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Female Body and Revolution: Creole Writing of Caribbean and North American Literature in the Eighteenth Century

Lindsey Nicole Phillips



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

FEMALE BODY AND REVOLUTION: CREOLE WRITING OF CARIBBEAN AND NORTH
AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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LINDSEY NICOLE PHILLIPS

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The members of the Committee approve the Thesis of Lindsey Nicole Phillips defended on June 4, 2007.

Candace Ward
Professor Directing Thesis

Dennis Moore
Committee Member

Amit Rai
Committee Member

Approved:

Ralph Berry, Chair, Department of English

Joseph Travis, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.

To my female ancestors whose histories have gone unrecorded and whose stories I still
carry with me

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ABSTRACT

In the revolutionary period of the eighteenth century, Britain's transatlantic colonies resisted political, social, and religious control in order to establish a government controlled by the people, which allowed freedom and equality for all citizens. However, this ideal form of freedom did not extend to women and slaves within the newly formed American colonies. Until the middle of the twentieth century, critics often have overlooked, or ignored, the erasure of female history and the crucial position women, regardless of race, occupy within the colonial and republican societies. This project aims to (re)examine race and gender within the Caribbean and early American context, reinstating the role and struggle of women. Aphra Behn, in *Oroonoko*, and William Earle, in *Obi*, reveal the potential threat and rebellious spirit of female slaves within the Caribbean. In *The Coquette*, Hannah Foster questions the freedom and equality of women in the republican society, and she draws a comparison between the republican marriage contract and the institution of slavery. Leonora Sansay's *Secret History* places two American women in the Caribbean to illustrate the importance of female community and collectivity in removing women from patriarchal control. Using the Haitian Revolution as her backdrop, Sansay uses the slaves' success to provide an example for women to follow. Americans, as former inhabitants of England, become Creoles in the American colonies, undergoing a process of creolization that resembles that experienced by Caribbean colonists. However, as the early United States formed its own independent nation, its citizens adopted British colonial ideology and, at the same time, distanced themselves from the perceived limitations of Creole subjectivity. This project attempts to illustrate this contradiction between the ideals of freedom and equality and the reality of the colonial and republican societies in the transatlantic colonies and to illustrate the influence and interconnection between Europe, America, and the Caribbean.

INTRODUCTION

“‘Postcolonial theory’ describes a body of work which attempts to break with the colonialist assumptions that have marked many of the projects of political and cultural criticism launched from Europe and the United States, at the same time as it learns from and frequently refigures those projects in its analyses of the networks of imperial power that contribute to control much of the world.”

--Peter Hulme

Peter Hulme’s description of postcolonial theory coincides with my own reading of race within the Caribbean and early United States. He regards the relevance of postcolonial theory to America as underdeveloped; since Hulme’s acknowledgement of this problem, critics have not only begun to reassess the eighteenth century in terms of postcolonial theory, but also to include the formation of the early United States within the context of the racial revolutions occurring within the transatlantic. With my thesis, I will contribute to this reassessment and also address the problem of overlooking the early United States in regards to race. Given the complexities attending the formation of the early United States, particularly those grounded in ambivalent and often contradictory ideas about race, I examine the literature produced during the eighteenth century in order to tease out the implications of race within the transatlantic. The concept of America as a colony of the European nations resembles the European Caribbean colonies; we can identify the inhabitants of America, like those in the Caribbean, as Creoles. The term Creole denotes various definitions in different contexts, and for my thesis, I will use Sean Goudie’s understanding of this term. Goudie sees “Creole” as more than the birth of a colonial subject outside of his or her national origins. In addition, he uses this term “to account for admixtures, or syncretisms, between Old and New World ‘races’ and cultures” (8). Using Goudie’s understanding of “Creole,” I will expose the cultural influences of the revolutionary Atlantic and argue that this Creole position allowed certain subjects to form a collective community and distance themselves from the political control of England.

In this thesis, I will explore how ideas about women and slaves in early transatlantic writings informed and were shaped by notions of Creole identity at once contributing to the “collective community” described above and challenging its hegemonic status. Texts like Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*, William Earle’s *Obi*, Hannah Foster’s *The Coquette*, and Leonora Sansay’s

Secret History demonstrate the significance of the transatlantic traffic not only in relation to the colonies and slaves but also in relation to the cultures attendant on such commerce. The transatlantic routes did more than transport slaves and Europeans to the American colonies; these routes brought along various cultures as well as various assumptions about race and gender. For example, the British, the group of Europeans I will focus on in my study, had pre-inscribed notions concerning the role of women in their country. And while the early American colonists laid claim to notions of equality, a defining characteristic of their “new world,” these gender biases remained intact. Also, the master-slave relationship, established in Britain’s Caribbean colonies, infiltrated the minds of American colonists and shaped their opinions on slavery. The ideas and people that both crossed over on various routes in the Atlantic Ocean left the American colonies in a contradictory state. On one hand, “America” promoted equality and freedom to all; however, women and the enslaved, stood outside of this equality. Neither group could participate in the political realm even though they both contributed to and were affected by the political decisions occurring within the colonies.

