

Conflict in Caribbean Women Consciousness during Anti-Slavery Movement: Detailing From 'The Long Song' By Andrea Levy and 'The Book of Night Women' By Marlon James

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Abstract: Caribbean women consciousness is a term that found its importance in the neo slave narratives. The traditional slave narrative defines the slave women as passive, static, and were extremely tortured and abused among the human beings. The excessive inhuman and ferocious acts were exercised upon the slave women and the slave narratives characterised them as the victims. The anti slavery narratives took to concern women equality and their empowerment focusing on how they developed their own sense of Caribbean consciousness that remained within the sensibility of the Caribbean space and tradition. The neo slave narratives from mid eighteenth century onwards concentrated on understanding the Caribbean women consciousness from deep within the slightest of difference in opinions among the females that battled the male from white colonial past as well as from within the society of blacks. The contemporary neo slave narratives especially in the context of Jamaican anti slavery movement deeply analyses slave women with difference in opinion with the black rebellion and formed a branch under the Caribbean women sensibility as a whole. Portrayal of July, from the The Long Song and Lilith from The book of night women, the hypothesis aims to represent women with different Caribbean women consciousness that almost favoured the white masters during colonization in Jamaica.

Keywords: Caribbean women consciousness, neo slave narrative, difference, anti slavery movement, definition of self.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are certain attributes set for the role of femininity in the world. Most of this rules were set by the historic western tradition that defined women as fragile, obedient and passive section of the society. The construction of the feminine image was a combination of societal definition and biological creation. This construct was carried on to other parts of the world through Eurocentric power and colonial hegemony. The colonial period in the third world led to drastic change in the outlook on the perspective of the colonial subject. A part of colonised people longed to look like the whites. The colonial literary discourses around the African attitudes spoke of the longing for the white. Many of the Caribbean texts followed the theme of black women white man relationship. Anything less in the strata of race was seen to be in love with the white man. Be it a creole or a black woman who is a nigger or a mulatto. Discourses on the defining of the Caribbean women consciousness and female self in relation to the white man was indeed a major focus of the writers.

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White men being the colonial masters always had the beast in them that more often attacked the black women in the Caribbean. The women were raped as a punishment for not working in the fields as per the allotment or if they resisted the male dominance. There was a small number of women who actually fell in love with their white masters being conscious of white male traits and master slave relationship. They tend to have a recreated self which was influenced by the anti slavery movements in the Caribbean.

II. OBJECTIVE

The thesis aims to provide the conflicting female prospects in the Caribbean neo-slave narratives, The Long Song by Andrea Levy and The Book Of Night Women by Marlon James. It aims to portray the changing nature of their conscious self which lead to a change in the Caribbean women consciousness and definition of self with their changing interests during the anti slavery movement in Jamaica. The term neo-slave narrative was coined by Ismael Reed in his novel Flight to Canada written in 1976. The term is usually used by modern fictional writers in their works depicting slave narratives in the New World. Most of these works are written in the form of novels poems or memoirs. The aim was to give a first person narrative on the history of enslavement in the form of fictional facts. The respective works are based on anti slavery uprising including the Christmas rebellion as well as the Atlas revolt of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Jamaica. The Long Song depicts the life of July a young girl and her journey of defining her self all the way during the revolt against the white colonial supremacy, whereas The Book of Night women depicts the life of Lilith as a young girl who goes through several stages of confusing journey in defining her self at the onset of night women rebellion in Jamaica. In The Long Song, July's life was designed by the white power in the plantation of Amity where she was born when her mother got raped by the overseer Tam Dewar. She was taken away from her mother at the age of less than five, to the great house by the white mistress Caroline Mortimer. Being the house slave she rarely underwent punishments and ended up spending her life with the new master Robert Goodwin. She loved him and wished to live like a white lady, but with the uprising she was left alone by Robert and later it was she who scared him away from the plantation and by the end of the story. He escapes to London taking with him, their only child named Emily. July represents a mixed emotion of black women trapped in the notions of colonial discourses on race and sex. In The Book of Night Women, Lilith's life was designed by both the



