

**Colonial Shadows and Female Light: Paule Marshall's Vision of  
Resistance in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The  
Timeless People***

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**Abstract**

In the present studies, Paule Marshall's presentation of resistance displayed by Black women across colonial history and within recent times highlights the works *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*. The paper applies a postcolonial feminist viewpoint to explore how Marshall develops broad female protagonists who face obstacles from disappearance from culture, poverty and patriarchy. With inspiration from postcolonial theory, Black feminist thought and intersectionality, the analysis finds that Marshall highlights diasporic identity as something involving hardship and strength. Paule Marshall tells important stories in African American and Caribbean literature about Black womanhood, fighting for

freedom and transformation in times of colonization and later years. This article investigates how Marshall's female characters in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) stand up to the legacies left by colonialism. Postcolonial and feminist theory help the author point out that Marshall observes resistance not merely as disruptive action, but as something rooted in spirituality, community life and the need to redefine oneself and one's culture. Furthermore, the study talks about symbols and actual places of resistance, where personal development and collective memory combine to represent autonomy and picture a future free from colonialism. Marshall's stories reveal the continuing role of women in carrying culture and driving progress in these still colonial influenced societies.

**Keywords:** Paule Marshall, resistance, postcolonial feminism, diaspora, identity, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Black feminist thought, intersectionality, neocolonialism, cultural memory and women empowerment.

## 1. Introduction

The writings of Paule Marshall, a leading Caribbean-American author, have come to represent how people experience, manage and resist aspects of their cultural identity and diaspora. Since she was shaped by her Barbadian heritage and life in Brooklyn, Marshall always focuses on how women of African origin face contradictions between colonial history and the inequality they face today. In the article, Marshall studies the ways *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, written by Sugar Cain, portray the challenges that Black women meet in diasporic and postcolonial contexts. Even though Brooklyn and Bourne Island take place in very different areas, the books talk about the same subject: the struggle to remain individual in a society that tries to thwart you. In this work, Miller's vision of resistance comes to life in Selina Boyce and Merle Kinbona, who show awareness, memory and strong spiritual spirits. With the help of postcolonial theory, Black

feminist theory and intersectional approaches, this study points out the different and important ways in which Marshall empowers women in her writing.

## **2. Contextualizing Paule Marshall: Life and Literary Contributions**

Cherished author Paule Marshall was formerly known as Valenza Pauline Burke and was born to immigrant parents in 1929. She learned the Bajan dialect and started forming her writing voice by living in Brooklyn. Many people praise her for the lyrical quality of her writing, her use of authentic Mexican culture and how she gives women's lives attention. Marshall's books commonly deal with being far from home, family origins through women and the tight balance between fitting into new societies and staying traditional.

Described as his first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* introduces Selina Boyce, a girl from a Barbadian family who lives through the Great Depression and World War II in Brooklyn. Economic hardships, conflicts within culture and gender expectations are examined by the novel as effects on Selina's growth. Alternatively, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* occurs on Bourne Island, an island in the Caribbean still affected by the past rule of slavery and colonization. Remaining in the central role, Merle comes to stand for both personal pain and cultural resistance during the island's shift from settled life to change.

His work shows the determination of women who push against and overcome social inequality. Using strongly drawn female characters and lively settings, Marshall explains that standing up to power is not always a separate fight from shining your light, as identity is usually built during conflict within a culture.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For this article, Postcolonial, Black feminist and intersectional theories are used to explore the notion of resistance as Marshall expresses it. He says that being colonized damages people's mental health, causing both alienation and self-rejection (Fanon 12). Our view of cultural negotiation and identity splintering in postcolonial times is enhanced through Edward

Said's concept of Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry. The author's bell hooks, Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins describe Black women's experience as including both racism and sexism. Hooks says that "resistance is the most important thing about being human" (hooks 15) which is true for all of Marshall's women. Lorde's thinking about the erotic as a source of power and Collins making lived experience central to knowledge, are both reflected in Selina and Merle's feelings and learning. Her theory of intersectionality reveals that the mixing of race, gender and class identities often leads to distinct kinds of discrimination. Through combining these different ideas, the approach explores how Marshall's stories address resistance to racism and other marginalizations.

