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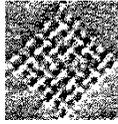
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# *Challenges to Nationhood in Kincaid's Annie John: Marginalization, "Strangeness," and Creation of Alternative Realities*



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Jamaica Kincaid (born Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson) emerges from the generation of Caribbean women writers that gained attention in the 1980s. Kincaid was born and raised in the geographical Caribbean and writes from the Caribbean diaspora in North America. She is the first notable writer from Antigua, and although Kincaid migrated to the United States in 1966, many of her literary works (*At the Bottom of the River* 1978; *Annie John* 1983; *Autobiography of My Mother* 1997; *My Brother* 1997; *Lucy* 2002; *Mr. Potter* 2002) draw on, reflect, and elaborate her relationship with her mother/land. She published *Annie John* in 1983, and set the text in the Antiguan society of the 1950s and 60s. Among other thematic concerns, *Annie John* engages the independence movement as it unfolded in Antigua, and it enables an examination of the attitudinal shifts on gender and nation that occurred from the 1950s to the present. The position of this essay is that Annie becomes the conduit through which Kincaid challenges, expands, and escapes the confining boundaries of Antigua. I contend that Annie inhabits a "space between" (a space theorized by NourbeSe Philip as a paradoxical space of subjugation and subversion) colonial and patriarchal structures and forces in Antigua. However, Annie becomes, as she explains, "strange" – which is the equivalent of being maroon like – and subverts these hegemonic structures and forces.

The themes of colonialism, patriarchy, the mother-daughter relationship, sexuality, and gender in *Annie John* have been explored and discussed from various angles by numerous critics and scholars. For instance, thematic implications of adolescence and the mother-daughter relationship in *Annie John* are prevalent in Louis Caton's "Romantic Struggles: The Bildungsroman and Mother-Daughter Bonding in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*," Patricia Ismond's "Jamaica Kincaid: 'First They Must Be Children,'" and Alison Donnell's "When Daughters' Defy: Jamaica Kincaid's Fiction." Anti-patriarchal readings of *Annie John* are pervasive in H. Adlai Murdoch's "Severing the (M)Other Connection: The Representation of Cultural Identity in Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*," Moira Ferguson's *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body*, and Kathryn Morris's "Jamaica Kincaid's Voracious Bodies: Engendering a Carib(bean) Woman."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For colonial discourses of *Annie John*, see Barbara Edlmair's *Rewriting History: Alternative Versions of the Caribbean Past in Michelle Cliff, Rosario Ferré, Jamaica Kincaid, and Daniel Maximin*, Moira Ferguson's *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid: East*

Furthermore, critics and scholars have done extensive research on Anglophone Caribbean nationalisms. For instance, Curdella Forbes's *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender*, Allison Donnell's *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*, Leah Rosenberg's *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, Patricia Saunders' *Alien-Nation and Repatriation: Translating Identity in Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, and Carol Boyce Davies's *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* already point to the limitations of Anglophone Caribbean nationalisms and the need to develop new vocabularies that would counter the traditional and dominant representations of gender and nation. However, there is limited research on Antiguan nationalism and, specifically, on Antiguan women's contribution to and participation in nation building. This essay engages and adds to these nationalist discussions.

To define *strangeness* that informs Annie's strategies of resistance and subversion, I draw on Alejo Carpentier's theorization of the "marvelous real" and the practice of marronage that characterized the maroon tradition in the Caribbean. According to Carpentier, in the "Baroque and the Marvelous Real," the marvelous real is latent, omnipotent, and common place in Latin America (and I will make the case for the Anglophone Caribbean). The horrors of slavery combined with the ruptures caused by migration and relocation, and the concentration of different people (from different geographical locations) in Latin America and the Caribbean create a reality that is "marvelous." In defining the marvelous real, Carpentier states:

Dictionaries tell us that the marvelous is something that causes admiration because it is extraordinary, excellent, formidable.... The extraordinary is not necessarily lovely or beautiful. It is neither beautiful nor ugly; rather, it is amazing because it is strange. (101)

In other words, the historical and cultural multiplicities, complexities, differences, and overlaps in Latin America and the Caribbean create the catalysts for the marvelous real. The peoples, cultures, and societies of these regions not only consistently elude, but also consistently defy established norms.