black as well as the white members of the Montepellier estate. She was born as a result of her mother's rape (aged fourteen) by the overseer Jack Wilkins. She was taken over by Homer another slave who planned to recruit her to their night meeting for plotting an uprising in the near future. Lilith did not wish to become a part of the uprising and was seduced by the new overseer Robert Quinn. He was the same as every other white men in the plantation as he was very conscious of his identity outside his bedroom that made him the master and Lilith his slave. Lilith choose not to fight the whites during rebellion and choose to live with the memories of Robert Quinn after he was killed in the rebellion. Coincidentally both the work had the male counterparts named as 'Robert'. The research with a view to generalise the white male character's attitude to the respective women protagonists use it as a sign of masculine enterprise of colonialism. Lilith on the same way had to fight with her own community to assert her self as belonging to the white community. Being the daughter of the white father she often related herself with them and not with the blacks. Even during the uprising she stood with the whites and saved them from the black rebels. Thus neo slave narratives contradicts the traditional slave narrative by portraying characters such as Lilith and those who choose not to fight back at the white even after being tortured by them. Once a Johnny-jumper (slaves who were given power over the other slaves by the white master) tried to molest Lilith and she killed him in the attack. She was never interested in the rebellion and never purposefully involved herself in the night women rebellion. She fell in love with the overseer and saved her white father during rebellion from her own community of black slaves. These fictionalised history of the enslaved women is an obvious understanding of the slave women and their obscure Caribbean consciousness which has never been looked at in the anti slavery narratives of Jamaica. The writers of the modern age thus reinvent the presence of each kind of basic human trait through the portrayal of July and Lilith as slaves in Jamaica. These kind of works focused on different subjective positions, interest, and voice which are as different as the many resolutions of the white man. Dorothy Hale, a critic describes voice as "a subject who is both more and less than an individual and stronger and weaker than a free agent". A slave girls emotion with respect to her agency with the white male is ambiguous in the colonial society. As Hillary McD. Beckles says in 'Historicizing Slavery in West Indian Feminisms', "the overall result, then is a historiographical textual representation of women as victims, in diverse ways and to varying degrees, of the masculinist enterprise of colonialism". The voice of July and Lilith was addressed through different narrative pattern that involve the author's intention of her/him playing as an agency that voice of different Caribbean women consciousness. With an attitude to impress the white male, young black woman often tend to present themselves higher in their race structure within the black community. They had conflicts therefore with the black women as well as with the white women. A constant approach to women characters as victims, and also as rebels and warriors in the anti slavery narratives are a common phenomenon. The concept of self respect, sense of womanhood and the idea of anti slavery movement coincided in these narratives. July's attempt to scare Robert Goodwin with a tumbler full of insects which he feared the most, is an attempt to redefine her self as well as played its