### **Spirituality and the Matrifocal Power of Women**

Among Marshall's strong points is her way of integrating spiritual themes and placing the central roles in her books in women's lives. The main characters in *Brown Girl*, *Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* gain their sense of self and a way to resist by looking to their spirituality, family past and mothers. He explains that spirituality does not mean organized religion, but is a real and felt connection to our past, place and people.

The sea and spiritual ceremonies outside of Christianity attract Selina in *Brown Girl*, *Brownstones*. Every time she listens to music or just contemplates water, she is feeling her way toward something deeper than financial goals. Her spiritual experience goes together with her cultural growth. When she learns more about her Caribbean background, she notices the spiritual aspects of who we are that go past following rules and trade.

The book presents women's activities related to food, stories and social gatherings as part of the mundane and meaningful work of their lives. During tough times, women help build spaces filled with laughter, strength and consistency. Silla might look severe on the outside but is still a tradition-preserver. Songs, proverbs and rules in Shona culture tie to longstanding

memories handed down through families for many generations. Marshall avoids making these roles look special but illustrates how they are the foundation for diasporic survival.

Spirituality is especially shown as connected to standing up for what's right in *The Chosen Place*. Merle's move back to Bournehills concerns both where his body is and where his soul is. Her relationship with the burial ground and her symbolic resurrection by the book's end are very spiritual acts. Such experiences form the basis of any political resistance movement. According to Marshall, a movement towards liberation should begin with a spiritual reassessment of what has happened before.

Bournehills is arranged differently than Western societies' common patriarchal structure. It is mainly through women that the community organizes its life, keeps traditions alive and fights outside influence. Marshall shows in the novel that choosing Merle to lead is a way to underline her feelings that women can guide well when their authority comes from trusting and sharing rather than from being at the top of the hierarchy.

Moreover, Marshall calls on African diasporic spirituality by mentioning rituals, spirits and ancestral guides which makes it possible to view resistance in a cosmology that mainstream Western descriptions usually overlook. Using spiritual traditions in her stories makes them seen again as reliable and valuable sources of wisdom. She believes that resistance exists on political and also on a metaphysical level. It deals with offering fresh insight into history, treating wounds in those affected and affirming ourselves in the locations where we once could not be seen

### **Colonial Legacies and Female Resistance in *Brown Girl, Brownstones***

As *Brown Girl, Brownstones* starts, Selina Boyce's journey takes place with other immigrants craving a better financial status in the United States. Her mother Silla is dedicated to succeeding in America which she believes can only happen if you own your own home. As a result, her daughter becomes hurt and the family life becomes unusually strained.

Though her mother's beliefs are from following fashion and other cultures, Selina comes up with a different path by studying many cultures herself. She thinks critically about the American Dream and prefers to create authenticity with her connections to Caribbean culture and her talents. The resistance I face is quiet and thoughtful and it matters a lot to me personally. She says, "I want to be myself." Not what my mother thinks I am. Not copying the example of my father" (Marshall, *Brown Girl* 221).

Marshall explains that Selina's obstinacy acts as a sign of religious sovereignty. She tries not to embrace the rules that capitalism suggests and appreciates her many different qualities. Being Latina means we balance acceptance, worry and hope, all held within us like memories. As a result, Marshall gives us a character who is both calm and brave.

### **Reimagining Identity and Resistance in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People***

In *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Paule Marshall moves the story from the immigrant parts of Brooklyn to an imagined Caribbean island called Bourne Island. In this novel, it's clearer how colonial legacies help form both personal and community identities. Merle Kinbona, the main character, demonstrates the many problems and changes experienced by postcolonial people.

Both personal and community-wide trauma are part of Merle's story. She feels great sadness at her husband's death and is lonely because she cannot help herself. Yet, Marshall shows that Merle shines as an active figure in preserving and resisting cultural history. Nadine Gordimer uses Merle's role to reveal neocolonialism's effects and Western actions' continued impact on countries after colonialism.

Bourne, as an island setting, becomes important for connecting history, memory and identity. Marshall explores the part colonialism played in leaving some communities poor and under the influence of white racial dominance by using Bourne's perspective. Her behaviour

towards other characters and her part in community matters explores the conflicts between what people want, what is tradition and what the group must do.

