can be mapped. She identifies five general oppositional sites of resistance against oppression: “equal rights,” “revolutionary,” “supremacist,” “separatist,” and “differential.” She notes that these sites of resistance are not temporally situated and she suggests that each position is potentially as effective as any other.

However, according to Sandoval, differential consciousness represents a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different sphere than the other four. It is a new kind of subjectivity that is developed under conditions of multiple oppression and which operates *through* the other categories by changing each category’s emphasis from a fixed set of positions, ideas, and analyses to a fluid set of tools, tactics, and approaches. These approaches are to be used when the situation calls for them, in particular when the need is for forming coalitions that enable mobilization against external oppressions or forces. While equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness and resistance imply coherent ideologies with fixed political programs, differential oppositional consciousness involves latching onto one or more of the other four sites as the conditions of oppression themselves reshape and change. Its value, according to Sandoval, lies in its practitioners’ unique ability to respond to the rapidly changing conditions of the postmodern world.

Sandoval illustrates how this new subjectivity may manifest itself and be used strategically with the example of the political practices of US Third World feminists. She defines US Third World Feminism as the political alliance made during the 1960’s and 1970’s “between a generation of U.S. feminists of color who were separated by culture,

race, class, sex or gender identifications but united through their similar responses to the experience of race oppression” (1993: 49). The oppositional activity that can be mapped through US Third World feminism suggests a “differential mode of resistance” to neocolonialism—an “alternative and dissident globalization” (1993: 3).

Sandoval states that differential oppositional consciousness has emerged as a strategy within US Third World feminist practice from necessity of circumstance. As these “third world” women have long been “multiply” (1993:3) oppressed, they have had to learn to highlight or obscure different aspects of themselves in order to be accepted and to work effectively in different political organizations. For Sandoval this knowledge is a rite of the political “coming-to-consciousness” for a US third world feminist. For example, if a US Third World feminist wants to work effectively or feel comfortable in a group organized on the basis of race, she will have to highlight the racialized aspects of her personal identity and de-emphasize the gendered ones. Conversely, if she wants to work effectively in white feminist organizations, she will have to play down or ignore the racial aspect of her identity. As a result of having to continually emphasize or de-emphasize different aspects of their identities in different situations, Sandoval states, US Third World feminists have become practiced at shifting their ideologies and identities in response to different configurations of power.

Sandoval argues that such practice by US third world feminists has significance and implications for non-US Third World feminists as well. This is because the experience of marginalization is a reality for more and more people around the globe who are “caught in the crisis of late capitalist conditions and this is expressed in the cultural angst most often referred to as the postmodern dilemma” (1993: 17.)

She thus sees U.S. Third World feminists as having generated a “common speech, a theoretical structure” that “provides access to a different way of conceptualizing not only U.S. feminist consciousness but oppositional activity in general” (1993: 1). According to her theory what is needed is a “new subjectivity, a political revision that denies any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to re-center depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted” (1993: 15).

Sandoval warns against the dangers of not adopting such an idea and strategy of differential oppositional consciousness. Those who fail to do so and who remain committed only to equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, or separatist modes of oppositional ideology will inevitably reproduce the oppressive ideologies and practices that they oppose. Any of these liberation ideologies, Sandoval claims, is “destined to repeat the oppressive authoritarianism from which it is attempting to free itself and become trapped inside a drive for truth which can only end in producing its own brand of dominations” (1993: 14).

ii) Mansbridge and the Oppositional Spectrum

Jane Mansbridge defines oppositional consciousness as an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination (2001:4).

For Mansbridge (as for Sandoval) oppositional consciousness is not a uniform, generalized concept but a nuanced one that differs from group to group and individual to individual. It is shaped and colored by the position of a marginalized group within a system of domination and subordination, the degree of the group’s physical and cultural separation from the dominant group and the degree of voluntariness in its distinctness from the dominant norm (Mansbridge, 2001:8). Oppositional consciousness, therefore, is not one

thing but many and it exists along a continuum and not as a dichotomy. Mansbridge notes that there are many points of entry and many cognitive and emotional features that differ from individual to individual (2001:15).

That said, she notes that along this spectrum of oppositional consciousness there are four minimum elements that remain constant to it:

- 1.) Identifying with members of subordinate group
- 2.) Identifying injustices done to that group
- 3.) Opposing these injustices
- 4.) Seeing the group as having a shared interest in ending and diminishing these injustices

The elements of “minimal” oppositional consciousness do not need to occur in a consecutive manner or simultaneously and sometimes one or more may be absent. Within different groups and individuals these elements are compounded by a host of other ideas, beliefs and feelings. Mansbridge stresses that it would be hard to overemphasize the openness, instability and multifaceted nature of this spectrum and the elements within it. Even within members of the same subordinate group it may take different forms among individuals who are differently situated in their material lives and their ideological perspectives. For Mansbridge, oppositional consciousness can be fueled and galvanized by anger over injustices done to the group and prompted by personal injury, indignity and harms suffered through one’s group membership. A paradox inherent in oppositional consciousness is that it is internal to an individuals mind and yet is also inextricably derived from the social world.

Furthermore, oppositional consciousness of and in itself does not carry social movements from their beginnings to fruition but rather acts as one of many galvanizing and intermediate factors that cause some of the important dynamics of social movements.

Mansbridge notes:

The coerced will eventually form an oppositional consciousness that spells out the workings of injustice, the need to act collectively, and the possibilities of success in collective action. When political opportunities open and sufficient resources, including social networks, are in place, oppositional consciousness then acts as a cause, helping to bring an effective social movement into being. (2001:16)

According to this theory oppositional consciousness revolves around injustice.

Mansbridge states:

Oppositional consciousness, in our understanding, does not consist simply in identifying with one's own group and opposing another. It requires that one see the group with which one identifies as the recipient of injustice. It requires that one's opposition be opposition to that injustice, and/or to the group or groups that brought that injustice about. It requires that the perceived identify of interest among the group members be based on bringing this injustice to an end. (2001:240)

Oppositional consciousness may be evoked in a number of ways. It can arise from internal and individual realization or from a collective realization that one's own group is different from another group. It can also arise from a complex realization stemming from both individual and collective cognizance. Activist intentions also play a major role in the creation of an oppositional consciousness because activists consciously decide to synthesize ideas, symbols, collective identities, injustice frames and cultures of solidarity (2001: 21).

In the context of my work, Sandoval's theory is pertinent in that it illustrates how oppositional consciousness, more than simply being an abstract peripheral theory, has actually been conceptualized and (theoretically) developed into a sophisticated and potent tool to be used by dominated communities in the context of oppression. Furthermore, in illustrating its use through the activities of US Third World feminists, she specifically shows that as a concept it can be used to understand and explain the workings and motivations of marginalized women actively engaged in present day liberation movements. Such a theory and subsequent argument about the successful use of oppositional (differential) consciousness underscores my own idea that oppositional consciousness is a resource for women is worth exploring because given the right dynamics and circumstances it may be used as a strategic tool for women's empowerment.

Furthermore, Sandoval's theory of oppositional consciousness as a tool against hegemonic oppression is informed by the idea of contextualization that is central to the postcolonial feminist theory which informs the larger framework of this study. Material histories and actual lived experiences are key to the process of de-colonization or de-marginalization that she proposes. Within her work 'Methodology of the Oppressed' Sandoval uses an example of a photo of an African boy dressed as a French soldier and argues that the way to break down the ideology of colonialism in the photo is to go in and change the boy from a symbol to a real boy by telling the story of his life and his history (1991: 98). The strategic use of oppositional consciousness by feminists also serves to highlight differences or context in Sandoval's theory. Feminists take up the form of opposition most useful to achieve the goal of more equal social relations and, then, move

into another oppositional role; through the move, the differences between the two positions are made more apparent.

However, even while acknowledging the importance of Sandoval's work and its pertinence to my own, I believe that her framework and topography of oppositional consciousness is not suited as a lens for my own analysis of Haitian women's fiction.

Sandoval has mapped out oppositional consciousness as it has been and may be used in the context of *active* oppositional struggle. While it may be the individual feminist who is adopting one sight of opposition or another and while she may be doing it for her own specific benefit, she is doing it from a position of being consciously aware of her opposition to oppression, hence the idea of using it strategically.

Along the continuum of oppositional consciousness, Sandoval's topography would occur at a point beyond the initial awareness of such a consciousness, to a point where it had developed into a sophisticated and complex understanding of how this consciousness may be used in the service of an oppositional movement. Mansbridge's idea of oppositional consciousness examines what oppositional consciousness *is* while Sandoval's shows what it has the potential to *become*.

My analysis is aimed not at exploring the particular complexity or use of oppositional consciousness as a political tool within the narratives of Haitian women's fiction per se, but rather at trying to discover whether or not such books show any manifestations of oppositional consciousness within the individual narratives at all.

As such, in order to encompass the different narratives within the different texts, in which characters may or may not show the kind of sophisticated and strategic understanding and use of oppositional consciousness as put forward by Sandoval, I will be analyzing the

chosen texts through a lens of minimal oppositional consciousness as put forward by Mansbridge.

The operationalization of Mansbridge's theory of minimal oppositional consciousness (instead of Sandoval's) within my work will allow for a more broad and inclusive analysis of whether or not the fictional texts deal with the evolution or formation of oppositional consciousness through the narratives of their respective protagonists as they engage with the cultural, political and social oppressions that affect them as (Haitian) women.

III. Methodology

I will be analyzing the chosen texts through a prescriptive feminist literary analysis. Such a mode of literary analysis begins, like other critical feminist literary theories, with the idea that writing and reading are both acts that are inherently political in nature. However, prescriptive feminist literary analysis focuses on identifying those works that are prescriptive in nature and that would, in effect, be of use to women's movements or assist in feminist politics.

The idea of such a pragmatic analysis coincides with the second wave women's movement in the US, Canada and the UK, when the idea of women's fiction as being of use to the women's movement in these countries was beginning to be explored.

Register (1981), a proponent to this kind of analysis of women's texts, specifies that in order to identify a text as prescriptive or not, and in order to state that it might serve a role in a women's "liberation" cause, it must be analyzed and measured according to whether or not it has one or more of the following features. It must: 1) Serve as a forum for women 2) Help to achieve cultural androgyny 3) Provide role methods 4) Promote sisterhood 5) Augment consciousness raising (1981: 235).

Within my work I will be focusing on an analysis geared towards the final element. In other words, I will be carrying out a prescriptive feminist literary analysis, reading and analyzing each text in light of its prescriptive value to augment consciousness raising.

Erica Jong (1971) has noted that a great deal of the “feminist approved literature and poetry” reads more like a generalized rant about the victimization of women rather than having any psychological grounding. She states “The poet has not really looked into herself and told it true. She has been content to echo simplistic slogans” (1971:33).

Such authors hold that in women’s literature, accounts of discrimination that cover only the material accounts of such discrimination will not suffice. For the protagonist to be fully characterized and for the real effects of such discrimination to be put out there, we must also see the private effects and rendering of such discrimination.

Prescriptive feminist analysis is different from other feminist theories of analysis in that rather than focusing on the sexual politics of language and style, the feminist interpretation of symbolism, the strategic use of certain language, or exposing the deeper meaning of discourse within discourse, it requires a “straightforward” reading of texts in order to determine whether or not they may be considered prescriptive texts and hence a resource for women’s liberation.