part in the anti slavery rebellion. Lilith's killing of her white master and his family was merely an escape from his violence which showed its remarks on the strength of women in anti slavery movements. She was though least interested in participating in the anti slavery movement against the whites. In order to achieve such a stage they go through diverse mentalities and disunity among other black women within their society. It also foreshadow the contemporary fight for race class and gender during the feminist movements. White females in the plantation exclude others in the name of race but they themselves survive in the Caribbean as a means for producing white progeny for the existence of England. Their ideology of femininity is in constant conflict with the ideology of the black women. White men choose black women over the white females and they were always left alone in the plantation. The men never took it serious and left once their demands were over. They have no protection from sexual assault and the men were very much conscious of the white women's purity. Unmarried white masters feared their father and considered it a sin to have committed adultery, which did not apply to them when they did the same with a black slave woman. As the critic states, "the black woman was situated at the (re)productive core of the slave system with a unique legal status". Most of the blacks resisted to this while some of them had inhibitions. July resisted when Robert Goodwin disregarded her in front of the public but Lilith choose to stay active in Robert Quinn's love. Their relation with the white master reflected in their attitude towards the anti slavery movement. Though each of them benefited from their special relationship with the white man they were later neglected by the men outside the house. During the white male association with the black female they enjoyed more freedom than that of white women who were alienated from the white men's circle. Once the masters were hesitant to accept the black as their enduring partners, the white women came to power. Therefore we can say that black women played a role in defining not just their own self but also white female identities. White women were considered pure and incapable of doing wrong which is challenged in the *The Book Of Night Women* where Isobel was seeing going to the whore house. The black women found distinctive ways to fight the white male that male a generalised view on Caribbean women consciousness. The generalised view of traditional slave narratives discuss women as victims of colonial slave masters. Women as a section of society was alienated on the basis of their weaknesses and inability in fighting over the colonial power. The slave narratives thus mostly included women who contest over their categorisation as passive human beings and tried focusing on enhancing Caribbean women sensibilities. The hatred for the white masters and fighting them back was a long struggle by creating a sense of Caribbean women consciousness over the years. "Responses by female scholars especially have ranged from eclectic extractions for the construction of political projects of mythic glorification (such as invention of heroism and the propagation of super-survivalist narratives that illuminate women's persistent civil rights struggles for social justices) to the outright denial of 'history'n the organisation and promotion of relevant feminist knowledges" (Silvestrini, 1989; Reddock, 1985: 63-80; Gautier, 1983: 409-35) July could not

evolve her self as per her ideals. The ideals of a smaller group of women who wished to be a part of west and struggled to detach from the black genealogy. The confused state thus ensue and lead to belonging nowhere. She then identifies herself as opposed to Clara the mulatto servant. Eventually she started hating Caroline and seduces the white master Robert Goodwin. When he didn't meet her expectations she scared him with his worst nightmares by the end. Her success story ends with the story of her son who was send to England and returned as a successful businessman. A historicised slave narrative by a white includes their hardships in 'taming' the beast in the native. The issues of slavery or enslavement are depicted as a means of civilising tools and thus in a way affirm their superiority that leads to new theories on neo slave narratives. The subject perspective of hardships of slavery of black is diverted to their own hardships on not finding the food of their choice or the changing climate. The master narrative of the life on Jamaican sugar plantation was countered through the works of Andrea Levy and Marlon James. Andrea Levy took it serious when she described about master narratives and debunked every essence of such narratives. Her use of the protagonist July as the narrator was an accurate choice as she represented a typical black woman who had gone through the slavery system in Jamaica. July as a women had her choices and preferences that changed with her ageing. Like most of the girls in Jamaican sugar plantation there pre existed her dream for freedom. July representing the changing women ideals does reflect upon the narrative style of her story. John Rouse a writer defines narrative as "the first story, the primal story, from which all others come. It is your story". Through a way of communicating knowledge on the incidents of the slave era she depicts her personal ideals by way of conflicting authenticity in her narration. To make a sense of a slave girl's life experiences the style of narration has played its major role. All throughout the narration her hesitation to reveal the truth behind her enslavement portrays her individual self during the system of slavery. The quest for self while being a slave is shown with her comments of being the daughter of a white man. The wish for attaining higher grounds with the white as well as the disgust for the whites are both presented parallel to each other. The readiness to accept a white man as the father and being in a relationship with a white master shows how she admired being with the white. At the same time she disregarded Caroline Mortimer which shows her dual perspective towards the white during the age of rebellion. The master did value the Jamaicans less than a human and more importance was given to them as a commodity sold at slave market. The white's inhuman nature showed more of their nature in making more slaves instead of a progeny. A likeness for the white was seen from a very early age in July as she stood enthralled when she met Caroline at the age of five. The longing for the white as a result of eurocentrism and was a major impact among some girls during the period. A longing for the white body and dislike for one's own black body is one of the themes in the novel. A like for the white male and disliking the white female was a part of this trait. Being the daughter of a white man as well she hoped to have life of a white. It's only when her dreams are shattered she set against the white man. Likeness for the white male does not mean the same towards a white mistress. They performed tricks and follies against the mistresses and also