The definition of marvelous real is a useful way to approach and conceptualize the practice of camouflage and various other earthly and unearthly transformations maroons enact to deceive their enemies. Nanny of the Maroons, for instance, is historically represented as an expert of deception and camouflage; in fact, her strength and power exist in her proclivities to become "extraordinary" and "strange" and to defy normative expectations.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the Haitian

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*Caribbean Connections*, and Alison Donnell's "She Ties Her Tongue: The Problems of Cultural Paralysis in Postcolonial Criticism."

<sup>2</sup> Herbert T. Thomas, in *Untrodden Jamaica*, and Vic Reid in *Nanny Town*, respectively characterize Nanny as a woman with masculine traits—as "ferocious and blood-thirsty more than any man among the maroons" (36)—and a woman with animal-like traits—whose cloak "take to it its own wings and Nanny...fl[ies] and soar[s]..." (57).

Macandal subverted colonial authorities from a space of transcendence he achieved by transforming into various animals. In "Francois Macandal: The True Story, Facts, Myths and Legends," Mark Davies indicates that during the colonial authorities' attempt to burn Macandal on a stake, many of his followers "claimed he disappeared and became a mosquito or other flying creature as he had promised he would" (1).<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, these illustrations reveal the ways in which maroons deployed methods that are "extraordinary," "strange," and "marvelous" to resist oppression and norms and to escape.

I draw on the theorization of marvelous real and the historical and literary representations of animal magic and camouflage as instances of marronage to conceptualize *strangeness*. Strangeness connotes falling outside normative boundaries, becoming unfamiliar, alien, extraordinary, and marvelous. Strangeness suggests occupying the realm of ambivalence from which traditional binary constructs are challenged and deconstructed and which allows the emergence of new subject positions and realities. It is my position that Annie's act of negotiating her space of subjugation through secrecy, deception, and trickery to subvert and erode patriarchal and colonial conceptions of womanhood and nationhood—in other words, accomplishing the *extraordinary*—indeed instantiates the marvelous real. Augmenting her voice from the margins of the Antiguan society makes her metonymic of other women, who, though they contribute to the Antiguan society, have either been culturally, socially, or politically marginalized.

Similar to literary works by Anglophone Caribbean women writers (such as Michelle Cliff and Zee Edgell), *Annie John* highlights and addresses the colonial and patriarchal structures that operate not only in the state's apparatus but also within families and societies at large. In the historical moment when the novel is set, the ideal family life promoted by colonial administration and by Antiguans who endorsed and were seeking respectability and social mobility involved "marriage by Anglican minister; a white church wedding with a big reception; a non-wage-earning wife; a respectable house, one where the woman did not work and that was clean and presentable; and church attendance in the Anglican church in particular" (Williams 96). Importantly, this suggests that "housewifization" was sanctioned (97), illegitimate children were unacceptable (76), and female-headed households were aberrations (92), even though matrifocal families (as Curdella Forbes depicted in her discussion on West Indian families) were prevalent at the time.<sup>4</sup>

Consistent with the traditional familial arrangement, the story of Mrs. John and Annie John is centered in the maternal experience; but this experience is situated within a larger patriarchal

<sup>3</sup> In literary representations, particularly Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World: A Novel*, Macandal disguises himself by transforming into various animals: "green lizard...night moth...strange dog...incredible gannet" (35).