Such an analysis allows me to explore and study the fictional works of Haitian women using oppositional consciousness “augmentation” as a particular kind of lens under the larger umbrella of prescriptive fictional analysis.

For Register (1981), such an analysis means that the respective texts must be read in order to see whether or not they provide insights into one or more of (female) personality development, self-perception, interpersonal relationships and other “private” or “internal”

consequences of oppressive practices against women. The analysis of the texts using the parameters of minimal oppositional consciousness will enable me to do just this. I will be able to focus on the “(female) personality development, self-perception, interpersonal relationships and other “private” or “internal” consequences of oppressive practices against women” with respect to the expression and manifestation of oppositional consciousness through female characters.

It is important to note that in adopting a prescriptive fictional analysis, I am aware of the criticisms aimed at such method as being reductionist and authoritarian. Eagleton (1986) notes that such analysis of literature is problematic because of the idea that there is a simple and direct channel of communication from the author to the text to the reader and the idea that the reader would receive the conscious-raising text in the way that it was meant (1986: 215).

However, in expounding her own idea of such an analysis of literature, Register does acknowledge that the presence of one or more of the characteristics of a prescriptive work is only half the battle and that the remaining work of actually using such texts to augment consciousness or to use the book as a “template” for opposition or action is left up to the reader and the reader’s experience of the work. It is up to the reader to compare and contrast the issues and problems faced by characters with her own, to make connections or to explain similarities in terms of causes and oppressions, and to decide on appropriate action---if any at all (1981: 237).

Register’s idea of identifying the prescriptive feminist fiction does not mean that it is fiction that must and will be applied, rather, as stated above, it is in an effort to identify what

works *might be of use*, or what links *may be present* between works of fiction and women's movements.

Furthermore, I state that although I am adopting the method of literary analysis that Register has put forth because it suits my own purposes in terms of what I would like to glean from the texts, I do not claim that a straightforward relationship would exist between Haitian women writers, their texts, and a Haitian women's readership. While my exploration may be for oppositional conscious raising material within the texts, I do not suppose or propose that if such material is there, it either definitely will cause conscious raising amongst Haitian women, or that such conscious raising is a straightforward, given process.

(i). Content Analysis

Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (2004: 18). Additionally, he asserts that as a research technique, content analysis provides new insights, strengthens a researcher's understanding of a particular phenomenon, or informs practical actions. Berger (2000) sums it up succinctly when he states a content analysis "analyzes the content of something" (2000: 173).

I will be using the "Directed Approach" to content analysis within my work. The goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. Existing theory or research can help focus the research question. It can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables, thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes. This has been referred to as deductive category application (Mayring: 2000).

The main strength of a directed approach to content analysis is that existing theory can be supported or extended. In addition, as research in an area grows, a directed approach makes explicit the reality that researchers are unlikely to be working from the naive perspective that is the hallmark of naturalistic designs.

According to such a methodology, using existing theory or prior research, researchers begin by identifying key concepts, categories or variables as initial coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein: 1999). Within my work the units of analysis are the five texts that I have chosen as representative of Haitian women's revolutionary fiction. The existing theory that will be used to direct my analysis of these texts is that of oppositional consciousness as defined by Mansbridge. The key categories are the four salient parts of a minimal oppositional consciousness: 1.) Identifying with members of subordinate group, 2.) Identifying injustices done to that group, 3.) Opposing these injustices, 4.) Seeing the group as having a shared interest in ending and diminishing these injustices.

Next, each category must be operationalized for analysis using the theory. I have operationalized the four elements by formulating a set of questions for each. They are as follows:

1. Identifying with members of the subordinate group

- Has the author shown, through the protagonist(s), a realization of the subordination or oppression of Haitian women? Does the author deal with the idea of what it means to be a Woman/Haitian Woman in opposition or relative to Men/Haitian Men?

2. Identifying injustices done to that group

- Has the author dealt with specific oppressions experienced by Haitian women such as the persecution of women by the Duvalier regime, sexual and social repression by rigid

patriarchal norms and political and social exclusion etc.? Is there awareness by female characters of these oppressions as specific to women as a group or as due to gender?

3. Opposing these injustices

- Is there an expression (through female characters) of opposition to the above-mentioned (or other) oppressions and injustices within the text? Is this opposition expressed as resistance by a female character against personal oppression or injustice or resistance through larger social mobilization? In what way (if at all) is the consciousness of instances of personal agency expressed?

4. Seeing the group as having a shared interest in ending and diminishing these injustices

Is there a realization or growing consciousness by female characters/protagonists of the larger interests of Haitian women or of the “bigger picture” within the context of their personal narratives? Is there a realization of a larger or collective consciousness and history of experience? Are the narratives of female characters embedded by the author within the larger movement of Haitian women towards social justice and equity?

Using these predetermined questions and categories of analysis, I will go through an initial reading of each text in order to identify the Haitian female characters and protagonists in whom a progression or manifestation of oppositional consciousness will be studied. During this initial reading I will identify and highlight those passages in which I believe the thoughts, words, emotional reactions and narratives of these characters fall into the chosen categories for the analysis of oppositional consciousness. I will approach a second reading in a more systematic manner. Having identified the protagonists within each text I will re-read the texts with the formulated questions in mind, in search of additional passages to highlight

as well as with the idea of cutting passages which on a second reading may not fall into these categories.

I will be carrying out a third and final reading of each text in which I will code every passage according to which element of oppositional consciousness it falls into, using a different code for each element/category. If there is more than one character for analysis within a text then I will be using sub codes (Character A, element oppositional consciousness 1; Character B, element oppositional consciousness 1 etc.) for the easy identification of the trajectory of oppositional consciousness for each character.

I will finally organize this content and present it by categorizing it under each of the four different headings of the minimal elements of oppositional consciousness, making sure to present the chosen content within the context of each character's individual narrative.

According to the directed approach of content analysis the informing theory used will guide the discussion of findings. The identified categories offer either a contradictory view of the phenomenon or will support, further refine, extend, and enrich the theory.

Within my work, the analysis of whether or not minimal oppositional consciousness is present within these characters will be guided by both the idea of oppositional consciousness put forth by Mansbridge as well as the content I have identified as evidence of the manifestation or progression of such an oppositional consciousness.

Tabulating the presence of instances, passages, verbal exchanges etc. within the text to support all four elements would allow me to argue that oppositional consciousness is exemplified within the narratives of the female character/protagonist.

Lack of such passages or narratives---either of certain elements of oppositional consciousness or all of them---would mean that either the minimal oppositional

consciousness is not exemplified within the female protagonists of the given text(s) (although elements of it are still present), or that oppositional consciousness is altogether absent from the trajectories of their stories.

(ii.) Feminist Methodological Issues: Subjectivities & Self-Reflexiveness

Claiming connections between ideas, experience and reality in order to produce credible knowledge of gender relations is an inherently political process which has ethical implications. Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002) note that feminism is often “accused” of being a form of emancipatory research that carries overt political motives. It is the idea of such motives and biases during the process of knowledge production that leaves researchers with the onus of having to justify what is “true” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002: 48).

For feminists, the relationship between the pursuit of truth and the reality of biases, experiences, power relations and bodies is always problematic (Gelsthorpe 1992; Humphries 1997; Ramazanoglu 1992b; Temple 1991).

There is much academic debate on issues of subjectivity and objectivity in the context of feminist methodology and research. In addressing this issue Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002) note that objectivity, in the sense of reaching the “truth” by controlling bias, is not a reasonable aim for social science. They state that from a feminist (as from the Marxist) perspective it seems more rational to assume that all research incorporates subjectivity, partiality, bias and political commitment. Furthermore, they claim that the problem for feminism is to make the politics of knowledge production as evident as possible rather than to claim that bias can be reliably controlled (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002: 49).

Within the context of my work I proscribe to the theory forwarded by Ramazanoglu & Holland in which they claim that feminists can be reasonable, logical and systematic in their research without treating reason as a neutralizing force (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002: 52).

I acknowledge that the ideas and the inspiration for my research have been guided by feminist concerns. I also realize that my experiences and concerns with feminism are grounded not in some kind of feminist collective consciousness but in my own experiences as an Afghan woman of a certain age, with a certain education, from a certain socio-economic background, living within my own particular time and place. I understand that my personal feminist perspectives on what it means to be a woman oppressed within a patriarchal culture do not necessarily correspond to those of Haitian women. My own ideological assumptions are not the assumptions of the authors of these texts and cannot be interpreted as such.

In realizing and acknowledging such a personal bias I am determined to approach my research self-reflexively. Being self-reflexive means being constantly aware of the partiality of my perspective in relation to these other (Haitian) women (Marcus, 1994: 402). I hope that such self-reflexiveness will ensure that I will not project my own feminist concerns and perspectives on to the analysis of the data.

It is also necessary to address the methodological dilemmas and debates that are generated when one is carrying out qualitative research in the context of either racial disparity or likeness. Twine notes that the instability and the unnaturalness of “race” and the uneven meanings of racism can have methodological consequences for qualitative researchers even when the research is not focused on the issue of race or racism (Twine, 2000: 27). Rhodes (1994) states that it is also argued that racial subalterns better understand

racial prejudice or discrimination better and that this might lead, in this particular context, to view or interpret the data in a prejudicial manner (Rhodes, 1994: 550).

I do acknowledge that (as a woman from Afghanistan) I am a woman of color carrying out a qualitative analysis of the works of other women of color. However, I believe that this “bias”, like that of my personal feminist stance, may be similarly combated through my self-reflexive approach to this work.

In addition, I point to what Twine (2000) has stated in addressing the idea of such a racial bias or standpoint.

Racial subalterns do not automatically better understand racism nor do they identify more closely with members of their racial group because people have multiple identifications. Racial subordination does not mechanistically generate a critical stance vis-à-vis racism any more than colonialism created anti colonial subjectivities.

(Twine, 2000: 15)

(iii.) Sample: Prose Texts

As representative of Haitian feminist fiction I will be analyzing a single work of each of the following Haitian female authors: Nadine Magloire, Marie Vieux-Chauvet, Jan J. Dominique, Edwidge Danticat and Anne-Christine D’Adesky. Within my work feminist fiction is defined as those prose texts that deal with the themes of female oppression and underlying discourses of female agency and social change (Lauret, 1994: 88) or, more specifically, with the themes of oppression of Haitian women and their discourses of agency and social change.

I have chosen these particular authors because their personal histories as well as their social and economic backgrounds reflect the diversity of classes and experiences of Haitian

women. As well, their subject matter and the periods of experience which they have written about also reflect the variety of experience of Haitian women.

I have also chosen these novels due to the fact that they are a part of the canon of revolutionary Haitian women's fiction as categorized by Chancy (1997). According to her these texts are revolutionary because they contest the regimented view of Haitian history that has denied the Haitian female experience (Chancy, 1997: 15).

These authors and their respective works are as follows:

(i.) The Uneasiness of Life (1967)

Nadine Magloire

Nadine Magloire was born in 1932 in Port-au-Prince. After completing her primary and education in Port-au-Prince and her higher education Paris, she settled in Montreal when in her twenties.

