

CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER? A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MALE-FEMALE LOVE RELATIONSHIPS IN TWO CARIBBEAN WOMEN WRITERS' NOVELS

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Abstract

The thematic issues of love and family are prevalent in Caribbean literature. Often these relationships are fraught with conflicts between men and women. However, the dynamics of these relationships are presented from different perspectives in both male and female authored texts. Caribbean literature Essentially, male writers from the Caribbean have transferred the image of the subservient woman prevalent in patriarchal western society into the literature written about their societies. It is no wonder then that the women writers accuse their male counterparts of collaborating with colonial and slave masters to distort the role and image of the Caribbean woman in relation to their men especially in the immediate post slavery era. The women writers continue to counter this gender biased portrayals. The two women writers whose novels are analyzed in this paper look at the different shades of relationships that exist between men and women in the Caribbean. In their portrayals, they try to reclaim the dignity of women in these relationships. They emphasize the strength of the woman rather than portraying her as a subjugated victim who is subsumed within the male definitions of the gender relations.

Keywords: patriarchy, gender, literature, man, woman, relationship, love.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much of Caribbean literature that deals with thematic issues centering on male-female relationships are fraught with conflicts. The dynamics of these relationships are presented from different perspectives in both male and female authored texts. The perspectives of these authors are often influenced by the existing or perceived gender relations on the one hand, and the type of education they received on the other. Men had the privilege of formal or western education much earlier than women in the Caribbean societies. This education which they acquired at the turn of the eighteenth century was closely patterned after the largely patriarchal values of Western society reinforced by 'the angelic' image of Queen Victoria at the time. This invariably influenced their perception and portrayal of man-woman relationships in the society and the literature.

It is equally important to note that fiction and the novel as a literary genre flowered and flourished within this time. Essentially then, most early male writers from the Caribbean tend to have transferred the image of the subservient woman prevalent in patriarchal Western society's culture and literature into their own society and literature. According to Eva Fibes, "Man's vision of woman is not objective but an easy combination of what he wishes her to be and what he fears her to be, and it is this mirror image that woman has to comply with." (Fibes, 17)

More still, these images are reinforced by the treatment of women during slavery, colonialisation and also the position of women in the Judo-Christian religion foisted on the colonies by the West. Thus in some canonical literary works by early Caribbean male writers like Edgar Mittleholzer's *Corentyne Thunder*; V.S. Reid's *New Day*; Roger Mais's *The Hills Were Joyful Together*; George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, *Natives of*

my Person, Water Without Berries; V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and Shiva Naipaul's *Fireflies*, women characters who represent mothers, wives and concubines or any definition of love relationship with men are so ill-treated that the patriarchal leaning of the society in which they are set becomes obvious. One may even say that the authors may have been influenced patriarchal and gender biased views about women in the largely male-dominated societies. For instance, in Mai's *The Hills*, the men beat their wives and concubines at will often inflicting near fatal injuries on them. These women are consistently treated as children and often portrayed as gullible and naive with the attendant inability to function as persons in their own right. There is no attempt to create an enabling environment for a relationship of mutual respect and equality to thrive between men and their wives and/or concubines in any of the novels mentioned above. Rather wife battering is regarded as a disciplinary action in order to rein in the woman and force her to submission.

In almost all of these novels too, the women struggle to provide for the needs of the men and the children. The women often turn to prostitution in order to provide for the family. Most Caribbean men are socialised into a world view that associates the home and providing for it with women so they find little or no motivation for caring for their families. Almost all the novels mentioned above also have their fair share of abandoned wives and mistresses (Mcwatt, A. 1990). Thus, in nearly all of the male-female relationships portrayed in these novels written by male authors, most of the women find themselves in a kind double bind. They have to cope with male irresponsibility in and outside of marriage. However, many Caribbean women writers challenge these images while insisting that the male writers' images and portrayals of women are flawed. They also try to counter this image by creating women characters that define male-female love relationships according to the challenges of modern society. This essay attempts a critical analysis of the fiction of two of the women writers whose voices are strident in challenging these images and have tried to use their fiction to redefine these gender relations in the African Diaspora Caribbean society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Male subjugation and negative definitions of women date back to many centuries ago. For instance, in their ground breaking and comprehensive study of western attitudes to women, Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough (1996) note that from as far back as the seventeen hundred BC, women have been basically owned by men. In this study, they make mention of ancient Assyrian law codes that stipulate that the dowry paid on a woman is a kind of purchase fee that empowers the man/husband to own her as he owned other properties. The payment of a dowry then gives the man the impetus to subjugate and treat her like he would treat his common animals and other properties. The study also traces the attitude towards women in different religions and at different time epochs and concluded that women have been defined according to the perceptions and fancies of men:

It is true there is no literature, no art of any country in which women are more prominent, more important, more carefully studied and with more interest than in the tragedy, sculpture and painting of the fifth century Athens but then their roles have been highly restricted, namely that of housekeeper, mother and temptress. (p. 51).