Merle's techniques of restraint are stealthy but have strong results. If she stands up to the expectations laid by patriarchy because she asserts her independence. It has been pointed out that Merle is strong because she converts her pain into experiences that encourage audiences to join in resistance (Smith 134).

He therefore includes in his narrative acts of resistance that involve faith and cultural life, as well as those that stir the political heart. The story of Merle is given focus in *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People* and this makes the book's idea of empowerment rooted in history and togetherness.

### **Societal Ruins and Rebuilding in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People***

Paule Marshall tells a story in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* about the aftermath of colonialism and the difficulties a postcolonial Caribbean society faces in creating a fair society. The rundown Bournehills area of Bourne Island is meant to represent a place that is both decaying physically and culturally, due to past troubles. At the same time, these damaged places are constantly changing as resistance, healing and rebuilding happen here.

Merle Kinbona lives through the conflict between failure and recovery. She experienced sexual violence and exile, yet chose to go back to Bournehills to lead a push for its community to recover. You can see in her that Kate mirrors the island's identity, as she is both broken and able to keep going. In his novel, Marshall shows what a female leader could be, destroying the usual ideas of leader and follower. Merle can lead by sympathizing, remembering and belonging with the people, not by ruling over them.

When American development workers—Harriet, Saul and Allen—arrive, the postcolonial critique broadens. The plan to “assist” people in Bournehills is full of problematic contradictions. Despite their good intentions, they do not understand enough about the history,

culture or pain of the community, so their work ends up being paternalistic and does not work well. Merle leading without a proper government position bothered Harriet and Saul wasn't sure if he should lead or let the indigenous group decide. These experiences reflect the disagreement between invaders and local leaders.

His way of presenting these outsiders also supports a wide criticism of neo-colonialism. Despite the end of imperial conquest, the development project now mimics the patterns of managing, watching and promoting certain cultures. Bournehills is seen more as a place for testing reforms than as a neighbourhood with its own decisions. The writing also points out that social steps taken without first understanding community history can end in strife or failure.

Yet, this novel ends up being a narrative of people figuring out how to overcome challenges and start over. People from Bournehills, inspired by Merle, describe their idea of how to develop—relying on old knowledge, beliefs and teamwork. Marshall does not make it seem easy; the difficult process includes many slow and challenging moments. But she points out that change needs to start internally, based on history, shared pain and refusing to just accept our fate as victims.

The way Marshall writes the book supports this central theme. With the help of several perspectives, readers can learn about the many dimensions of postcolonial culture. Bournehills is seen and felt differently by each person and there is no main truth to it. The divided and unstable nature of the society in her story comes out in the way the novel's narrative is arranged. By reading it, we're asked to confront difficult truths about the past, the people in charge and what has happened to them.

Merle's visit back to the ancestral place and her choice to remain there give a gentle sense of hope at the book's close. Though the ruins are still there, they now form a starting point for establishing a new society. For this reason, Marshall uniquely presents postcolonial

resistance—as something that happens every day in the actions of remembering, healing and building again.

### **Intersectionality: Race, Gender and History**

Long before Kimberlé Crenshaw created the term, Paule Marshall's books anticipated the concept of intersectionality—that the oppression and resistance people experience come from the interaction of various social identities such as race, gender, class and sexuality. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Marshall looks at how having these different identities influences women's lives.

The novel shows that, because society was patriarchal and racist, the characters had to deal with both race and gender problems. She experiences racism wherever she goes in Brooklyn and at school and she openly resists being told what to do just because she is female, as an immigrant. Selina is opposed to staying silent and working at home, while the Bajan community prefers this. Her acts of resistance work against both systems and their shared actions that affect who she is and what she can do.

Although Silla frequently becomes part of Selina's obstacles, she also represents a combination of factors contributing to resistance. Because she is a Black immigrant woman, Silla must cope with a society that underappreciates her job, disregards her way of speaking and culture and cuts her off from better-paying work. Because the system gives her little support, she must fight hard to take land which serves as her form of survival. She shows another way to resist—one focused on earning income and managing her life—which is just as meaningful.