Magloire's protagonists are some of the most revolutionary of all those seen in Haitian feminist literature, refusing the submissive roles proscribed for women in Haitian society and outright rejecting what Magloire herself has termed "the myth of male superiority" (Aax-Rouparis, 1997b: 53). Her female figures violate taboos, reveal the hypocrisies of society, deride its archaic patriarchal value system and violently reject the myth of male superiority. Nadine Magloire has, since the start of her career, loudly denounced what she calls the "machismo" of Haitian men, and the institutions that make of women perennial minors.

In addition to *The Uneasiness of Life* she has published *Autopsy in Vivo: The Mythical Sex* in 1979, which deals with sexual freedom, women's work and artistic creativity.

The Uneasiness of Life, which has been described by Shelton (1992) as a veritable declaration of war against society, is the story of Claudine, a Haitian woman from the upper class who struggles to become a writer. Chancy sums up the protagonist of *The Uneasiness of Life* by saying that she is a woman without a past, without a future; “struggling to aggrandize her own being by recreating herself through the written word” (Chancy, 1997: 110).

Under the pretext of writing a novel, knowing the dangers inherent in acknowledging a life such as hers in Haitian society, Claudine is actually writing the story of her own life in a pseudo-memoir.

(ii.) Love, Anger, Madness (1968)

Marie Vieux-Chauvet

Marie Vieux-Chauvet, born in Port-au-Prince in 1916 into a family of wealth and influence, is without a doubt one of the most famous of all Haitian writers. Throughout the forties and fifties Vieux-Chauvet had a number of works published; some of her favorite themes within the work of that time are voodoo, external and internal colonialism and eroticism. She emerged as a major Haitian literary figure within a scene that was dominated by men and received accolades and recognition both within Haiti and abroad. (Coates, 1992: 165)

However, it was only with the publication of her fourth book, *Love, Anger, Madness*, published in 1968 by the French press Gallimard that her fame turned into notoriety. Highly critical of the 1960s political and social situation in Haiti, specifically of the oppressive Duvalier regime, the book aroused a furor that resulted in Vieux-Chauvet’s exile from Haiti

to New York. In addition, all the copies of the text in Haiti were bought and destroyed and its distribution was postponed elsewhere.

Vieux-Chauvet died in New York in 1973 and her last book, *Birds of Prey*, was published only in 1986 (Coates, 1992: 164).

Love, Anger, Madness is often called a trilogy because its form consists of three thematically connected novellas. The overarching preoccupation of all three stories centers on the idea of fear as a force of social destruction.

The first part, *Love*, focuses on a female protagonist, Claire, who remains a virgin at the age of thirty-nine. *Love* takes the form of her diary in which she is able to express the passionate interior life that she has successfully hidden from those around her.

Anger is the story of a whole family of middle class landowners, the Normils, who awake one day to find their land taken over by the *Tonton Macoutes* (the name of the Duvaliers' infamous secret police), an occurrence that sets in motion a series of devastating events.

The triptych's third novella, *Madness*, centers on a starving poet named René and engages with the tensions inherent in the strict social stratification in Haitian society as well as with the antagonisms between traditional voodoo religion and Catholicism.

The novel's stories create a three-paneled portrait of what Haitian society had become by the mid 1960s—poverty stricken, chaotic and ravaged and ruled by violence.

Within my work, I will focus on the protagonists of *Love* and *Anger*, Claire and Rose respectively, as it is within their stories that Vieux-Chauvet deals with the situation and oppressions facing Haitian women. Vieux-Chauvet particularly addresses the roles that men confer upon women of the middle and upper classes.

(iii.) Memories of an Amnesiac (1984)

Jan J. Dominique

Jan J. Dominique was born in 1953 in Port-au-Prince. After receiving her education in journalism both in Haiti and Canada she settled in Montreal in 1970. During her time in Montreal Dominique worked within syndicated radio. She returned to Haiti in 1979 and took up a career within the field of education, translating works for the National Creole Pedagogical Institute as well as teaching at various colleges. In 1986, she began working as a broadcaster for Radio Haiti, which was owned by her father Jean Dominique. He was assassinated for political reasons in 2000. Political pressure and threats on her life forced her into exile in 2003. (Coates, 1992: 168)

Dominique's *Memories of an Amnesiac*, published in 1984, was highly lauded and won her the 1984 Prix Henri Deschamps. It was also highly controversial and Dominique was both praised and excoriated for the no-holds-barred manner in which she addressed the political and social situation in Haiti under the Duvaliers as well as for her treatment of issues of female morality and sexuality.

Dominique's novel is experimentally post-modern in form and is widely compared to another post-modern Caribbean novel, *Annie John* (1985), written by Jamaica Kincaid.

Balutansky (1998) notes "This metaphorically amnesiac protagonist [Lily] joins Annie John in the ranks of Caribbean female characters who struggle within and against contradictory terms to affirm their "true-true" names" (Balutansky, 1998:547).

Dominique has structured the novel as a quilted narrative. The first section consists of Lili's meditations, pieced into a third person narrative of her early memories. The second section of the novel is made up of diary entries and letters and manifests and symbolizes her

incipient identity. The omniscient narrator disappears and Lili's diary entries and letters take over the text.

(iv.) *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994)
Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince in 1969 to a family from the urban black working class with roots in the Haitian peasantry. At the age of twelve she became part of the growing numbers of Diaspora Haitians when her family moved to the United States. (Gadsby, 1993: 14)

In 1993 she earned an MFA (master's in fine arts) in creative writing from Brown University and her thesis, titled "*My turn in the fire---an abridged novel*", became the basis for her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which was published in 1994 (Gadsby, 1993: 15).

Amongst Haitian writers, both men and women, Danticat is arguably the most internationally renowned and celebrated. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, published when she was twenty-six, catapulted her into the American literary spotlight. She was hailed as a fresh and original voice and has since been nominated and received numerous prestigious literary awards. She has written seven books and her short stories have appeared in over twenty-five periodicals. Her work has been anthologized several times and has been translated into many languages. (Gadsby, 1993: 15)

Breath, Eyes, Memory is a tale of three generations of Haitian women of the Cacos family, told in the first person narrative by Sophie, the youngest (and only) member of the third generation. It is the coming of age story of a young Haitian girl, chronicling her journey through adolescence and young womanhood in the context of issues of childhood separation from parents, exile and return.

While the text is no doubt fictional there is a difficulty in classifying it as a novel in the most conventional sense of the term. Adjarian (2004) notes that the text, because of the highly personalized approach that Danticat takes when dealing with the struggles of Haitian women in patriarchal and/or neocolonial societies and then in the alienating and foreign environment of the Diaspora, should be read as a loosely constructed testimonial (Adjarian, 2004: 86).

However, as a fictional testimonial, it is noteworthy that the text eschews becoming enmeshed in or identifying with specific historical situations and actors. This narrative tactic closely resembles that used by the feminist Antiguan writer Jamaica Kinkaid and is used to shift attention *away* from a larger and/or global events to smaller, more quotidian ones.

Danticat, in loosening the ties of fiction to history and so consequently the identity and the lives of her characters to the specific dates of history books, ensures that the women in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* do not have to depend upon this patriarchal constructed account and narratives for their own meaning.

(v.) Under the Bone (1994)
Anne-Christine D'Adesky

Anne-Christine D'Adesky was born in the United States to parents of Haitian and French origins. She holds a Bachelors degree from Barnard College and a Master's degree in Journalism from Columbia (Coates, 1994: 166).

In 1984, working as a foreign correspondent in Haiti for the San Francisco Examiner, she began writing about HIV which had emerged as a new epidemic in Haiti and the USA. She went on to cover the HIV/AIDS epidemic for various newspapers including the *New York*

Native and *In These Times*. Her work on the issue has been hailed as pioneer journalism (Coates, 1994: 166).

Under the Bone was published in 1994 and was D'Adesky's first foray into the realm of fiction writing within her prolific writing career. Within the novel D'Adesky explores post-Duvalier Haiti through the eyes of Leslie Doyle, an American human rights activist who visits Haiti intending to reveal the brutal consequences and aftermath of the country's political turbulence and who wants to focus on female political prisoners. Once there she finds that the real story stems from the almost complete absence of any kind of record of the stories of the multitudes of Haitian women who were victimized under the Duvaliers.

III. Data Analysis

*Mother, one stone is wedged across the hole in our history
and sealed with blood wax.*

*In this hole is our side of the story, exact figures,
Headcounts, burial artifacts, documents, lists, maps
Showing our way up through the stars; locketts of brass
containing all textures of hair clippings.*

*It is the half that has never been told. Some of us
must tell it.*

- Loma Goodison. "Mother the Great Stones Got to Move."

Within this chapter I will be analyzing the female narratives within the five representative texts from the canon of Haitian women's literature in light of the four constitutive elements of minimal oppositional consciousness.

The analysis of the five works is broken down under a separate heading for each element. Such a structure shows the disparities in content between these texts but also highlights recurring themes amongst these disparate narratives.

It is important to note that within the context of my work the 'subordinate group', as characterized within the elements of oppositional consciousness, is Haitian women.

Oppositional Consciousness within the sample of Haitian Women's Fiction

I. Identifying with members of the subordinate group

The four women that populate the pages of Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; Sophie, Martine, Tante Atie and Grandmother Iffi, largely draw their identification from one another. These are identities gleaned from the standards and expectations of mother, sister, daughter and aunt. Chancy (1997) notes that the Caco women represent a matriarchal family formation, one that has been born out of both necessity as well as a kind of explicit choice (Chancy, 1997: 129).

For Danticat, identity seems to be inextricably linked to community and the community within the novel is one that is explicitly female. As such, identification with members of the subordinate group occurs within this community of women.

Within this circle Sophie, the protagonist, comes to a greater identification with Haitian women, one that moves beyond the immediate history of her own family. While this is rooted within her personal experience of shame and betrayal due to the physical "purity" checks that her mother carries out in order to ensure that she stays a virgin before marriage,

it expands to include a wider understanding and rejection at the manner in which Haitian girls and women are oppressed through patriarchal ideals of female purity and sex roles.

Sophie's greater identification and understanding of the issue makes sense in light of the fact that she has grown up within the US. In the midst of such a relatively liberal environment Sophie is provided with the latitude to juxtapose the liberation of women in western society with the oppression that Haitian women and girls face within their own culture. It is because of her experiences and formative years in the US and not despite them that Sophie comes to a higher level of identification with Haitian women.

In other words the sexual, social, economic and political freedoms that Sophie can take advantage of as a result of living within the United States, instead of creating a distance between her and Haitian women whose oppressions in these areas are absolute, actually brings her to a more profound awareness of the oppressions of Haitian women and of her own place amongst them.

Adjarian (2004) states:

Despite the upward mobility that Sophie demonstrates throughout the course of the text, she still remains connected to her (subaltern) community of origin and more specifically, to an oppressed group (women) within that community. (Adjarian, 2004: 92)

Sophie still identifies with the oppressions that Haitian women face even after she has liberated herself from them and has availed herself to the freedoms women enjoy in western society.

This identification with Haitian women is also central to Lili, the protagonist of *Memories of an Amnesiac*. Lili, whose original name is Paul, like her father's, comes to

both a literal and conscious identification with Haitian women as she struggles to shed the name of Paul in favor of her nickname (Lili) and to therefore find herself as a Haitian woman as well. Lili's voice seems to have been silenced by being crushed between Paul, the self who is the image of her father, and Paul, her father himself.