Another important work on the distorted images of women in literature is that of Sarah Pomeroy (1975). In the mentioned critical work, she examines how women are portrayed mostly as mistresses, whores and goddesses. These portrayals mainly follow a stereotype already put in place by men in the society. There is nothing hardly ever graceful or admirable in women.

Mary Wolstonecraft, *A Vindication of the rights of Women*, (1972) and Sarah Grimke's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*. (1970) also acknowledge that this arrangement undermines the personality and the authority of the woman so much: Sarah Grimke particularly notes:

Man has exercised the most unlimited and brutal power over woman in the peculiar character of husband—a word in most countries synonymous with tyrant... woman instead of being elevated by her union with man which might be expected from an alliance with a superior being is in reality lowered. She generally loses her individuality, her independent character, moral being. She becomes absorbed into him, and henceforth looked at and acts through the medium of her husband (pp. 85-6)

In Western societies especially in England much of the attention paid to fiction coincided with the reign of Queen Victoria in the eighteenth century. Her supposed docility, which was reinforced by Christian doctrine

and piety, encouraged the portrayal of women as inferior to men. Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997) points out how this influence worked with religion to undermine the position of women:

The bourgeois Victorian spirit of the former could scarcely accept female independence. Missionaries emphasized woman as mother, responsible for the care of household, cooking, and children, supposedly leaving the house only for church, unemancipated from either father or husband. (p. 75.)

Thus it is often that men who subscribed to western education in the colonies imbibed and retained these gender images. However, unlike their African counterparts who still retain some semblance of manly pride by providing for their families' needs (even though often very minimally) the Diaspora Caribbean men capitalize on the ability of the woman to 'make do,' (a term synonymous with managing whatever resources she can lay her hands on), to feed and clothe the children. The patterns of Caribbean slavery and male emigration in contemporary times add to the burden and the ability of the woman to cope alone. Emigration to other lands or urban centers in search of better economic opportunities increases the number of female-headed households in the Caribbean. Men stay away from their homes for long periods of time in order to work in the cities. Sometimes these men raise new families in the new places they call home; sometimes too, they simply forget their families left behind while enjoying city life. These patterns leave women with the sole responsibilities of child and home care for long periods of time.

The fact that women head such homes should have been an added boost to the power of women in family relationships but often the contrary is the case. On the contrary, a female headed home does not translate into a matriarchy. Invariably some women writers and critics have argued that female headship of homes in the absence of men does not necessarily translate to power. Rather it translates to more powerlessness and a victim mentality on the women. The burden of family care further weakens the woman mentally, emotionally and physically. For instance, bell hooks (2000) notes, "women who head households in patriarchal society often feel guilty about the absence of a male figure and are hypersensitive about imparting sexist values to children, especially males." (pp.72-3). It is no wonder then those male authors who are used to patriarchal definitions of wifehood and womanhood refuse to celebrate the indefatigable spirits of these women rather they use the burden of child care and home care thrust on the women as a weapon to further point to the image of women as beasts of burden.

2.1. The Role of Slavery

Though there were inherent patriarchal practices that may have eroded women's influence in African and pre-slavery Caribbean societies, nevertheless, the harsh treatment of the slave woman greatly diminished her personality further. Rape which can be said to be a form of punishment particularly designed for the slave woman alone was often used to force her into submission. Both male slave holders and overseers could rape slave women at will. Another weapon of subjugation was the natural closeness of the women to their children. The maternal relationship was used as a ploy to force slave women to submission. They were almost always under the constant threat of losing their children through sale to other slave owners. The slave women who were almost always threatened with separation from their children had little choice but to comply with the bidding of the masters, the mistresses and even the overseers White (1995) (Brodber (1982), Senior (1991), Shepherd (2002), and Gottlieb (1992).