tried escaping punishments. Throughout the hardship the one thing that made the life of a black slave girl was her hope for the future. As for July she hoped for a long lasting relationship with the master by giving birth to a daughter who looked like him. Most of the narration are presented on a comic way that also helped in televising it as a series in British Broadcasting Corporation. The comedy involved in the beginning of the narration shows her attitude towards the white mistress and less concern for her as a superior being in the Caribbean. Most of her ideals circled around the way men behave in the land especially the white masters in the plantation. July was called 'Marguerite' by her mistress "for she liked the way the name tripped upon her tongue like a trill". The name Marguerite showed her other self which disliked the white woman and the name July made her to be in her true self where she wavered between her choice of black and white. On one hand the women made fun of the white woman's dress on the other hand they wished to dress like them. The Long Song presented the life of a servant girl living with the white master in which Caroline the master's sister, was a disfavoured character due to which July could choose her perspective on the black and whites relationship statuses. The life seemed better for a house slave than a field slave as it involved less hard work and lesser chance for punishments. The house slaves had more of an emotional hardship on the note that with their hopes for a life along a white man. July represent the very few women in Jamaican plantation who lived with a dream of being a white man's partner. Her Caribbean self involved with that of a westerner and found profound interest in their living together. They differentiated themselves on the basis of race within the black community and utilised the 'power' involved in being the offspring of a white man. All emotional turmoil centred on the white man's behaviour towards a slave girl. The cultural indifference inflicted by the whites infuse in her an urge to behave like the white. The white as well as the black women in the plantation longed for a companion. In the Long Song, Caroline hated Marguerite (July) as the only companion and vice versa. The women irrespective of their race longed for a white male companion and in a way became rivals to each other in winning a male companion. The women of such type were edgy and cunning in their attitude towards the mistresses as shown in the character of July "...her face was damp with real tears, her imploring hands trembled, her breath whimpered in trepidation, yet just like Godfrey, our July was not really fretting". The house slaves barely feared their white mistress, for it was much less than the fear of the master. July's carelessness towards her duties as a slave shows how less she considered herself as a slave and more as a mulatto born to Kitty the slave and Tam Dewar the white overseer. All female character gets in the novel envied each other. Caroline envied other white mistresses in Jamaica. July envied upon her own mistress and Clara, who is the maid of other mistress as well a quadroon. "Of all the servants that had come from around and about—including the two from Windsor hall...—it was Clara that July could not take her eyes from". This emulation led certain female characters to have dual aspects as women with a particular cultural influence. It was all about the person that envied them beginning from their parent's origin to their current position in the society including their attire