<sup>4</sup> In *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender*, Forbes argues that the "[male-breadwinner] ideology continues to mediate West Indian thinking despite its increasing distance from lived reality, which shows, among other contradictions, over 40 per cent of households being female headed" (29-30).

and colonial context in the nation and indicates that there is a symbiotic relationship between patriarchy, hegemony, colonialism, and the subordination of women. Mr. John, much like England, is not the center of the novel; in fact, his name, Alexander John, is not mentioned until the last few pages of the novel (132). Even though he occupies a position only in the background, however, he gives shape to the story and shows the ways in which socio-cultural and political structures and superstructures privilege men and create spaces of subjugation and subordination for female subjects and subjectivities, such as Annie.

As a product of systems of male dominance, Mr. John, as do other men of the period, aspires to have authority in his family. These men imagine family and the nation from their perspectives which incorporate various colonial and patriarchal epistemologies on gender. Mr. John is charged with the “building” of foundations that contribute to the “building” of his family, acts that mirror at the time Antiguan men’s commitment to the “building” of their nation and national families. Annie states:

The house we live in my father built with his own hands. The bed I am lying in my father built with his own hands. If I get up and sit on a chair, it is a chair my father built with his own hands. When my mother uses a large wooden spoon to stir the porridge we sometimes eat as part of our breakfast, it will be a spoon that my father has carved with his own hands. (132)

There are parallels between Mr. John’s design of the structure of his family and the way men attempt to build and design the blueprint of the nation, which invokes him as a pioneer both in his family and country. His instrumentality in such patriarchal practices suggests that he helps to define the hegemonic and confining space in which girls such as Annie are situated.

Furthermore, Mr. John represents Antigua internationally as a member of the cricket team, and it is instructive to note that Caribbean cricket teams serve as national emblems of their respective countries. In *Blaze A Fire*, Nesha Haniff argues that unlike the Women’s League and the Women’s Social Welfare Associations, “men’s organizations like the Lions or the Rotarians or cricket or football clubs...do not suffer from such trivializing: their fundraising is not for ‘little causes’—it is to ‘help build the country’” (135). In his article, “Encouraging Talent for Six,” Antigua and Barbuda’s former Prime Minister, Sir Baldwin Spencer, indicates the relationship between cricket and nation building by honoring Sir Viv Richards whom he describes as “a truly great Antiguan...his accomplishments as a batsman and as Windies captain truly put our nation on an international map” (4). Reflecting on a similar form of pride her father takes in representing Antigua in the novel, Annie states, “the house would swell with my father’s voice telling one story after another of his days as a famous batsman with a cricket team, and of what he did on this island and the next as he toured the Windward and Leeward Islands with his teammates” (88). Since the cricket team becomes instrumental in nation-building, Mr. John’s participation directly implicates him in the building of the Antiguan nation.

Mrs. John is paradoxically a subject, product, and participant of this patriarchal system. She migrates from Dominica to Antigua in an attempt to escape her father's dominance. According to Annie, Mrs. John and Pa Chess "had a big quarrel over whether she would live alone, as she wished, or would continue to live in her parents' house, as her father wished" (105). Unable to reconcile the differences between her and her father or to defy him further, Mrs. John, as Annie explains, "at sixteen, after quarreling with her father, left his house on Dominica and came to Antigua" to "live alone, as she wished" (19). Mrs. John's desire for independence initially manifests itself in her insistence on buying with her own "six shillings," a trunk in which she "pack[ed] all her things" (19). Annie states that her mother personalizes the trunk by painting it "yellow and green outside, and she lined the inside with wallpaper that had a cream background with pink roses, printed all over it" (19), which is her way of fashioning her own identity.

However, it is Mrs. John's decision to migrate to Antigua and to marry someone similar to her father in certain patriarchal ways and to start a family that makes her a participant in the cyclic systems connected to women's acts of mothering, which makes her reproduce the very systems that dominate her. Unlike Mr. John, who is not charged with the responsibility of nurturing Annie, Mrs. John by virtue of being a mother has to assume primary responsibility; as Annie indicates, "I spent the day following my mother around and observing the way she did everything" (15). Following her mother around places the onus of the family welfare on Mrs. John, and it perpetuates the gendered configuration of the home space.