However, studies (refer to the studies already listed in the preceding paragraph) on slave women's lives during slavery reckon with the fact that women slaves fought back as often as the opportunities arose. The degradation of the male slaves made it impossible for them to act as protective leaders in their homes. The only recognized male leaders or heads are the masters and those appointed by him. Thus the women were constrained to devise ways of protecting themselves. They quickly learned that allegiance to the masters, mistresses and overseers are more important than allegiance to any other males be they husbands, fathers, brothers or sons.

Thus slave plantation and post slavery life did not encourage women's subordination to men. Women went through the same harsh treatment as the men during slavery. The labour of both men and women was needed for survival so women had their fair share of suffering. The fact that slave marriages were never acknowledged and respected by their masters gave impetus for much unfaithfulness and independence among the women. For instance, Deborah White (pp. 153-55) has pointed out how masters sold either of the couples at will and forced the remaining partner to remarry. Even life for the immediate post slavery black

was too harsh for women to enjoy any seclusion at home. White also discussed how a lot of the slave marriages and immediate post slavery marriages were based on convenience on the part of both parties. There were different reasons for marriages as well as varied forms of co-habitation between men and women. Some of the women married because they needed somebody to help out in their own fields while some of the men married because they needed someone to take care of some of their domestic affairs. Some of the women lived with men they were not married to but retained much of their independence. The effect of these unconventional and circumstantial unions still reverberates in the Caribbean societies up until now where all forms of union subsist between men and women and surely marriage is hardly ever binding on the couples.

The pervasive influence of white colonial culture can still be felt in the conflict in male/female relationships that operate at two levels. On the first level, the male African-Caribbean seem to have imbibed the European/Western Victorian and Judo-Christian myth of female/wife subservience and therefore seeks to force or beat his wife or mistress into submission. On the second level there is the constant fear of the strength of the woman, which she acquired during slavery as a result of the 'defeminisation' of the black woman by the slaveholders. In all, in spite of the arguable power wielded by women in traditional black societies, there is almost a general consensus by a number of scholars and critics that the contact with the West has done much more to diminish women's influence than to elevate them.

But the contemporary Caribbean woman has not been left out in seeking for a mutually beneficial relationship with her man as other women in different places are doing. This quest for the change in status quo is reinforced by the emerging knowledge that women have had a longer history of equality with the men that stretched far back to the days of slavery. As I have already mentioned earlier, White (2000), Bush (1990), Davies and Fido-Savory and (1990), Davis (1971) have all discussed how freed women slaves acquired fields like the men. They also discussed how women slaves separated from men whom they have been forcefully married to or married out of convenience. Some of the women also took revenge on the masters and his household for denying them the opportunity of authentic love lives (Brand, 1999). However, in spite of these studies and numerous others that show the contrary, most men writers have continued to portray the wife/concubine as a gullible, helpless and hapless entity. It is no wonder then that the women writers accuse their male counterparts of collaborating with colonial and slave masters to distort the image of the Caribbean woman especially in the immediate post slavery era. The works of two of the women writers who counter these images the male writers have imposed in Caribbean fiction are examined in this paper. The writers are Patricia Powel and Paule Marshall. Paule Marshall is particularly chosen because her works besride African, American and Caribbean Diasporas. Though claimed as an American writer, her work authentically explores and forms a bridge that links the images of African and Disapora women in both the old and new worlds.

3. COUNTERING AND REDEFINING MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

Patricia Powel in *Me Dying Trial* (1993) portrays Gweenie, her main female character as the typical African-Caribbean woman/wife who is subjected to 'muledom' and subservience by her husband. Walter is the typical African-Caribbean man who believes in the supremacy of brawn over brains. He beats his wife at will and drinks up his income instead of bringing it home. The status quo continues because Gweenie does not earn enough money to take care of herself and their children if she decides to leave the marriage. Powel uses African woman writer Buchi Emecheta's device of empowering women through education to change the status quo in the relationship. Gweenie decides to go back to school in order to improve her chances of getting a better-remunerated job. She also needs to earn Walter's respect but she soon finds out that the male chauvinism is ingrained in Walter more as an internalised value of the Caribbean patriarchal society than anything to do with her education or lack of it. The marriage will eventually break down because Walter refuses to treat Gweenie with respect as his wife. Rather the opposite becomes the case in that the more educated and economically successful Gweenie became, the more insecure Walter becomes. Walter's insecurity will eventually translate to more contemptuous treatment of Gweenie.