and the attitude with which they carried themselves. All this was a black slave girl could ever long for. From envy to verbal fight it took to define a slave girl of her identity and her aesthetics. In the quest for a new self with that of white, the black women despised their own community and often lied about their origin. The narrative challenged all those narratives that defined women power and Caribbean womanhood that got along with the anti slavery movement in Jamaica. These little fights and changing nature of self among women was never a mainstream Caribbean discourse. It challenges thus, not only the master narratives but also the black narratives of women having major role in the uprising. The slave characters from different plantation in these novels support their respective white masters in their attempt to win over the other race be it mulatto or a quadroon. The narrator representing July's self choose not to disclose the tale of Nimrod the freeman mulatto and the boy child born to them until her only son Thomas Kinsman made several attempts and forced her to reveal that part of her story. The self wished to reveal only her relationship with the white man and the daughter born to them which again makes her character edgy even after years of slave emancipation. The authenticity of the narrator is questioned with her changing character throughout the life. The novel written in the form of a memoir thus questions other memoirs as a genre and its authenticity without multiple narrators. There was a deliberate attempt made to hide her real story in between the chapters which shows her incapable nature to stick to a particular ideal during the anti slavery movement. Hypothetically the truth about the birth of her son was hidden even from the readers to show her conflict of cultural contact with the black community. The blacks enjoyed when trouble hits the white. Their concern shown over the matter was merely done sarcastically and they made use of those situations to instil terror in the whites. July cleverly used her opportunity to frighten her mistress during the uprising when she was left alone in the big house with other slaves. Thus the change in black women's behaviour in the context of anti slavery movement is reflected well in the novel. July enjoyed making fun of the mistress and stood by giggling all throughout when Godfrey the slave demanded money from Caroline, thinking that slavery was about to end. The news about freedom rumoured among the blacks as well as white that had a slight influence with their changing behaviour towards the rebellion. July wished for freedom from the white supremacy but held close to Robert Quinn as her ultimate companion for life. Even throughout the course of uprising July stayed with the master until the white defeat. She was called 'nigger' by the master and disrespected her among other whites with exertion of slave emancipation. Her right to choose her identity was denied and she was called by a name which she despised the most. The second self in her came to power when she was been called 'Marguerite' and 'nigger' by the community and she choose to scare away the master whom she once loved, with a tumbler full of live insects which was his worst nightmare. The change in self had a deep influence with their changing names. The supremacy over the black gave whites the power to change one's identity. The first aspect of one's identity comes from the name given by her parents or the name she willingly chooses for herself. The power gave the right to change July's name to 'Marguerite', a nigger, or a black slave girl. The white changed her identity from the time she was with them and that runs

parallel with the change in attitude towards herself as a Jamaican black girl. Over the hatred towards the white woman, the changing identity for their own personal reason inculcated more such hatred. The white man found it interesting to attract the black women by calling them by their original name and along with that other loving pet names. This process was followed all throughout the plantation among a black women-white man relationship. The slaves tend to like the way the master called them all loving names which added on to their love for the white man. July's change in character is seen when she was called by the names which she despised the most. Her attitude towards the man whom she loved the most changed in an instance just as her identity changed and played her part in anti slavery movement. The women's changing attitude goes well along with the implementation of slave emancipation in and around Jamaica. Though the king had implemented freedom from slavery it continued still in the plantation. They were not completely free and were demanded to work in the fields with even tough rules by the new masters who came along across the years. The novel had several conclusions based on the changing nature of the narrator. The narrator's intentions provide a celebration of difference in ideology of July's character. July's birth happened as a consequence of her mother's rape and July as a girl of her own choice decides to carry the ladder of race along with the identity given to her by Tam Dewar as her father. 'Diarist Ananias Nin says, "We write to taste life twice"'. Thus Andre Levy's intention of July's narration on some particular events and attempts made to eliminate certain other events can be seen as her choice of endowment to be taken forward for her grandchildren as Caribbean history. Andrea Levy tries to bring to light characters such as July who are followers of mainstream history and portray their actual image that challenge the tradition. The pruning of the details on July's punishments were meant to exclude bad memories of her young age and tried to pass on only the good version of her story for her grandchildren to read. The narrator never left a chance to boast about her son's achievements as a black in England but nevertheless she withdrew from telling the story of his birth which shows the changing Caribbean women consciousness. The purposeful act of not delivering the sad part of one's life gives a more effective sense of making the readers believe of the unauthentic author. A cautious role is played in by Andrea Levy to show different women consciousness in the Caribbean on the onset of slavery and its after effects especially in Jamaica. The end of slavery brought high self esteem for the slaves as they chose not to work as per the master's wish. House slaves began to raise their positions equal to the white mistress just like how July helped Caroline in making regulations in the plantation. "...she (Caroline, because of her inefficiency) proclaimed that, from that day onward, her house-maid July, should serve her also in the administering of the plantation". After the proclamation of freedom the masters and the mistresses were given compensation for losing respective slave as their property. A slight dispute arose among the slaves on the amount by which each one was valued by the colonial masters. Those who were valued the same pounds had disliked the fact that they were given equal importance. The struggle to get acceptance even after he