Lili begins her narrative by stating her belief that writing her story will release her from this feeling, at the same time acknowledging the dangers inherent in this undertaking. These dangers stem not only from remembering but also from remembering as a *woman*.

She invests the act of writing with all the implications it would have for her as Paul/Lili, but also for Haitian women as a collective. She says "I must write so that there will be no lack of sources" (Dominique, 1984: 12). Chancy notes that Lili, through her writing, is filling the *lacune* that her own experience informs her are those of other Haitian women as well (Chancy: 1997: 91).

Adjarian (2004) notes "However bourgeois and self-involved Dominique's narrator/protagonist appears, she remains connected through her narrative to a larger community of silent (middle-class) female ancestors" (Adjarian, 2004: 91).

Indeed, when Lili speaks (referring to her narrative) she says it is to give words to the silence:

The silence of my mother and of the mother of my mother, that dates back to the beginnings of [my] consciousness, to the beginnings of the world...the howling, the cries that nothing succeeds in covering over, the sobs of those women who never had a chance to make themselves heard, the screams of horror of those who gave birth to men forced to speak and make silent those shut-in women. (Dominique, 1984:51)

In *The Uneasiness of Life* the protagonist Claudine exhibits a similar identification with Haitian women although it is an identification exclusive to the Haitian women of her own

bourgeoisie class. There is little acknowledgement of the millions of Haitian women that live outside of the sphere of her own existence. She is explicit in her contempt for the masses that live in poverty. She states: “Toussaint Louverture was right; this nation should be forced to work under the whip while it awaits to learn human dignity” (Magloire, 1968: 48).

The irony, however, lies in the fact that while she relates to only these women, her sentiment is that of derision and is based in the contempt she feels for their superficiality and shallowness. In a passage where she is preparing to have a group of women to tea she notes:

It’s absurd to have invited them since they bore me, but the harm has already been done.

We will speak of the usual superficialities. Material things, fashion, gossip. It seems that there can be nothing else of interest to Haitian women. (Magloire, 1968:36)

In the same breath Claudine both acknowledges herself as a member of this sphere and distances herself from them through her awareness of their perceived flaws.

In *Under the Bone* D’Adesky, even while exploring the barriers of class and caste between Haitian women, illustrates the sense of identification and collectiveness which reaches beyond these barriers and which is based in their collective victimization under the Duvalier regime.

This is shown through a Vodou ceremony held for a grieving widow whose husband has been murdered by the army. The ceremony, mostly made up of neighboring women, shows that comfort is transmitted to her through a sense of collectivity: “The crowd bathes in the collective memory of others who have died, in the long history of their own struggle” (D’Adesky, 1994: 223).

Female identification is also shown to be a result of the targeted victimization of women. This is illustrated at the end of the novel through the characters of Luz, a prostitute, and

Elyse, a member of the middle class of Haitians and Luz's cellmate during their imprisonment. Luz and Elyse, despite the vast class differences between them, are drawn together through the brutality of their ordeal. Luz helps Elyse walk away from the ashes of her village and from the knowledge that her family is dead and Elyse, in turn, vows to help Luz. This is a manifestation of the identification of Haitian women with each other even in the face of its presumed absence. This is a collectivity which transcends the borders of class and disparate backgrounds.

Vieux-Chauvet also stresses the identification of Haitian women with each other through the consciousness of collective victimization. In *Love Claire's* identification with Haitian women as a subordinate group comes to her through the growth of a feminist consciousness born out of the situation of her friends, Jane and Dora, who are brutalized by the secret police of the dictator Stenio Vincent. Within Haitian history Vincent's secret police are often called the precursors to Duvaliers infamous *Tonton Macoutes*.

It is through her involvement with Jane and Dora, who lack the male protection that she has and which prevents her from being victimized by the commander of the secret police (Caledu), that Claire comes to a deeper understanding of how women are connected through the victimization by patriarchal norms and standards, even amongst seemingly different circumstances. Jane and Dora are both attacked because they are lighter skinned, just as she has been singled out for exclusion and contempt within her own community for being darker skinned. They are isolated for violence according to the same patriarchal norms of beauty in Haiti that have isolated her and prevented her from the protection of a husband. Claire's growing awareness of the victimization around her allows her to understand that she and

other Haitian women are victims of the social and cultural norms from which they have been cast.

II. Identifying injustices done to the group

Within *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Danticat identifies and deals with the injustice of sexual oppression and the violation of Haitian women through both rape and patriarchal norms of female purity. She expands on both the personal repercussions and the wider implications of this oppression and abuse.

As a child Sophie comes to understand that she was conceived after her mother was raped. Her mother, Martine, believes that her rapist was a *Tonton Macoute*, or a member of the terrorizing police force of the Duvaliers which became infamous for the reign of terror it perpetuated through abductions, tortures, rapes and killings.

It becomes apparent that Martine's exile from Haiti is self-imposed and that she was propelled into flight in order to escape the episodes of insanity that came upon her after her rape, episodes which intensified during her pregnancy and after the birth of Sophie.

Sophie's initial alienation from her mother because of the truth of her conception is compounded in her teenage years by the role her mother takes on as protector of her virtue. Sophie is subjected to the tyranny rooted in a system of gender oppression that has been going on for generations, perpetuated on her mother by her grandmother and then on Sophie by her mother. In Haitian culture part of a woman's worth is located in her purity before marriage and derives from her virginity. By administering tests of sexual purity to Sophie, Martine serves as the unwitting accomplice to a sexual double standard that encourages males to be sexually liberated while women must keep themselves pure at all costs. This is presented as a ritual enacted between mother and daughter throughout the generations and its justification is to ensure that daughters are kept pure before marriage. Later in the text

when Sophie confronts her grandmother about the need for such purity tests her grandmother defends the practice by saying: “If a child dies, you do not die. But if your child is disgraced, you are disgraced. (Danticat: 1994: 156)” And then further:

From the time a girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me (Danticat, 1994: 156).

Chancy notes that it is because Martine has internalized the ideology of female inferiority that Sophie’s mother is capable of abusing her daughter in this way (Chancy, 1997: 121). This stems from the belief (patriarchal) that a female’s body is useful only to the extent that it is pure before marriage. It is with such justification that she can commit this act against her daughter. Chancy notes further that Danticat demonstrates through this act between mother and daughter the extent to which the subjugation of women has led to the mother’s sexual oppression of her own daughter. The effect of this subjugation is so complete that the mother believes she is taking care of the child’s body when in fact she is subjecting it to the very abuse from which she is hoping to save it (Chancy, 1997: 121).

Danticat shows the beginnings of a consciousness of victimization in Sophie when, years after her flight from her mother’s house, now a married woman and mother, she chooses to look back and to take the virginity checks for what they were: sexual violation.

Sophie takes the step of going to therapy and also of joining a support group of sexually abused women. It can be argued that this is a manifestation of the fact that Sophie begins to come to a conscious awareness of herself as embedded within and related to a larger women’s community of abused women.

Danticat here has presented two disparate sides of female sexual victimization. Both women are conscious of their own victimization as well as of the fact that they are victims to these specific acts because they are female. Martine, by internalizing her victimization, is silenced in the literal fashion but also represents the metaphorical silence of all Haitian women victimized in the same way.

Sophie, on the other hand, comes to a realization of her victimization. She is also able to place it within the larger picture of the patriarchal oppression of women that pervades Haitian society and culture.

Dominique's protagonist, Lili, in *Memories of an Amnesiac*, explores the injustice of silence that Haitian women are relegated to as well as the injustice of having little to no place within the larger picture of history. Lili expresses not only the affinity she feels with her female ancestors but also a profound understanding of the dichotomy between men, who must speak, and women, whom they must silence.

Lili explicitly mourns what she calls the "lost women" in Haiti's history and the misogyny that Haitian women have had to face as a collective. She feels that the American occupation is where her own consciousness of this began to develop and uses it as a point of departure from which she feels she can begin to "speak of the deep resentment" (1984: 4) she feels towards the misogynistic Haitian society. She states that hers is a masculinist culture where women have neither "a sense of history" nor "meaning in history" (1984:6). Adjarian notes that Lili is very conscious, from the beginning, of her place in a society where "women are empty signifiers in a reality and a discourse that elude female modes of sense making and signification" (Adjarian, 2004:94).

The repression of female sexuality (except within the narrow confines of marriage) is another theme that is central to the text. During her exile in Canada Lili begins to understand the vast chasm between Haitian men and women not only in the larger theatre of history but in the quotidian space of day-to-day life as well. In Montreal she tries to forge some kind of connection with the men of the Diaspora Haitian community based upon her feelings of alienation, only to find that her presence as a woman continues to be denied and her opinions rejected. Chancy notes that this reflects the Diasporic reality that while both Haitian men and women dream of a triumphant return to a peaceful Haiti the dream of men does not include equity for women. Such equity is seen as a side issue at best and a non-issue at worst (1997: 46).

Lili begins to be able to articulate the way that this distance manifests itself. She writes:

I gave them my trust rapidly: they were pronouncing the words corresponding to my quest...I promised myself that I would seek out the men of great courage. And I met them...feeling the distance with those who spoke in my name while refusing me the power to speak. (Dominique, 1984: 120)

In another instance she notes her frustration with the social mores that surround marriage and a woman's role and duties within it. Musing upon the fate of Haitian women whose sexual roles are rigidly defined, she writes to her friend Liza, "Why do women always have to be the ones to give without receiving anything in return? Only tradition forces them to do so and I refuse this kind of tradition" (1984: 117).

In *Under the Bone* D'Adesky also highlights the silence of Haitian women in writing of the manner in which Haitian women are absent from the accounts of the brutality and horrors of the Duvalier regime.

The journalist, Doyle, having gone to Haiti in order to research the stories of women who were imprisoned under the Duvaliers finds that such histories are few and far in between. The theme of the muting and silencing of Haitian women and of the marginal space they have been relegated to in the recounting of history is an injustice that is highlighted throughout the text.

While Doyle recovers only one piece of evidence of the victimization of women, it is a piece that gives insight into the depth of the aggression of the regime against Haitian women.

The pictures showed the shallow graves with the remains of several bodies in a state of severe decomposition. On the back, Jose has written” *Artibonite: Mai 1981*. There were other photographs as well...one picture of a group of women, their hands behind their backs a soldier aiming his gun at him: *Duvalierville Juillet 1983*. The last set of pictures were smaller photographs, all of women’s bodies, lying where they had fallen: in a gutter, in a courtyard, shot in a bedroom...*Port-au-Prince: 3 Novembre 1985, Victimes Inconnues*. (D’Adesky, 1994:142)

This passage highlights the victimization of Haitian women during the Duvalier regime as both systematic and consistent.

The injustices suffered by women are transmitted further to Doyle through some of the women that are brave enough to talk to her. In particular, a character named Marie-Therese reveals that she and other female prisoners were kept in clinics so that the government could claim that they had no political prisoners. She relates to Doyle the physical and sexual violation that female prisoners were routinely faced with and highlights the fact that Haitian women were the recipients of a victimization that arose only from their gender (1994: 150).

The injustice for Haitian women through their exclusion from every role except those of wife and mother epitomizes Claudine's struggles in *The Uneasiness of Life*. Claudine's sense of the injustice done to Haitian women springs from the roles that they are expected to play, the parameters within which they are forced to express themselves and the ways in which Haitian society excoriates those women who do not live by these cultural norms.