The motifs of a lack of respect and male insecurity also permeate some of the works of Paule Marshall. For instance, the relationship between Lowell Carruthers and Ursa Beatrice Mackenzie in *Daughters* (1991) is shadowed by Lowell's fear of women. He had already been betrayed and abandoned by his ex-wife and this event in his life has eroded his confidence in his ability to sustain a relationship with the opposite sex. Thus Ursa's intelligence and activism is a threat to his fragile male ego. Much as he would want to sustain a relationship with Ursa, he feels threatened at her determination to identify with the mass of black youths. To

him, she should assume the role of the typical docile black woman as defined by male bias. Any boldness and achievement on her part will be an affront to his already bruised, fragile and insecure male ego. However, Ursa's rejection of this stereotype threatens the relationship and it eventually breaks up. Ursa goes on to abort Lowell's baby because she would not want to have a child for one so insecure.

Vincereta Daniels, another character in the same book breaks up her relationship with Willis Jenkins for the same lack of trust and respect. She evicts her lover of five years and when she feels the desire for children, she goes for artificial insemination. However, she does not foreclose the idea of a relationship with a man. Rather she would want one where both parties will have mutual respect and care for each other.

In Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, (1983) Avey Johnson would watch her personality being subsumed in that of her husband, Jerome Johnson. She is forced into a false lifestyle for the better part of her youth because the husband wanted to live the American dream of the typical bourgeoisie family. He denies and despises his humble and black background. But Avey eventually reclaims her ancestry but not until after Jerome Johnson's death. While he is alive, she is the typical docile wife but from the time of his stroke that immobilizes him, she starts out on the journey towards personhood. She confesses that even while he is still alive, he has become a stranger to her. On his deathbed, she sees two different faces: the person full of life that she married and the cold calculating American bourgeoisie he has grown to become. Though Jerome is dead before Avatara would listen to the voice of her late aunt to go back to her roots, the most significant thing here is that she does reclaim her personhood. She does not internalize the bourgeoisie values of her husband so much that she cannot relinquish it when it becomes necessary to do so.

However, it significant to note that some of the relationships that break down do so because men want to hang on to the myth of male supremacy and male control in their marriages even when the circumstances of the marriage do not support such claims. For instance, in the marriage between Walter and Gweenie in Powell's *Me Dying Trial*, the couple starts out as young friends. Their relationship breaks down because Gweenie insists that she be respected and treated as a person in her own right; a person with feelings and personal ambitions.

African literary critic Phanuel Egejuru's assertion that the position of the woman as wife in African and Diaspora societies is circumscribed by men's fear of their wives plays out in most of the relationships under examination in this essay (Egejuru and K.Katrak, 1997). For example, Walter is jealous and afraid of his wife's vivaciousness and intelligence. Powel has earlier told of how Gweenie's intelligence and pragmatism helped to endear her to her fellow students and peers both male and female:

She love to chat and argue and people take to her quick... The fellows at the college who married and unmarried never take long to latch onto her. And them would touch on every subject possible: science, social studies, politics, geography philosophy, every little thing and them come to respect her very much, for Gweenie was sharp and her mind broad. (p. 24)

Her peers and friends see her worth as a person. Her worth is not measured by her sex or gender. Her worth is not measured by her marital status. Rather her worth is determined by the qualities she possesses as a person. But for Walter their relationship must be defined by his presumed subordinated position of the woman as a wife. It is no wonder then that he could not relate with his wife and would rather beat her up and stifle her growth. He could not cope with boldness in a woman because it is an affront to his bloated male ego.

However, Gweenie's eyes have been opened to her potentials and capabilities. She is not about to sacrifice her newly acquired awareness and personhood on the altar of an unsatisfactory marriage. She compares Walter with her schoolmates and friends who respect her opinion and realises that Walter disrespects and derides her opinion in almost everything. To Walter, she is not even supposed to have a mind of her own. Walter's disrespect is also borne out in the way he tries to silence her at a social gathering where she makes an important contribution to a discussion about the government. Gweenie continually feels an increasing sense of being stifled and begins to question her loyalty to Walter. She begins to also disrespect Walter in little ways. This lack of mutual respect more than any other unresolved marital issues threatens the marriage. This later culminates in the total breakdown of the marriage with Gweenie leaving Walter and migrating to the United States of America.