Race, gender and history play a bigger part in shaping events in *The Chosen Place*. Because she is light-skinned, Merle finds herself having to move among different racial levels in the Caribbean and abroad. Both the trauma Delice faced and how she was abused connect to

the larger pattern of using Black women's bodies in colonialism. She is no longer passive as events happen to her; instead, she's starting to decide how to behave.

Open to Grief explores how white American women are drawn by racial and national advantages, with Harriet being a key example. Merle and Bournehills show that Harriet's feminism does not take into account race and culture. He uses this comparison to show that white feminist discourse is not universal because ignoring different levels of power can break solidarity among women. Marshall examines intersectionality through the use of space. Urban Brooklyn and rural Bournehills mean much more than locations, as they point to different points where power intersects. Brooklyn's grid system and many tenements represent the limits of urban life in a capitalist society. Forests, rivers and the remains of older ruins in Bournehills save both old stories and can be part of a fresh start. Using these spaces examples how people have to navigate the layered forms of discrimination.

Marshall consistently resists making her characters just one thing in her writing. They reflect influences from many sources which are often in disagreement with each other. What makes their resistance valuable is how complicated it is. Because Marshall recognized intersectionality without knowing its name, he helped define liberation for the many forms of experience humans have.

### **Comparative Analysis: Female Resistance in Both Novels**

Paule Marshall inventively writes about women in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* who can resist the ongoing effects of colonialism, male dominance and cultural separation. Even so, resistance appears differently in each novel because the characters and settings are not the same.

Selina finds herself resisting her life mostly inside her mind. We follow her in Brooklyn, as she tries to blend her Caribbean background and the way of life in America. She must balance what she wants with what her mother, her group and white culture encourage her

to do. Selina resists her mother's main goal in life by being creative and looking after herself, instead of chasing money.

Instead, Merle's acts of resistance are shown as collective and connected to politics in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*. In a Caribbean community after colonial times, Merle notices the real effects that colonialism and neocolonialism continue to have on her home island. Adjustos challenge the idea that just trauma and losses can overcome the spirit of a society and they help affirm the role of minorities in politics.

Although they do not act at all alike, both characters demonstrate strong female character traits that shine brighter than the shadows of colonization. Marshall's women work to remain visible by speaking out, retelling their stories and taking up their own space.

### **Findings**

According to this study, several important aspects of female resistance appear in Paule Marshall's novels *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*.

In the first place, resistance includes many forms and can be very personal. Marshall's novels show that rebelling for women is not limited to political action; many protests happen within and keeping their culture alive and their faith strong constitutes a resistance too. Bystanders discover that silent, secure resistance comes from self-understanding and cultural traditions, even during quiet times.

Second, Marshall criticizes the main colonial narratives by focusing on Black women. Both novels give priority to the experiences, voices and ideas of Caribbean women, changing usual Eurocentric histories. Giving importance to women's voices is a major way to take back control of what history means and to whom it belongs.

Intersectionality has a big impact on the way characters are formed and what strategies they use to fight back. The two women face together the effects of racism, sexism, differences

in social background and colonialism. Such cases show that resistance arises from the blend of identities and should therefore be studied in its surrounding context.

Being tied to land and community is found to be very important for strength. Bourne Island is a place where Merle experiences memory and tradition for her readers. Being connected to place influences her choices, revealing that geography and the history of those communities are closely related to diasporic and postcolonial identities. These results prove that Marshall plays a key role in discussing postcolonial feminism, cultural identity and protest movements.

### **Conclusion**

In both *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Marshall presents a deep understanding of how Caribbean women deal with the impacts of colonialism and gender inequality. By describing what Selina and Merle experience, Marshall makes it clear how people form their own identities as colonialism ends.

Latin American women's resistance is shown as including strength, reclaiming culture, shaping beliefs and growing personally. Throughout her novel, Anne challenges the hangover from colonialism with the power and hope shown by women. As a result, communities can restore and grow during and after terrible historical experiences.

Marshall tells stories that give attention to unheard voices from the colonial period. That way, she adds to postcolonial feminist writing and points readers to think about how race, gender and culture affect one's identity. All in all, the study proves that Paule Marshall imagines resistance as something involving recall, a sense of belonging and personal power. Her writing is still important now because it leads to talks about the continuing effects of colonial rule and the strength of women.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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