In Claudine's own words:

We believe ourselves to be among the chosen ones and then discover one day that we are, in the final analysis, destined to a mediocre life since this is the life that fate has in store for us...What does it matter that I felt destined for greatness. I lead an insignificant life. (Magloire, 1968: 7)

Claudine's bitterness stems from the realization that she is fettered by the constraints of society from ever being "significant" (1968:9) or leading an existence that would be more than that of the superficiality that she realizes her kind is heir to.

She writes of her movement from girlhood into adolescent womanhood and of the disenchantment that she felt in realizing the duties she was expected to fulfill. These duties were mainly to marry and to play the role of faithful wife and mother and to abandon the world of literature and art that had defined her identity up to that point.

Claudine's perceptions of these injustices extend beyond her immediate person to the other women of her socio-economic and class background as well. She evaluates the lives of her friends who, she concludes, are for the most part living lives of unhappy desperation.

Claudine, using the examples of her friends, testifies that in her experience women marry to maintain class privilege, to satisfy the expectations of their families or because their aspirations for better lives can only be met through marrying men who can give them

those lives. She states: “the essential function of a husband is to keep the money flowing home” (1968: 25). This indicates awareness on Claudine’s part of the impact that economic dependence and societal pressures of conforming to patriarchal ideals has in circumventing the ability of women to choose the lives that they want to live.

She further notes that the only woman within her acquaintances that she admires is Maud, a twenty-year-old painter’s model. She is extreme in her praise for what she sees as Maud’s independence from the quotidian life of marriage and motherhood that her own peers have fallen victim to. She says:

She has a splendid body...I have more respect for a woman who uses her body to fulfill her own whim than for these wives who are so proud of being faithful but who, in fact, are selling themselves to their husbands. (1968: 34)

For Claudine, then, marriages that are made not from choice but from social and economic necessity can be equated to prostitution, the social degradation for women being the same in both cases. Her thoughts of the injustices done to women are not tentative musings but judgments upon the oppressions of male dominated society and the male ideals of women that Haitian women must conform to.

The themes of violence against Haitian women and the power of a patriarchal culture that predisposes Haitian men towards this violence are explored within *Love, Anger, Madness*.

Claire observes the secret police battering, murdering and mutilating many women and comes to an awareness of this violence against women as having more to do with misogynistic impulses than with politics. She notes in her diary that she believes what she overheard in conversation about Caledu: that “we’re dealing with a sadist who is perhaps avenging his powerlessness on women” (Vieux-Chauvet, 1968: 69). This speaks to the fact

that Caledu has risen from the lower classes to assume power in the state police (as many of those in Duvalier's army did).

Chancy notes:

Claire recognizes that Caledu targets women of the upper and middle classes in this manner in particular because he is the product of a society that views women as objects to be possessed, and light skinned women, especially, as trophies of privilege. (1997: 192)

Claire also realizes the powerlessness of women without male protectors through the plight of her friends, Dora and Jane, both of whom are without husband, fathers or brothers, and who, as a result, fall subject to Caladu's violence.

Claire's powerlessness stems from being dark skinned within a light skinned bourgeois family. As a result she is condemned to live a life that is incomplete by the standards of Haitian women because there is no man within her class who will marry her. Denied the station of wife and mother, Claire is relegated to nothing more than sitting within her room and observing life through her window. This is also an injustice that she is aware of and which she rages against within her dairy.

Vieux-Chauvet also represents and illustrates the sexual violence against Haitian women through her story *Anger* in which the protagonist, Rose, must submit to being raped for one month by a lawyer who represents the government forces who have taken away her father's land. He promises that in return, he will order the land be returned to her father. These soldiers are not named directly but bear a great resemblance to Duvalier's *Tonton Macoutes*.

Rose embodies the countless Haitian women who have been sexually victimized as a policy of political and social oppression by the government. She describes her rape in

explicit detail. Rose's rapist says to her: "You are a virgin, aren't you? You didn't lie to me? I'm going to hurt you, very badly, but you will not say a word, you understand? Not a word" (Vieux-Chauvet, 1968: 284). And then later she states "He drove himself into me with one dreadful blow, brutal and, immediately, grunted with pleasure. I bit my fist, out of pain and disgust" (1968: 284).

Vieux-Chauvet breaks through the silence surrounding the sexual victimization of Haitian women, which is reported to have been widespread under the Duvaliers, in both the way that she as an author deals with the subject head on and in the fact that within the narrative she gives the power of voice to Rose herself to describe the crime that has been committed against her. Chancy states: "Chauvet's characters are explicitly feminist incarnations whose purpose is to render the real lives of Haitian women more visible, without romanticization" (1997:186).

III. Opposing these injustices

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Sophie, in order to put an end to the purity checks that she is subject to, becomes the instrument of her own liberation by using a pestle to break the hymen her mother guards so jealously. It is significant that Sophie becomes her own liberator instead of her achieving the same end by sleeping with the man with whom she has been carrying out a secret relationship. Adjarian notes that this is a subversion of male-female sexual roles with Sophie seizing and using phallic power (represented by the pestle) for her own liberation (2004: 97).

Sophie's loss of innocence is also accompanied by independence as she leaves her mother's house and marries the older African man whom Martine had forbidden her from seeing. While it may seem that by marrying Sophie is conforming to the patriarchal Haitian

notions of the duty of women to engage in matrimony, Sophie's choice of husband is a declaration of autonomy and rebellion against these very norms. Her choice of mate is neither Haitian nor is he the choice of her family for her. Sophie marries far outside of the cultural norms that dictate who a Haitian girl should marry and how. Sophie is thus dictating the terms of her own life.

In addition, Martine takes a lover and refuses to marry him. She is thus entering into the taboo of a Haitian woman that engages in sexual congress outside of the chastening circle of marriage.

Tante Atie, (Martine's sister) disgusted with a society in which she is considered an outcast because no man has ever offered to marry her, lives alone, self sufficiently, spurning the social mores that dictate that a woman cannot do so.

The possibility for redemption, salvation and opposition for women through literacy is another common theme in the novel. Tante Atie, by learning to read and write, begins writing poetry and stories that she had heard as a child and so becomes the recorder of a kind of history herself. This is a subversion of the dominant male role as "recorder of history".

This idea of opposition and revolution against Haitian cultural norms in the Diaspora is repeated in *Memories of an Amnesiac* when Lili, after leaving Haiti for Canada as a young woman, begins to push against the boundaries of social, political and cultural norms that were imposed upon her in Haiti. In an act of political subversion she takes part in a march with other students, rallying in the streets with them as they protest against the Canadian government. In dissenting and rebelling (even if this rebellion and dissent is in Canada) Lili

is striking out against the established and systematized rules of passivity against any authority that she had grown up with under the Duvalier regime.

Lili also takes a decisive and revolutionary step away from the social mores of modesty and female chastity and away from the rigid sex roles of women in Haiti by beginning a series of extra marital sexual relationships. Her first sexual exploit is with a Canadian man named Steve. Lili understands the symbolic nature and the wider implications of this step. She states: “He was not my first lover, I did not have a first lover, Steve was my reply” (Dominique, 1984: 99). During her twelve years in exile Lili pursues relationships with a number of men as well as women, breaking the double taboo of both female promiscuity and of homosexuality.

While Lili does finally enter into a relationship that leads to marriage with a fellow Haitian exile, a “dark-skinned” man named Eli, it is notable that this is a marriage that would not have been sanctioned according to the rules of Haitian class and caste, Lili being a light skinned member of the bourgeois and her husband being a dark skinned man whose roots are within the peasantry. Therefore, even though Lili’s act of marriage is one that conforms to the Haitian patriarchal ideals for a woman, her choice of husband does not.

Furthermore, even after her marriage she continues to pursue affairs with both men and women, a course of action that Adjarian notes seems almost a rejection and denial of her newly admitted complicity with the patriarchal system that she had rejected so vigorously earlier (Adjarian, 2004: 96).

Finally, the very act of Lili writing her history and her experiences is an act of opposition against the very specifically female experience of oppression as a Haitian woman.

Chancy notes:

Since women have consistently been written out of both the historical and literary records of Haiti, the writings by Haitian women writers are acts of intervention, meta-histories, which restore the lives of Haitian women to visibility. (1996:61)

The tacitly understood patriarchal rules of her society have reduced Lili to a state of absence or effacement. She notes herself that it is the dehumanizing nature of these oppressive mores that have masked her true reality. In being silenced she is being denied the ability to inscribe herself onto Haitian history and reality. In the act of writing her history she breaks free of these constraints and affirms herself, writing about what she is forbidden from remembering and, in doing so, writing herself an existence upon the stage of a history where women are told they have no place.

Within *The Uneasiness of Life* Claudine's act of writing is similarly subversive. Claudine's "novel" is a history of her own life and yet it is also a narrative of her time and place, of the forbidden desires and dreams of women and of the subversive actions that can result when these desires are given free reign. The documentation of such a life in the form of a tangible discursive document becomes an act of opposition to a culture, people and history that would silence it.

Claudine acts in opposition to the cultural ideals in which a woman's identity is conferred upon her through her role as wife and mother. She arbitrarily bestows upon herself what Chancy has called the "privilege of desire" (1997: 65), that which in Haitian society and culture is enjoyed exclusively by men.

Claudine's artistic ambitions, her self suffusion within the world of art (painting, poetry and prose) and her action of putting words to paper become acts of opposition to Haitian cultural ideals for women.

She freely explores her sexuality and takes a number of lovers, among which are married men and in one instance a woman, Maud, the model whom she had earlier admired so much.

Claudine uses this liberated sexual behavior as a form of opposition and resistance to the social mores that would have women able to engage in sexual behavior only within the confines of the marriage bond. Chancy notes:

The Uneasiness of Life accurately reflects the muting of the female voice within Haiti and the ways in which that silencing necessitates the use of the body, of black female sexuality, as a strategic site and tool of resistance. (1997:116)

In addition, having rejected the "respectability" of marriage, she also rejects the social taboo which forbids a woman from living alone, calling her bungalow and the sense of independence she feels in it a "dream realized" (Dominique, 1968:11).

Within D'Adesky's text dreams become conduits for recollection, opposition and subversion. Her text has been labeled more symbolic and "abstract" than other fiction written by Haitian women and yet it may be argued that the means of redemption and salvation for women within *Under the Bone* reflects the reality of women who are living under the double oppression of dictatorship and patriarchy.

Carol Charles notes:

The subversion of Duvalierism is enacted from within the parameters of the imagination. Dreams, then, provide the main characters with the opportunity to confront their own set of beliefs as well as to imagine themselves in the place of

another in order to shed claims to ignorance which in turn lead to self-absolutions of responsibility. (1996:158)

This is significantly illustrated in the dreams that Elyse, an activist who has been imprisoned after she was framed for murder, has while in captivity. Elyse often has these dreams after particularly bad episodes of oppression or violence within the prison. Recounting her vivid dreams Elyse states that she sees her ancestors, in particular her grandmother, who is fused with the Haitian goddess of water and protector of children, *Mtres Agwa*. This hybrid ancestor guides her through a rainy storm. Elyse understands that she is being sent an important message about her own survival.

Charles notes that these dreams give her a sense of hope and personal power that enables her to overcome a circumstantial inability to act (1996:160).