A closer look at the relationships that break down in the works the two writers analysed in this study shows that the women opt out of relationships when they stop working for the parties involved. This counters the

argument that the women liberation movement and feminism pose a serious threat to marital and other male-female love relationships. However, as shown from the events in the novels, men's refusal to recognize the changing gender roles in the contemporary time is the most singular factor that rather poses a serious threat to the marriages and other man/woman relationships. Women are ready to share the burden of bread winning with the men but men on their own part want to hold on to the traditional value of male supremacy. Ann Oakley (1982 comments on the man's inability to adapt to these changes, "Women are doing more of 'his' work than they used to, but men have made few inroad into 'hers'. This applies both to 'feminine' types of paid work and to feminine work in the home." (p. 245)

4. WALKING TOGETHER

The African-Caribbean women's determination to continue in the role of stabilizing agents for their communities drives them into alternative ways of relationships with the men that can guarantee mutual respect and care. Thus the crux of the matter in womanist redefinition of the role of women as wives is that men are the ones who need liberation from the egoistic stance of patriarchal society. Women writers and the female characters in their novels are not rejecting marriages and other forms of love relationships. The African-Caribbean women's brand of feminism does not see women's rejection of marriage as an alternative way of being. Rather, women are encouraged to seek mutually respectful relationships with men. However, women must reject relationships that seek to enslave them. Women have mostly been the victims of male aggression in love relationships. It is therefore, the responsibility of the aggressors to shade his aggressive toga and negotiate mutually beneficial relationships with their hitherto victims. Contemporary women writers want a change in the status quo. They want to portray relationship where men are capable of initiating and maintaining egalitarian relationships with women. In keeping with the search for the latter type of man, more and more women writers are creating characters in man-woman love relationships that have mutual love and respect for the other partner. More importantly, the women are free to express their individuality as opposed to being subsumed in the personalities of their husbands or male lovers.

For example, there is a juxtaposition of the theme of male insecurity and female subjugation with the theme of equality and complementarities in Marshall's *Daughters*, Marshall sets the background to this novel with the historical figure of Congo Jane who fought alongside Will Cudjoe in a slave revolt. The author's main motivation is to paint an alternative picture of the relationship between slave men and women from the one painted by white historians and writers. Very early in the novel, Ursa Beatrice Mackenzie, the central female figure of the novel is determined to embark on a study on the lives of these two as a way of documenting this aspect of slave family life:

A neglected area in the study of the social life of the New World Slave communities has been the general nature of gender role and relationships. This paper examines the relatively egalitarian mutually supportive relationships that existed between the bondmen and women and their significance for and contributions to the various forms of resistance to enslavement found in the United States and the Caribbean. (p. 11.)

The story of Congo Jane is based on the historical Nanny, the leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons who actually led a slave revolt. (Gotllieb, 2000). Ursa Beatrice's research is out to seek answers and solutions to the turbulence in relationships between black men and women in America and the Caribbean. The recourse to history will answer such questions as the reasons for the myth of the black emasculating matriarch versus the weak, inferior and domesticated black woman often documented in slave records written by mostly white settlers. The story of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe serves as a counterpoint that invalidates these myths. And with the history and statues of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe looming at the background, Marshall sets out to re-enact their relationship in the marriages in this novel set in the imaginative Caribbean Island of Triunion.

Estelle, Ursa Beatrice's mother is the wife of the male protagonist Primus Mackenzie. She is American but from the very time she reads the story of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe in the library, she becomes enamoured with her bravery, "And all the slave revolts! I should have mentioned them first. I love the woman who was one of the leaders. Her story...it was an education for me...." (p. 29.) Of all the husband/wife relationships in the novel, Estelle and Primus's is the one patterned after that of the heroic couple as Celestine, a character in the novel points out, "Yet she has to be in his business too. Always getting on like a Congo Jane marching next to him with a cutlass and a gun." (p. 316). One is not surprised at Estelle's involvement in activism which dates back to her student days in America. When she eventually marries

Primus, she refuses to assume the role of the docile wife. Rather she is her husband's political ally, his hostess, his secretary, and manager; trailing him on his campaign trips and generally supporting him.

Another couple in the novel who demonstrates this type of husband/wife solidarity is Mr. Justin Beaufile and his Spanish bay wife. He is a politician too, and Primus Mackenzie's political opponent. Mrs. Beaufile follows her husband on his campaign tours and addresses rallies with him. With her active support, he wins the election while Primus loses the election when Estelle withdraws her support. These two black women recognise the imperative of unity of purpose between husband and wife as a prerequisite for success in both the private and the public arenas.