Kincaid validates the claim that mothering helps to create heterosexual asymmetries that become learned behaviors (Chodorow 218) by elucidating the masculine roles allotted to Annie's father (building house, or nation 132), while in the same passage showing how women are prepared for mothering and homemaking. Annie states that "the sheets on my bed my mother made with her own hands. The curtains hanging at my window my mother made with her own hands. The nightie I am wearing, with scalloped neck and hem and sleeves, my mother made with her own hands" (132). Kincaid's satirical technique of parallelism—using the same paragraph for two descriptions—creates a holistic picture of societal expectations of gender. This passage unequivocally outlines the division of labor that suggests why men are prepared for the work force, such as building, traveling with the cricket team or representing the nation regionally, and why women become housewives and mothers. This set of invented traditions on gender and culture also helps to create an imagined community mobilized as a part of the national identity or the national "we" to which Annie must adhere.

Patriarchal and misogynistic epistemologies are also internalized by children who reify and reproduce these epistemologies through acts of repetition. This cultural and social performance of gender is evident in the friendship between Annie and her male friend, Mineu. According to Annie, in all the games she and Mineu played,

I was always given the lesser part. If we played knight and dragon, I was the dragon; if we played discovering Africa, he discovered Africa; he was also the

leader of the savage tribes that tried to get in the way of the discovery, and I played his servant, and a not very bright servant at that; if we played prodigal son, he was the prodigal son and the prodigal son's father and the jealous brother, while I played a person who fetched things. (95-6)

Mineu, like Mr. John, assumes authority of the public sphere, while Annie, like Mrs. John, "fetches things." The gendered roles of the elders, Mrs. John and Mr. John, are reflected clearly in the roles of Mineu and Annie, as imagined and prescribed by Mineu. This is, in turn, a reflection of patriarchal "imagined community".

By role playing with Mineu the story of a woman and her lover who are murdered by her other jealous lover, Annie also draws attention to the violence women endure that is obscured by the patriarchal and colonial systems. Edouard Glissant postulates that art returns a society to itself (104) which is what Mineu's dramatic representation of this misogynistic story does. Importantly, Mineu orchestrates the game, and as usual he,

[...] played all the big parts. He played the murdered man and the murderer, going back and forth; the girlfriend we left silent. When the case got to court, Mineu played judge, jury, prosecutor, and condemned man, sitting in the condemned man's box. Nothing was funnier than seeing him, using some old rags as a wig for his part of the judge, pass sentence on himself; nothing was funnier than seeing him, as the drunken hangman, hang himself. And after he was hanged, I, as his mother, came and wept over the body as it lay on the ground. (97)

What is most notable about the way Mineu configures the game is that the roles he plays—the murdered man, the murderer, the judge, the jury, the prosecutor, and the condemned man—are all articulated in the game, while the woman at the center of the entire story is "silent" (97). In part, the game is symbolic of the patriarchal and misogynic attitudes that inform the national culture; women suffer the brunt of the violence and have the least access to effect change. However, Annie draws attention to the violence women endure and the helplessness and lack of recourse they face by disallowing herself to solicit help when Mineu's role play turns tragic and he almost hangs himself.

Nevertheless, as a female adolescent, Annie can only see herself through the eyes of the society that Mineu, her mother, and father represent, which alludes to a comparable model of double-consciousness W. E. B DuBois eloquently articulates in *Souls of Black Folks*. Notably, there is a level of inbetweenity intrinsic in this concept of double consciousness—seeing two ways at once suggests standing between two extremes. Indeed, Annie frequently references the material space she inhabits between her mother and father: "[f]or most of my life, when the three of us went anywhere together, I stood between the two of them or sat between the two of them" (133). This physical space between her mother and father speaks to a metaphorical space Annie inhabits between the respective socio-cultural and political forces that interpellate her and which attempts to perpetuate a cycle to keep women subordinated and subjugated.