D'Adesky is illustrating how opposition to oppression does not always need to mean an overt action and also that Haitian women do not always have the chance or the opportunities to take such action. In such cases, it is the imagination and the subconscious that can serve as a source of power and hope. In the absence of resources with which to affirm identities or spaces in which to act against oppressors, dreams become precursors to action. They become spaces where visions of female collectivity, action and thought are played out.

Vieux-Chauvet's Claire, in *Love*, is galvanized to action through her growing political and social consciousness of the ills and wrongs against Haitian women. She seeks out her childhood friends despite being warned by them to stay away because by associating with them she would be drawing attention to herself from the secret police. Seeing Dora stumble in the street one day Claire comes down from her "look out post" (the window of her room) to help her along her way even though the commander of the police is standing in the street

at the time. Dora is frightened for her but Claire insists that she will come and visit her every day. Surprised at her own daring Claire asks herself why she feared the commander Caledu before this moment. Chancy notes that Claire begins to acknowledge that she has the power to take control of her own life and the ability to watch over those women whose fates have been decided by Caledu's viciousness (1997: 192).

At the end of the novel Claire murders the commander and thus puts an end to his reign of terror. Claire stabs Caledu with a dagger. The dagger here may be interpreted symbolically as a phallic object. Claire therefore subverts the power of the phallus (in a way that Rose is unable to) by turning it back onto Caledu. In doing so she releases herself, Jane, Dora and also the countless women he brutalized from the violence of patriarchal and political domination.

Claire also carries out an act of opposition through her diary writing. She does this by writing about things such as political oppression and sexual longings, subjects that are not considered the purview of Haitian women. Through the act of writing she becomes, like Lili and Claudine, a recorder of history.

Rose's act of opposition, in the form of her sexual violation in return for her father's land, is a paradox. On the one hand, Rose subverts the victim aspect of rape by negotiating the rights to her own body. She acts to take a step towards her own inevitable oppression (political and sexual) by demanding compensation for it. On the other hand it is an act of opposition which falls flat as the land is not returned and her brother and father are killed into the bargain. Nonetheless, it may be argued that Rose at least attempts to empower herself within the circumstances of her victimization and exploitation.

IV. Seeing the group as having a shared interest in ending and diminishing these injustices

In *Breathe, Eyes, Memory* Sophie, feeling that she can only reconcile her own victimization by confronting the notion that the practice of “purity testing” is acceptable, ultimately returns to Haiti where she confronts her grandmother. After the virtue of the daughter of a neighbor is called into question, Sophie defends the girl’s rights by recalling her own experience. She says:

“I hated the tests”, I said. “It was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. When my husband is with me now, it gives me such nightmares that I have to bite my tongue to do it again.”

“With patience, it goes away.”

“No Grandme Ife, it does not” (Danticat, 1994:156)

Her grandmother, after stubbornly defending the practice as a necessity to keep girls pure, comes to understand how the problems in Sophie’s life stem from the trauma of this ritual and in a poignant passage she apologizes, saying: “My heart, it weeps like a river, for the pain we have caused you” (1994:157).

At the end of the exchange noted above it seems that both Sophie and her grandmother are talking in absolutes. Sophie’s reply to her grandmother seems almost to echo with the voices of all girls and all women as she affirms that the horrors do not go away.

Danticat’s protagonist, once empowered to take action to put an end to the violation against herself, has reached a point where she may be able to contest these “purity” checks as a violation against all Haitian girls. She rejects it as a “necessary cultural practice” as her grandmother, who here represents those women who believe implicitly in the patriarchal ideals of female sexual repression and perpetuate it through the matriarchal order, argues it.

Sophie is passing an active judgment on a culture, order and society that has allowed the conditions for her suffering. This, as well as Sophie's defense of the neighbor girl, shows that Sophie understands the wider detriment of these practices and principles and so also the necessity in ending them.

In *Memories of an Amnesiac* Lili "speaks" and remembers in order to give words to the larger community of her female ancestors-- those whom she says never had a chance to make themselves heard. For Lili, resisting silence and resisting burial under what Adrienne Rich has called "an inadequate or lying language" (Rich, 1992:64) -- a language through which a deceptive account of social relations at both micro and macro levels is promoted--- is a task of the victimized collective and this is a collective that she represents.

If, as it has been argued earlier, Lili's actions and opposition are done within the larger context of being a Haitian woman then it can also be argued that Lili's efforts of self-affirmation are a step towards self-affirmation within the context of Haitian women. This is a shared end yet one that must come from very personal actions. Lili's triumph is also a triumph of the collective.

Magloire's Claudine, however, remains oddly silent in expressing a sentiment of collective benefit in an end to Haitian women's oppressions, even while being one of the most overtly vocal amongst Haitian female protagonists in pointing to these oppressions.

Magloire has Claudine in a state of full mental dissolution by the end of the novel. Claudine cannot sustain the life that she lives within the parameters of Haitian society. She intends at one point on justifying her existence and yet she cannot because she knows of no other "liberated" Haitian women whose models she may follow.

It may be argued that although there is a marked absence of Claudine's sentiment on the benefits for Haitian women in ending the injustices she herself has been a victim of, the terrible fate that she is relegated to is a covert statement by Magloire about the collective gain in changing social norms in Haiti so that women who dare to step outside of the designated roles of wife and mother may not suffer a similar fate.

Similarly, D'Adesky's text does not show a manifestation of oppositional consciousness at a point where the characters are able to articulate their shared interest in diminishing the injustices that they suffered and will no doubt continue to suffer.

Elyse and Luz aren't women who are able to realize their collective interests. Rather, they exist on the margins of individual survival. These are women in whom oppositional consciousness is manifested and highlighted in spaces of the imagination and the subconscious, hence the importance of dreams as a space of empowerment and opposition within the text.

In *Love, Anger, Madness* Rose's consciousness is focused and contextualized very much within the story of her family while Claire is the protagonist on whom Vieux-Chauvet confers an oppositional consciousness that transcends the immediacy of her own plight. It is through Claire's involvement with her friends and their victimizations that she becomes aware of the larger need of action to end the injustices that they face. Her growing feminist consciousness manifests itself in the revolutionary actions that she takes. In her final action of killing Caledu, Claire shows that her consciousness has reached a level where she realizes that action is required for the greater good of women and not just for herself. Chancy states:

Claire gains strength from her association with both Dora and Jane. It is for these women, as well as for herself, that she will assassinate Caledu, whose death is

desired by all...In her relationships with Jane and Dora, as well as the faceless, nameless women she hears being dragged through the streets by Caledu in the middle of the night, Claire is asserting a woman-centered consciousness. (1997: 86)

The End of the Story: To Be or Not to Be Oppositionally Conscious?

The five texts analyzed here show oppositional consciousness at various points of crystallization amongst their respective female characters.

Oppositional consciousness throughout *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is presented not in terms of a unified progression per se, but rather as scattered fragments of action, dialogue and thought. It may be argued that Danticat has presented the development of characters in the text to reflect the manner in which Haitian women at all levels may begin to understand the injustices done to them. They may do so without actually recognizing this understanding as feminist or oppositional thought or organizing or reacting to it in such a way.

Breath, Eyes, Memory is about oppositional consciousness at a very fundamental and yet rudimentary stage. It is about the first stirrings of this kind of consciousness, be that in a woman living in a village in Haiti or a young girl growing up in New York. Danticat has highlighted the ways that change may begin: in the form of literacy (Tante Atie), the rebellion of a teenage girl (Sophie) or the economic empowerment and independence of a woman to provide for her own family (Martine). Danticat's message seems to be that consciousness, whether recognized as oppositional or not, must begin at some initial point, no matter how ambiguous, and that it can only be hoped that somewhere down the road, through the painstaking march of generations, those beginnings may spark a larger flame.

Memories of an Amnesiac is a text in the tradition of a *bildungsroman* (a coming of age story). Within the course of this coming-of-age novel, in the evolution from “Paul” to “Lili”, the protagonist must struggle for an identity by breaching the gap between her past and present. Lili’s oppositional consciousness, gauged by the elements put forward by Mansbridge, is one that is constituted of all the requisite parts. Her subversive political acts, her sexual experimentations and her musings upon the nature of Haitian women’s oppressions seem to spring forward from an unwavering, deeply nuanced oppositional consciousness which evolves as she does.

An analysis of the oppositional consciousness of the protagonist of *The Uneasiness of Life*, Claudine, has shown that the first three elements are highly evolved and translate into direct action and that the fourth element is subtly presented through extrapolation of the first three and through the fate of the protagonist herself.

Claudine’s ending seems to show not the benefits but rather the dangers of a consciousness evolved into opposition. Chancy notes: “Claudine abandons her search for self because she has internalized the oppression of Haitian woman and found no alternative expressions of female identity in the world around her” (1996:70). As such, Claudine’s narrative seems to be more about identity *attempted* rather than achieved. As an expression of oppositional consciousness it reads more as a cautionary tale than as one that results in some kind of redemption and catharsis for the protagonist.

The Uneasiness of Life is ultimately a text about the fact that to be a Haitian woman is to be someone that is denied the privilege of existing on any terms except those that are dictated to her. It may be about the importance and yet the ultimate futility of the attempt to oppose these mores. In Claudine’s inability to find redemption as an artist or a writer the

final resounding sound of Magloire's text is one of the silence that has enveloped most Haitian women and that now engulfs Claudine as well.

In *Under the Bone* the literal consciousness becomes more real for Haitian women than the world within which they live. And yet rather than serving as a tool of desperation and delusion it becomes one of empowerment. Watkins (1998) has explored the possibilities within the subconscious that may be applied to this context. He states:

The imagination is a tool through which possibilities are explored and are approached, though not in a tangible form. In other words, the imagination brings us close to the unimaginable but not necessarily into conscious fields of knowledge.

Within this gap lies a dilemma, the individual decision to make of the imagination a tool for transformation or to regard it only as an idle psychological process... We can use the imagination's capacity for sympathy either as stimulus for moral action or in the pursuit of self-interest. (Watkins, 1998: 75)

Chancy notes: "The imagined is the world of possibility, not finality" (1997: 145). This becomes tremendously important in the context of Haiti (and in many societies where women must face similar dilemmas) where women are victimized, marginalized, and oppressed, where overt oppositional action is next to impossible for many women and where it is in the imagination and the subconscious that strength and opposition can be gleaned. It is through the power of oppositional dreams that the Haitian protagonists sustain themselves in the nightmare that is their lives. In this sense oppositional consciousness becomes not an end unto itself but a beginning, one in which the possibilities for survival and opposition and revolution are endless.

The protagonists of *Love* and *Anger*, Claire and Rose respectively, show oppositional consciousness at various stages of development. Rose's oppositional consciousness is formed only to the point of political awareness of her situation as well as of her own helplessness and hopelessness as a woman. It is with such awareness that she "allows" herself to be raped and it is with the knowledge of this victimization and the meaninglessness of it that she kills herself in the end.

Claire, on the other hand, is a protagonist who goes through a full metamorphosis. Vieux-Chauvet, through Claire, shows how the protagonist can rise from ostracism and isolation to possess an oppositional consciousness of such strength that it leads to the ultimate oppositional action of justice and courage.

Vieux-Chauvet, through Claire and Rose, shows two sides of the same coin. Both are women who, through violence and political upheaval, are brought to a consciousness of action. In the case of Rose the intentions are of subversion but the reality is one of helplessness. Claire, on the other hand, is a representation of a Haitian woman who though constrained by almost every circumstance can still rise to validate her existence through opposition and revolution.