freedom struggle thus remained among the black women. July could not accept the fact that Molly the cook was valued thirty one pounds in compensation the same like July, who was the lady's maid and who had the advantage of knowing little knowledge in English. Another yet important character that explained the women consciousness was Miss Clara who was the manifestation of producing lighter coloured offspring by pairing mulatto or a creole women with the white masters through her dance parties. These kind of fellowships made the Caribbean women consciousness to depart from its cultural roots and thereby which imitates the western mentality. As they confronted questions about their skin colour, they would go to any extent pretending as a white offspring to please the master they admire. The black women found it mostly pleasing if they were made companions and a white women would surely be the masters legal wife, because the black women was most regarded by the master and the mistress would most probably left alone at the big house. In *The Book Of Night Women* by Marlon James, Lilith was a similar character the author choose to portray that excluded from all mainstream Caribbean women characters during an anti slavery movement. The first notable incident in the novel was her killing of Paris, the Johnny-jumper. "That was the first time she feel the darkness. True darkness and true womanness that make man scream". The man referred here is the power initiated by men over women as well as the colonial power that gave the freedom to ill treat the women of Jamaica. True darkness and true womanness are the Caribbean women consciousness that took charge of her when anything went wrong with her. The attitude towards life was different for a few like Lilith who embellished in the mixed race though she was never accepted by the whites. The women with greatest angst for an uprising and freedom despised the white and moved each day planning for the rebellion. Those women were the one who had experienced immense hardship at a younger age and who lived with anger and vex towards the white all their life. Lilith represented those who felt no intentional harm for the whites though somewhere she ought to have freedom from the slavery. There must be an initiative to include such women consciousness into the mainstream Caribbean women consciousness. These level of thinkers were marginalised among the mainstream Jamaican slave women of the time who always plotted against the white. Women like Lilith were edgy characters who was in a confused state of true womanness in the entirety of Caribbean women consciousness during anti slavery movement. Lilith found her strength in eliminating people from her life that enslaved her from freedom of choice. The Johnny jumper, master Roget and his family, and Andromeda the slave were killed by Lilith unintentionally. According to Homer the night women these killing were seen as a kind of participating in the anti slavery rebellion which the night women of Jamaica were plotting, whereas Lilith justifies it as her own self definition of freedom and does not contribute to the anti slavery movement. The killing meant to exert power over the men irrespective of their race and women whom she saw as an obstacle in impressing Humphrey, the master of the plantation. Being the offspring of white father and black mother, slave women who found comfort in the white section of society is seen to have occupied space in Marlon James's writing. Feeling for the white even after the atrocities wielded on them, some

chose to remain passive and stood against their own black community.

III. CONCLUSION

They are examples of disunity in the general feminine ideology during anti slavery movement specifically in Jamaica. Women's changing nature and interests are depicted to show a move away from traditional master narratives and traditional slave narratives of the Caribbean. Jamaica being an important part of Caribbean is taken into consideration as a place where women were diverse in thinking and acting accordingly during anti slavery movements. July is an example of not voicing publicly her desires where as Lilith is a perfect example of voicing out her difference in ideology. There is inconsistency in the evolution of such women characters who find preferred ideology as a result but some land in confused self. The preparation of defining a different Caribbean consciousness of women is hard for a Caribbean origin living among its own people. This kind of defining women with a contrasting sensibility does prove its importance in the contemporary literature. It deviated from the traditional norms of preserving one's culture and holding on to an ideology defining the Caribbean sensibility. The notion of difference upholds both the narratives that makes its effect in all parts of the world that are redefining slave narratives. The work of literature in a context of anti slavery movement generally celebrates the inferior defeating the superior. This work brings to light the conflicts and change in character and of self that defeats the superior and plays its own way of participating in the anti slavery movement. Marlon James in his book often begins a chapter with these lines – "White man is white man is white man, but not every nigger be the same nigger".

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