Indeed, when Annie sees her reflection—such as when she views herself in the glass of the store's window—what she sees is a reflection of the hegemonic and patriarchal expectations of (a girl's) her life. Annie states:

I saw myself just hanging there among bolts of cloth, among Sunday hats and shoes, among men's and women's undergarments, among pots and pans, among brooms and household soap, among notebooks and pens and ink, among medicines for curing headache and medicines for curing colds. (94)

What Kincaid suggests here is that from a (pre)national perspective, the name and image of Annie John can only be associated with items that constitute home and homemaking. In the hegemonic and patriarchal configuration of the national space, there is no other meaning between the signified woman and the signifier home, between a woman and a person who fetches things.

Unlike her mother, however, who complies with systems that oppress and then attempts to perpetuate 'colonial psychology' by confining Annie within the borders of her 'colonial trunk,' (20), Annie resists the colonial model of womanhood and subverts the patriarchal configuration of nationhood. Annie's inclination for subversion on the cusp of adolescence instantiates my claim that the period of adolescence is a comparable "space between"—theorized by NourbeSe Philip as a paradoxical space of subjugation and resistance (99). Annie uses the subjugated spaces she occupies—between her mother and father; her family and school; Antigua and England—to subvert authorities of power and challenges the hegemonic ways in which the nation defines itself and the roles of gender. Her subjection to the authority figures of her mother and father explains why Annie resorts to subversion. As an adolescent, she cannot launch an overt form of rebellion.

Annie negotiates her space between by using the knowledge that was taught her to be the "mistress of her house" and a "good colonial subject" to subvert Mrs. John's model of Victorian womanhood and the national discourses that confine a girl to a version of respectable society. Since her mother becomes the main power broker against whom she has to struggle, Annie states, "[w]e both noticed that now if she said that something I did reminded her of her own self at my age, I would try to do it a different way, or failing that, do it in a way that she could not stomach" (87). When Mrs. John sends Annie to etiquette classes and to learn the piano, Annie sabotages these lessons in ways her mother "could not stomach" (87). Annie states that she is asked not to return to etiquette classes because "[she] could not resist making farting-like noises each time [she] had to practice a curtsy" (28). She is also asked not to return for piano lessons since she seemed "[u]nable to resist eating from the bowl of plums [the instructor] had placed on the piano purely for decoration" (28). Though she still inhabits a subjugated space, Annie intentionally behaves in a way that challenges national conventions on womanhood and in a manner her mother and, by extension, hegemony, cannot "stomach."

Annie also challenges dominant discourses and the nation's way of defining femininity and sexuality through the choices she makes between her friends Gwen and the Red Girl. Annie re-evaluates her friendship with Gwen after the latter indicates that she has completely assimilated into British cultural imperialism, particularly its heteronormative worldview. Gwen suggests that Annie marry her brother, Rowan, which would confine Annie to the standards of respectable society: "I think it would be nice if you married Rowan. Then, you see, we could be together always" (93). Annie has been resisting this heteronormative imposition by her mother, the society, and her school; that Gwen also subscribes to this dominant way of seeing sexuality and women makes her complicit with the dominant forces Annie subverts. Annie states, "It was then that I began avoiding Gwen and our daily walks home" (93). Annie's break from Gwen is metonymic of her subversion of the normative position on sexuality.

Like Annie, The Red Girl occupies a similar position of inbetweenness and stands as a foil to the conventional Gwen and Mrs. John who endorse national and cultural hegemony. According to Annie, the Red Girl "took a bath only once a week.... She didn't like to bathe.... She changed her dress once a week for the same reason. She preferred to wear a dress until it just couldn't be worn anymore. She didn't like to comb her hair, though on the first day of school she could put herself out for that. She didn't like to go to Sunday school.... She didn't like to brush her teeth.... She loved to play marbles, and was so good that only the Skerritt boys now played against her" (58). Unlike Gwen, who conforms to the Eurocentric discourses on womanhood and therefore fits neatly in the national construct of Antigua, the Red Girl falls outside defined boundaries and, as a result, is banished to the island of Anguilla. Annie, who befriends the Red Girl in an attempt to do exactly the opposite of what her mother — by extension the incipient nation—expects of her, will later migrate (which is a comparable flight to freedom). Her objective is to one day rescue the Red Girl and to live on an island—indicative of a maroon-like community — where they can be free and can torture and taunt those who pass by in ships, presumably those that once dominated them (71).