Common Oppositional Themes & Postcolonial Feminism

There are a number of recurring themes of female oppression and opposition to these oppressions (within the Haitian context) threaded through the five texts analyzed above.

One such theme is the control of the female body and of female sexuality through rigid patriarchal cultural norms. This issue is met with another common motif: the rebellion and opposition of Haitian women through exercising their sexuality. The physical and

psychological victimization of Haitian women (or gender-based violence), especially under the Duvaliers, is also illustrated in each of these five texts. The experience of Haitian women of having been relegated to the sidelines of Haitian history is expounded upon through the narrative of more than one protagonist as well. Related to this is another prevalent theme: opposition, identity formation and self-expression for Haitian women through the process of remembering and the way in which Haitian female history is preserved (on an individual as well as a collective level) through such remembrance. This remembering takes tangible form either through oral or written expression and these actions themselves become further acts of opposition.

The expression of these themes may be reconciled within the framework and tenets of Postcolonial feminist theory. For example, the silencing of Haitian women can be connected to Spivak's idea of the silencing of the subaltern woman, her lack of history and the way that she has been constructed and spoken for by dominant groups. Through the lens of Postcolonial feminism, this silencing and the opposition to it can be interpreted on two levels. One level is the silencing of Haitian women through the homogenizing tendency of Western feminist discourse and the other is the silencing through the patriarchal power of men (Haitian & Colonial) who have long been the principal recorders of history. The opposition to this silencing then, either through (oppositional) consciousness and/or through action, is an opposition to both the oppression imposed by Western feminist discourse and that imposed by patriarchal discourse.

Second, taking oppositional consciousness as an expression of subjectivity, the implicit goal of Postcolonial feminist practice in mapping out alternative positions of subjectivity is met through the expression of oppositional consciousness in relation to the themes listed

above. While the narratives themselves may be fictional, the issues of gender violence, oppressed sexuality etc. as they affect Haitian women are not. Therefore, it can be argued that these authors, in engaging with the tangible oppressions of Haitian women, even if it is in the context of fiction, are mapping out plausible subjectivities in relation to them.

Finally, the variety in the nature of these subjectivities provides another link to postcolonial feminist theory. Within these texts these highlighted themes affect the female protagonists as a sub group of women from the developing world (Haitian women) but they affect them within differing contexts of class, history and geography. The subsequent subjectivities of each woman reflect the nuances of their differing contexts. This speaks to the integral aspect of Postcolonial feminist theory according to which the historic, geographic, economic and social particularities of a woman's life command attention because the materiality and locality of different factors produce differing circumstances, understandings and outcomes.

This idea is expanded upon below in the process of addressing the contextualization of these works in postcolonial feminist practice.

Haitian Women's Fiction & the Postcolonial Feminist Context

In stating that postcolonial feminist theory provided the backdrop for and informed this work, it is necessary to address the possibility that there is an "explanatory potential" and (potential) "political effect" of the texts that I have analyzed that place them within the currents of postcolonial feminist practice. I argue that this potential and effect lies in their value as counter hegemonic feminist discourse, functioning in opposition to the generalizing tendency of western feminist discourse in relation to "third world" women. These texts fulfill this

function by contextualizing the narratives of (Haitian) “third world” women and illustrating the diversity of the lived experience of such women through these narratives as well.

One of the central tenants of postcolonial feminism, as I expanded upon earlier, is the idea that “third world” women are falsely presented as an almost monolithic category within western feminist discourse. This is problematic, according to postcolonial feminism, because the context of “third world” women’s lives is completely lacking.

The narratives of the protagonists of these texts however, counters this idea of “third world” women within western feminist discourse by showing that even through all the protagonists are Haitian women, and even though they live or have lived through relatively the same kinds of external oppressions in the form of dictatorship, sexual and physical violence, political and social marginalization etc. their experiences of these oppressions are relatively different, as are the trajectories which their lives follow, due to the specific circumstances and the dynamics of their own lives.

Breath, Eyes, Memory is set in Haiti and NY during the reign of the Duvaliers although Danticat does not specify the exact time period. Danticat alludes to the *Tonton Macoutes* as being responsible for Martine’s rape. Martine’s reactions to the violation she faced in Haiti are a function of the freedom that she has in living in the US. Her economic, social and sexual independence (although personal initiatives) are possible because of where she is. This can be juxtaposed with Tant Atie who, having oppositional impulses against the cultural and social oppressions within Haiti, which have left her a marginalized women because of her unmarried state, is able to only go as far as taking the step of living alone and writing poetry. The agency that she is able to exert differs because she is circumscribed by her location. Sophie, the generation within the family who is able to go the farthest in exerting her independence, is

aided in the circumstances of having grown up within the United States. The latitude that she has for action and opposition is still greater than that of either her mother or aunt and is related to a different context of time and place.

In *Memories of an Amnesiac*, Lili's story takes place against a larger backdrop of the rise to power of François Duvalier in 1957. Lili's experiences of the dictatorship are confined to a second hand account of the beating of people that she sees in the streets and the raids on a house by the *Tonton Macoutes* that she sees, inadvertently, as a child. While Lili and her family are affected by the larger political oppression of the regime they are not directly affected by the widespread physical violence or torturous ways that so many people, men and women, fall victim to during the same time. She is able to even further distance herself from such oppressions and violence by going to Canada to study *because* she comes from a wealthy family. Her concerns with "deeper" issues of identity and female sexuality, her sexual experimentation and actions are all shaped by her personal context of resources, background and education.

Magloire, in *The Uneasiness of Life*, provides a story that has minimal political context. There is little to no mention of the larger politics of the country. Claudine's story is written as a first person narrative and is focused exclusively on the roles that women are relegated to as wives and mothers and the strict patriarchal control of their sexuality. It can be argued that Claudine's concern with her own possibilities as an artist and what she perceives as the main oppressions within her life reflect her position in belonging to a class of Haitian women for whom such concerns not only are but *can be* a priority. Magloire, in showing the contempt that Claudine she has for people of the lower classes, men and women, and the total lack of perspective concerning the issues that effect them, illustrates the extent of the disconnect that

can exist between Haitian women of different classes. However, Magloire, showing the distaste that Claudine has for women of her own class that adhere to cultural norms, shows that such a disconnect can exist between Haitian women of the same class as well.

Love, Anger, Madness yields two protagonists, Claire and Rose, who also have vastly differing experiences of the same kind of political brutality. While Vieux-Chauvet does not directly name the militia and the military forces that terrorize the characters of *Love* and *Anger*, it is widely acknowledged that they are thinly veiled representations of the precursors of the *Tonton Macoutes* (in *Love*) and the *Tonton Macoutes* themselves in (in *Anger*). This places the narratives within the historical context of the period right before Duvalier took power and the period in which he was in power. Claire, because she belongs to an upper class Haitian family, is protected from the sexual and physical brutality in ways that her friends, who are of a lower class, are not. Her experience is that of a spectator, looking upon the victimization of other Haitian women. Her own subversive actions, such as helping her friends in full sight of the military dictator, are possible because of her class. Such subversive actions, which end with her murdering the dictator, are functions of her own social position in combination with her awakened oppositional consciousness.

This can be juxtaposed with Rose, from *Anger*, who has no such protection or latitude in her own dealings with the veiled *Tonton Macoutes*. Rose's family is a part of the poor rural class in Haiti. As such Rose believes that she has only her body with which to bargain with for her father's land. However, her narrative shows that in fact she does not have even that. Rose has neither protection nor way of empowering herself against the kind of sexual violation that Claire, also a Haitian woman, does not need to fear due to her class.

Under the Bone is set in the aftermath of the fall of the Duvalier's in 1986. The Haitian women within this text Elyse, who is an activist and Luz, who is a prostitute, come from widely differing backgrounds. Despite these diverse backgrounds, however, they do find themselves subjected to the same kind of torture and sexual abuse. D'Adesky's text is one in which Haitian women of different classes and histories do have similar lived experiences under the Duvaliers. However, it is important to qualify this by saying that this is illustrated in the context of the shared experience of prison in which they are both incarcerated. D'Adesky shows connection between the two women forming not because they are both Haitian women per se, but despite the fact that they come from such widely different circumstances and social contexts. Her text is about the connections that may form against a shared oppression, even given differing histories, classes etc.

Therefore, the narratives that are presented within these texts, by illustrating just how varied are the experiences of Haitian women, even within similar historical contexts and in the face of similar oppressions, answer the postcolonial feminist's cry for the need for the contextualization of 'third world' woman. These texts explicitly show that there is no singular Haitian woman, with a single experience of political or social oppressions, that Haitian women do not have a collective consciousness or a collective lived history. These texts do function in doing the work of postcolonial feminism as it struggles against the monolithic 'third world' representations of western feminist discourse. If western hegemonic feminist discourse is about effacing 'third world' difference, then these texts are actively involved in countering such effacement by sketching the details of individual women's experiences in---albeit in a Haitian context.

Another issue within postcolonial feminist theory is the idea that ‘third world’ women are represented within hegemonic feminist discourse as powerless, marginalized and victimized subjects. However, within the five texts I have analyzed, the protagonists empower themselves to act against the issues that adversely affect them within their respective contexts with the tools that are available to them. As such, these narratives act against the portrayal of ‘third world’ women as marginalized victims only and instead show that even within ‘third world’ contexts, organic empowerment is possible.

I conclude that the explanatory potential and the political effect of such texts in countering hegemonic representations of (Haitian) “third world” women through contextualization and demarginalization places them within the context of postcolonial feminist theory and practice.

Conclusion

The moment of change is the only poem

- Adrienne Rich

A time would come, he had just had the revelation, when the hands of the exploited would come together to demand justice.

- Marie Chauvet, *Les Rapaces*

In an article on feminist history, Adrienne Rich (1986) writes:

There is nothing you can do in history that will free you of the historical responsibility of being born at a certain time, in a certain place, with a certain skin color". I would add, of course, and into a certain sex...

But you do have the choice to become consciously historical---that is, a person who tries for memory and connectedness against amnesia and nostalgia... Breaking silences, telling our tales is not enough. Historical responsibility has, after all, to do with action ---where we place the weight of our existences on the line, cast out lot with others, move from an individual consciousness to a collective one. But we all need to begin with the individual consciousness: How did we come to be where we are and not elsewhere? (Rich, 1986:140)

It is a belief in the idea of needing to begin with the individual consciousness that is both the starting point for this thesis and its end.

The five texts which I have explored within this work exemplify a body of literature which embodies the collective history of Haitian women in the context of common external forces such as conflict, dictatorship, and patriarchal and cultural oppression. However, they also simultaneously speak to the variety of lived individual experiences of Haitian women. The Haitian women within these texts also exemplify, in varying degrees, the manner in which individual consciousness can also be oppositional consciousness and how this, in turn, can result in oppositional action.

Because these works have been shown to deal with themes of female oppression and with discourses of female agency and social change they can be categorized as feminist texts (according to the definition given by Lauret 1994).

Given the feminist nature of these texts as well as the exemplification of oppositional consciousness through the female protagonists within them I propose that these books can be seen as the Haitian counterparts to the fictional works of Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath and Rita Mae Brown, which were used during the second wave of feminism in Canada, the United States and the UK. Those books, too, were defined as feminist according to the definition given above. In addition, as outlined within the first chapter, they were characterized by the development of feminist consciousness within their respective female protagonists.