Marshall also shows what happens when there is no unity in the relationships between black men and women in the portrayal of Ursa Beatrice/Lowell Carruthers and Vinceta Daniels/ Willis Jenkins. The relationships break up because the men will not accommodate strong and independent minded women in their lives. They would rather that their women stay in the background and assume the role of the docile wife. For instance, the relationship between Ursa and Lowell breaks down because of Lowell's self-pity. Gradually, Lowell's self-pity erodes the relationship and Ursa slides from loving him to pitying him. But their relationship had not always been like this. At the very beginning, they were friends and lovers. They confided in each other and looked forward to a relationship very much like that between Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe. Ursa tells Lowell their story, their closeness, their bravery, and the frustrations she had encountered with her supposed liberal supervisor who did not want this aspect of the slave family life documented:

Because of what I was setting out to prove...which was that there had been a time when we actually had it together. That slavery, for all its horrors, was a time when black men and women had it together, were together, stood together....(p. 94).

Lowell in spite of his diffidence acknowledges the need for this unity too, "I like that... what it says, what it means. We need to get back to thinking like that, being like that again, if we're ever going to make it." (p. 94). Thus at the end of the novel, though the relationship seems to have broken down, the reader does not get a sense of closure. Rather the reader is left with the feeling that the two will get back together again. Ursa's dream seems to affirm as much:

He suddenly stopped and grabbed for her arm. His hand on her arm, holding it against his side and refusing to let it go even though she began angrily pulling it away. But he held on as though her arm...was a stick being held out to someone drowning. (p. 383).

Another character who comes to the realisation of the need for this unity is Vinceta Daniels. Having been let down by Willis Jenkins, her boyfriend of five years, she does not trust another man enough to get involved again. When she wants a baby, she opts for artificial insemination and raises her child alone as a single parent. However, when confronted by the system that turns black men into insecure people, she recants. She encourages Ursa to work out her relationship with Lowell and acknowledges her own need for a man to support her in times of distress especially in the largely racially defined society she lives in:

I would have given anything to have a Mr. Somebody standing beside Robson and me in that police station this afternoon. I felt this awful space, Ursa, this hole the size of me next to me... the space where some decent halfway together black man should have been. (p. 330).

These black women recognize the imperative of unity of purpose between black men and women as a prerequisite for fighting all the other "isms" that bedevil their society. By juxtaposing the relationships between Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe; Estelle and Primus Mackenzie; Mr. and Mrs. Justin Beaufile on the one hand with that of Ursa and Lowell, and Vinceta and Willis Jenkins on the other, Marshall makes the statement that black men and women did work together and do work together and can continue to work together only when they support one another, not when they exploit one another. Thus the relationships that should be encouraged are those that are mutually beneficial to husband and wife, to man and woman. Moreover, she makes the statement that women who want respect and equal treatment in their relationships will have to claim it by first asserting their personalities and insisting on inscribing same in the lives of the men in their lives. They need to transcend the societal and mythical definition of womanhood prevalent in their societies.

Alternatively, the other women who adhered strictly to this definition of wifehood and womanhood remain as mere appendages and pawns in the hands of the men. Astral Forde, the traditional Caribbean concubine stereotype passes from man to man. She uses the men to climb the social ladder instead of depending on her own abilities. Even when Primus rescues her from a downward slide in social status with a job as the manager of his holiday resort, she lives at the mercy of his whims. She spends her life waiting for Primus to divorce his wife yet knowing she is not capable of holding onto him. She is good only as a plaything that satisfies his need to prove his manhood once in a while but his heart is with the wife who has the intellectual capability to match his. In her old age, she realizes that the attraction is over and depends on the benevolence of Ursa and Estelle to keep her job when Primus dies.

The other woman/wife, Malvern also conforms to the image of the mother with her brood. She is Astral Forde's friend. She wears herself down with incessant pregnancies and a brood of children. She doesn't have a life of her own, rather she is always waiting for handouts from her husband. In the end, she suffers exceedingly and dies while the husband stays alive to enjoy the wealth the children will eventually bring.

5. CONCLUSION

This essay has tried to explore the position of the woman as a wife in the fiction of the two selected women writers. In an attempt to do this, it has tried to examine the development of the African-Caribbean woman from the position of servility in the marriage/heterosexual relationships as portrayed by mostly male writers to that of freedom and mutual interdependence that can be seen in the works of the two women writers studied. The need for women to assert themselves becomes much more pressing. However, the relationships that survive in the novels are those where there are mutual respect between the men and the women. Cohesiveness within the family unit or male-female relationships as a defining ingredient for development in African-Caribbean and other Diaspora societies

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