The invocation of the maroon motif here is fitting, especially since Annie's inclination for subversion on the cusp of adolescence also lends itself to a reading of the inbetweenness of adolescence as a period that enables marronage. At age twelve, which marks the onset of adolescence, Annie notices remarkable changes in her body:

The summer of the year I turned twelve, I could see that I had grown taller; most of my clothes no longer fit. When I could get a dress over my head, the waist then came up to just below my chest. My legs had become more spindlelike, the hair on my head even more unruly than usual, small tufts of hair had appeared under my arms, and when I perspired the smell was strange, as if I had turned into a strange animal. (25)

Annie's ostensible metamorphosis invokes the practice of camouflage that was intrinsic to maroons' military stratagems. They often deployed various forms of camouflage to fortify their

defense mechanism. For instance, Macandal had the ability to transform into a "strange dog" (among other animals) and Nanny elevated into a bird. However, this reading of Annie's character does not intimate that Annie can strategically control and manipulate what seems to be her natural, biological, and physiological development. In fact, we may agree that such changes during the period of adolescence are normal.

Yet, Annie's description of her physiological changes indicates that there are parallels between her metamorphosis and the practice of camouflage. She concludes that she has turned into "a strange animal" when her legs become "spindlelike"; the hair on her head become "unruly"; when she perspires, she smells "strange"; (25). These descriptors instantiate what Carpentier defines as the marvelous real — "the extraordinary...neither beautiful nor ugly...[but] amazing because it is strange" (101). Coincidentally, this is also the period during which Annie becomes aversive, rebellious, and subversive, much like the maroons who also use camouflage to resist and challenge forces of oppression. Ultimately, Annie's "strangeness" indicates the transformation she undergoes from a girl colonized by those in authority to an adolescent prepared to subvert those in authority.

Similar to maroons who exercised control over their bodies and use them as weapons against oppression (for instance, Nanny, who according to popular lore, used her body/buttocks to catch the enemies' bullets and fire back at them), Annie deploys her body to undermine the socialization at her school which acts as an agent of the colonial state. Even though Annie is aware that her mother insists on her attending this school because of its "lady-like" activities, Annie states that she and other girls would engage in "un-lady like" activities, such as dancing and singing popular calypso songs "which usually had lots of unlady-like words to [them]" (80). Annie's emphasis on the way she and the other students would dance and sing invokes the concept of the *jamettes*, who, according to Anne McPherson, are women who subvert colonial and national hegemonies through "public wit, sexual prowess, and defiance" (10). NourbeSe Philip extends the definition of *jamettes* by stating:

Jamette: from diametre, the diameter, dividing the world between the space and place of respectability and that of the underworld, the lower classes. Or, from a Wolof word, *jam*, meaning a slave. Jamette! A 'loose' woman, a woman of loose morals, whose habitat is the street. Jamette! A woman possessing both the space between her legs and the space around her. (77).

Annie takes control of her space and place by dancing to songs that are specifically forbidden because of their association with unrespectability. Accordingly, she positions her body to resist the colonial educational system that has been complicit in laying the foundation of social and political structures of Antigua, in much the same way that Nanny of the Maroons deployed her body/sexuality as a weapon.

Annie's appreciation of her "strange smell" (25) and her fascination with the Red Girl because she has an "unbelievable, wonderful smell, as if she had never taken a bath in her whole life" (57) also gesture towards a return to the body as a source of empowerment. Annie's reclamation of her body, which has been controlled and managed by the Antiguan society in various ways, certainly epitomizes NourbeSe Philip's postulation that strength is inherent in the black woman's silence(d) space/body.