Using these common characteristics of content as a foundation and extrapolating from the use and influence of those texts during the second wave as well as from the academic consensus on the influence that women's fiction may have upon a female readership, I argue that these Haitian feminist works also have the potential to inspire a notional feminist (oppositional) consciousness amongst their female readership.

Following Mansbridge's (2001) idea about oppositional consciousness (according to which it is one of the galvanizing and intermediate factors that causes some of the important dynamics of social movements), I therefore argue that in having the potential to inspire such oppositional consciousness amongst Haitian women, these books also have the potential to contribute towards their ultimate development. This may be through individual empowerment and/or through collective action.

Propagation of Haitian Women's Feminist Fiction within the Diaspora and Haiti

It becomes necessary to address the fact the propagation and use of Haitian women's feminist fiction must occur in a context which differs greatly from the circumstances in

which feminist texts were used during the second wave of feminism in Canada, the US and England. First, the propagation of feminist texts during the second wave took place in developed countries in which female literacy rates (and hence the potential pool of female readers) were much higher than current literacy rates amongst women in Haiti, which is a developing country. Second, the resources of these developed countries allowed for greater access to feminist fiction through public libraries, institutes of higher education, community book groups, bookstores etc. In addition, the democratic freedoms within these countries allowed women the independence to meet, share, discuss and develop their personal ideas and interpretations of these texts.

For the Haitian women that are a great part of the approximately four million Haitians living in the US, Canada and parts of Europe (UNHCR, 2007: 22), the educational and economic resources available to them (within these developed countries) facilitate access to these feminist texts. Moreover, democratic spaces provide them with the latitude to convert ideas that are generated from the reading of these texts into discourse and action.

There are numerous Haitian women's groups within the Diaspora, ranging from small community organizations to large-scale operations that have offices in several cities in the United States, Canada and Europe with extensive ties in Haiti as well. Organizations such as Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, MADRE-Haiti and The Haitian Women's Association (with branches in Boston, New York, Montreal and Miami) work for the advancement of Haitian women through education and employment initiatives, human rights awareness and programs which advocate for social justice for Haitian women in the Diaspora and in Haiti.

Such Diaspora groups may take advantage of the economic and social resources available to them to propagate such fictional works amongst the Haitian women with whom

they work. In addition to proliferating the texts they can act to organize community book clubs and discussion workshops that may become political arenas and forums for women to expand upon the feminist themes of oppression and opposition that these works deal with and to locate them within the contexts of their own lives.

In Haiti itself the educational and economic privations that women face makes the employment of these texts as a feminist resource more complicated. One of the largest obstacles would seem to be the low literacy rate amongst women; 52.2% of Haitian women are literate². This is further compounded by the poverty that pervades throughout the country, Haiti being not only the poorest country within the Western Hemisphere but also one of the poorest countries in the world, with 80% of the population living under the poverty line (UNDP, 2009: 58). Such economic conditions do not warrant an expectation that either the public resources are present to make such feminist fiction widely available or that many women in Haiti have the private resources to avail themselves of these books.

While it is true that the low literacy rate of women in Haiti limits the use of these fictional works to a relatively smaller female demographic, I believe that this is not a circumstance which obviates entirely against the use of this feminist fiction. This is because my proposition is not that they be used as a blanket resource that should be able to target all women but rather that it be used *in tandem* with other developmental resources and feminist tools and become part of a holistic approach to the end goal of women's empowerment. Seen in this way these works become a single resource, amongst others, that can be used to target the female population in Haiti.

² This is defined as the percentage of females above the age of fifteen that can read and write in French (UNDP, 2009: Human Development Report: Haiti: 58).

Furthermore, I argue that in terms of the ultimate aim of the development of women in Haiti it is irrelevant that the number of women that may be influenced by these texts is relatively smaller than the number of women that may have been influenced by the use of feminist fiction during the second wave of feminism in Canada, the United States and the UK. Given the restricting circumstances of poverty, conflict and patriarchal customs and culture that women in Haiti must deal with, even a small increase in the percentage of women who are equipped with a feminist oppositional consciousness would be a significant drop in the proverbial bucket of development.

To address the issue of lack of resources in Haiti, both in the availability of this feminist fiction and in the economic means necessary for their proliferation and purchase, I would like to recommend, within the framework of transnational feminism, the idea of Haitian women of the Diaspora using the resources at their disposal for the propagation of these texts in Haiti.

The Ties that Bind: Transnational Feminism and Links between Diaspora and Haiti

Globalization, and the perpetually changing dynamics of politics, economy, society and culture that it has given rise to, has had implications for feminist practice and theory as well. Feminism has had to account for these altering global and local conditions and to reckon with the repercussions for women inherent in them. Transnational feminism; similar to Postcolonialism in that it “compares the multiple, overlapping and discrete oppressions rather than to construct a theory of hegemonic oppression under a unified category of gender, seeks precisely to articulate and to understand the intersections between the international and the local” (Ferree & Tripp, 2006: 3). For transnational feminists this

intersection becomes a space where feminist activism steps outside of its local contexts and works across national borders. At the same time, feminist ideas and movements are propagated and diffused from international and macrocosmic levels to local contexts as well. The central paradox and symmetry at the heart of transnational feminism is that it is at once local and international, each sphere drawing from and being influenced by the other.

Basu (2000) has highlighted this paradox in arguing that within transnational feminist movements activists' efforts, when evaluated in regional and local contexts, show that sometimes they are sustained by international intervention but that in other cases they are subsumed by them (Basu, 2000: 72).

Although there are many perspectives of transnational feminism along a spectrum that ranges from socialist to liberal, all these different kinds of interpretations share a vision of transnational feminism as building on global networks of communication which bring about a "shifting of borders" that allows the emergence of transnational dialogues between feminists the world over. It is in this sense that transnational feminism is also referred to as borderless feminism.

The idea of this borderless feminism is not without precedent in the context of Haiti; there is a history of collaboration in activism between Haitian women of the Diaspora and women in Haiti. Charles (1995) has noted that in Haiti the policies of systematic oppression and violence aimed at women under the Duvalier regime gave rise to a consciousness among Haitian women of their own political role and the potential that they had as instruments of change (Charles, 1995: 138). While this consciousness could not manifest itself as action in Haiti due to the oppressive Duvalier state, it provided impetus for action once these women had left their country and were living in exile in North America. Charles states:

It is mainly in the Haitian immigrant communities of North America that women were able to organize their movements and their feminist struggle... This new consciousness was a form of empowerment that would favor the growth of feminist groups among Haitian women, in particular in the various communities in North America where the new Haitian women's movement emerged against the resistance of male controlled political organizations (1995: 141)

During the 1980s many of the members of these organizations returned to Haiti and became the vanguard of a very public feminist movement (1995: 140). After the fall of the Duvaliers, they were involved in the process of nation building as well as in organizing women in Haiti to lay the basic groundwork for a "new" women's movement. About 60% of the members of these new Haitian feminist organizations that worked for the empowerment and the development of women in Haiti were veterans of the feminist struggles of Haitian women abroad (1995:152).

I propose that it is through such "borderless" collaborations between Haitian women of the Diaspora and women in Haiti that feminist works of fiction such as those analyzed within this work may be propagated and promoted. Haitian women of the Diaspora (those working within Haitian women's groups such as those mentioned earlier) have open access to these texts, are members of powerful minority lobbies and can carry out fundraising efforts that would allow them to raise the resources necessary for the propagation of these texts amongst women in Haiti.

Haitian women of Diaspora women's groups can utilize their networks and the knowledge of their counterparts in Haiti to implement the distribution of texts to schools,

universities, women's groups etc. and to organize forums of discussion and debate centered on these works.

Looking Back & Forward

Having come to the end of this work I admit that the road to the finishing point was a long and challenging one.

There were manifold difficulties. First, reconciling the development of consciousness in the fictional characters of literature/art with the theory of "real world" oppositional consciousness was a painstaking process.

Second, even after having chosen oppositional consciousness as the focal point through which to analyze the chosen fictional works, my lack of a background in the study of literature made the analysis of these texts a challenge.

I also regret the three months that I lost in pursuing my original idea, which was to engage with Haitian women of the Diaspora in order to gain insight into what their views were on this body of Haitian women's fiction and to what extent they had been influenced by it, if they had been influenced at all. I realize now that it was a project more complex than I had originally imagined and one that would have needed the resources available to a doctoral candidate instead of a master's student.

That said, the process of working through these challenges allowed me to gain a more profound and nuanced understanding of the ideas involved in looking at literature as a feminist resource.

Furthermore, I am confident that despite these challenges I have been able to reach my objective of showing how Haitian women's fiction has the potential to be a developmental

resource for Haitian women. I have done this by linking it to the formation of oppositional consciousness in a Haitian woman readership through its content and through the precedence of the use of women's fiction during the second wave of feminism.

In showing how this "raw" material (fictional works) could be applied in the struggle for women's development in the context of a developing region or amongst a Diaspora community, I believe that my larger goal of extending the idea of searching for and analyzing the potential in such organic, overlooked resources for women from and in developing areas has also been met.

In meeting my objectives I have provided the *possibilities* and the idea of the *potential* of this raw material. This can in turn become the groundwork for further research. The practical implications and the feasibility of the application of feminist fictional works in the context of Haiti (or another developing area) can become avenues for further exploration.

Such future exploration may focus on issues such as the level of familiarity of Haitian women with this feminist fiction and the way that Haitian cultural norms about female artists color their opinions about it. This research may also focus on discovering whether or not Haitian women that are familiar with these feminist texts deem them to be accurate reflections of the lived experiences of Haitian women. Relevant future work could also center on whether or not there is a difference of opinion amongst Haitian women on this issue depending upon whether they are located in the Diaspora or in Haiti. This might raise further questions as to whether or not these feminist texts would work better as an oppositional conscious raising resource in one place as opposed to the other.

In exploring and answering these questions the potential and possibilities of Haitian women's fiction for Haitian women's development may become realities.

In ending I would like to state that while there is no guarantee that Haitian women will, through the influence of prose feminist texts such as those analyzed within this work, take up the proverbial arms or that oppositional consciousness will take root, I believe that in the struggle for women's empowerment every possibility should be explored.

Where the potential of these texts as oppositional consciousness raising resources is recognized it must also be acknowledged that the kind of oppositional consciousness will vary from woman to woman and that ultimate responses (or non-response) in the form of action and personal agency will depend greatly upon the latitude that each woman has for action.

A realistic vision wouldn't be for a female uprising based upon a uniform and collective oppositional consciousness gleaned from these feminist texts. Instead, my vision is for at least some kind of response along the spectrum of oppositional consciousness in some percentage of Haitian women.

It is my hope that if in the reading of these texts one woman is roused to anger or action against a history of oppression, that another might begin to look back, even grudgingly, upon her own history and that of her mother and grandmother and may ask 'Where are we now, how have we come here and how can we move on?' It is my hope that *something* will resonate and that Haitian women will glimpse at the arcs of their own lives in the courage of these female characters and will emerge from reading such texts shaken, purged and excited, recognizing not only the possibilities and hope that literature can harbor and exemplify but the possibilities within their own lives as well.

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