NourbeSe argues that since the "space between" engenders the black woman's silence and becomes the most "efficient management tool" for the outer place (or patriarchy), "holding on to [her] silence is more than a state of non-submission. It is resisting" (99). Holding on to and reclaiming her space/body is also a strategy of marronage, which is similar to the maroons' descent into the body of the earth as a way of resisting detection and launching wars on colonial authorities.

Annie's repulsion for menstruation — which ushers in womanhood—reveals the extent Annie engages a feminist poetics, one that enables her to reclaim authority over her body and challenge further the social and biological conceptualization of feminine identity. She states, "on the morning of the first day I started to menstruate, I felt strange in a new way...I walked to school...feeling as I supposed a dog must feel..." (51-2). More than repulsion, however, Annie discerns menstruation as a liability, a biological phenomenon that confines women to the traditions of womanhood. Considering her dislike for the limitations conventions impose on her, her aversion for menstruation is not far-fetched, since in many communities, particularly African ones, menstruation (besides being a form of "contamination") was viewed as a disability that prevented women from tribal leadership (Gaspar 232). However, Annie's antipathy for menstruation that is naturally associated with the identity of a pre-menopausal woman symbolizes (in a way that invokes the mannish-womanish representation of Nanny of the Maroons) the extent of her resistance to colonial, patriarchal, and essentialist epistemologies.

Consistent with her previous acts of defiance, Annie affirms a deliberate non-reproductive sexuality, evident in her resistance to the act of mothering. Unlike her mother, she is fond of Miss Catherine in part because she is unconventional: she has two men, and she is barren.

I liked Miss Catherine, because she used snuff, and it made her spit, and her way of spitting seemed as if it was the best way such a thing could be done. My mother did not like Miss Catherine, because she was barren, slightly crippled, and was always telling my mother the proper way to bring me up. (122)

Mrs. John's antipathy for Miss Catherine makes her regard *barren* as a curse word, which is evident in the way she deploys it to call her own antagonizing sister, Mary, "a barren, cripple, interfering idiot" (123). However, by indicating she likes Miss Catherine and by representing her as a foil to her overbearing mother, Annie reappropriates the word *barren*. She indicates that her predilections are for barrenness as opposed to rote mothering, which most certainly flouts any

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cultural or (pre)national configuration of womanhood. Because she does not repeat the traditional discourses on gender, Annie opens a path for alternative, less dominant modes of understanding her role as a girl/woman.

Finally, by expressing her approval for alternative sexual preferences, Annie also subverts those who represent the heteronormativity of the emergent nation. She invokes a discussion of lesbianism through her relationship with Gwen and the Red Girl, for whom expresses homoerotic desires; more than this, however, she refuses to include boys/men in the way she constructs relationships. Seeing how sickly her father has become and the way her mother has to “run up and down for him,” Annie states, “I plan not only never to marry an old man but certainly never to marry at all” (132). By so doing, Annie indirectly celebrates, or at the very least validates, other forms of family structure, such as the prevalent matriarchal ones (represented by the Red Girl and her mother) that were often shunned by respectable society. Annie’s “queerness,” in this regard, is consistent with her representation of “strangeness.” She falls outside what is recognizable and acceptable and therefore challenges the hegemonic and established conceptions of sexuality, womanhood, and nationhood.

Annie’s character reveals the extent to which the Antiguan nation marginalizes women and the extent to which a girl/woman must go to order/reorder her life in a way that is structurally and socially of a much higher order than that which her pre-independent and hegemonic nation designs for her. This struggle to reorder her life prompted Annie to migrate from Antigua to England. Such a decision suggests that she will continue to challenge hegemony, even if she has to start at the source of it—the metropolitan center of England. Ultimately, Annie works against the internal colonization of women in Antigua by rejecting the epistemic violence levied against women, by resisting marriage and rote mothering, and by breaking patriarchal epistemologies on gender that become embedded in the nation. Her metamorphosis into “strangeness” helps to create space for the emergence and acceptance of new and alternative subject positions and realities, such as unmarried women, lesbians, barren women, and single mothers.

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