Within the eighteenth-century, revolutionary Atlantic, the term *nationalism* and *nation* emerged as people with common language and cultures fought against each other in hopes of finding freedom and creating their own national identity. This concept of *national identity* formed a strong connection between the recognized members of the nation, who were willing to die fighting for their sense of nation identity. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community,” one that is both limited and sovereign—limited because a “nation” never knows all of the members of its “imagined” community, and sovereign because despite the inequalities within this imagined community, the members perceive the nation as an equal comradeship, and they are willing to die to protect it (Anderson 6-7). Rather than complications forming between two different nations, separate nations began within a group of people who shared a common sovereignty and language. Within a nation, or community, people fought against each other, resulting in the creation of their own separate national identity. In fact, many Creole communities developed a sense of nationalism before their mother countries of Europe. Anderson notes that the improvements in transatlantic communication coupled with the shared languages and cultures of the Creole communities with the metropolises led to an easy transmission of the new economies and political doctrines being produced in Western Europe (51). Surrounding my thesis is the sense of comradeship that united the Creole colonists during

this revolutionary time period. The Creole colonists used this strong sense of comradeship to separate themselves from the injustices they felt they suffered under their current nation. The strong bond of friendship led to the Creole's own distinct national identity. In addition to examining the inequalities between the one nation and its former colonies, in my thesis, I focus on the inequality that existed within the newly formed nations, which were forming across the Atlantic. Even though a sense of friendship and national identity united the Creole colonists, their newly formed community also contained inequalities and injustices for some of the members, especially woman and slaves.

Notions of freedom, equality, and revolution traveled across the Atlantic; the mercantile and slave trade routes and the colonization of the Caribbean and North America increased the communication between the transatlantic colonies and Europe. The circular exchange of cultures and ideologies resulted in what Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker refer to as the “many-headed hydra,” alluding to the Hercules myth; when one of the heads of the hydra, the monster Hercules was trying to defeat, was severed, it reproduced two more heads (2). Linebaugh and Rediker (re)write the history of the revolutionary Atlantic to include the “motley crew,” a term South Carolina Governor William Bull applied to the mixed group of sailors and slaves; however, Linebaugh and Rediker also include the laborers, religious radicals, pirates, and felons within the many heads of this crew (212). The ruling class used this derogatory description of a “motley crew” to describe the early proletariats who participated in revolutionary activities. This crew stood in opposition to the leaders of the Atlantic nations, yet their rebellious actions against the governments that restricted their freedom inspired the political leaders of the American colonies to follow their example and rebel against England in an attempt to gain their own political and social freedom. Samuel Adams, Jr., one of the political leaders, observed the rebellious spirit of the motley crew and adopted their motivations into his own political discourse, creating a new ideology of resistance in which the natural rights of man justified rebellious actions against governmental control (216). Therefore, slave and labor revolts set the stage for the American Revolution, providing inspiration much in the same way the American Revolution would later influence the French and Haitian Revolutions. Moreover, sailors occupied a unique position of literally transporting these revolutionary ideas of the natural rights of man and freedom between all the Atlantic nations. The revolutionary atmosphere of the Atlantic, like the “many-headed hydra,” can be attributed to several groups, and even though

colonial leaders attempted to remove the authority of the various groups, they only produced more groups and complications that strengthened the revolutionary atmosphere and weakened the colonial system's authority. In the following chapters, I reveal two heads of the hydra: female slaves and white women. These two heads of the hydra represent two sites of difference to consider when analyzing identity formation, in this case gender and race. Although other sites of difference like class continue to operate in the formation of subjects, I will be focusing on these two.

In addition to examining the political discourse shaping the revolutionary Atlantic, I will also explore the ways social structures within the colonies affected changing ideologies. The unifying theme in all of my texts is the reoccurring corrupted social structures that position women, regardless of color, as outside of the system. However, the idea of women only being docile, passive people who remain outside of the political sphere appears to be only an illusion. In reality, women did affect the political sphere and they did rebel against corrupt social structures that included institutionalized slavery. Social structures, as Frantz Fanon notes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, provide the real source of racial conflict; society allows black men to adopt inferiority complexes and forces them to choose between disappearing from society or conforming to the corrupt social ideals that marginalize them (100). Fanon accurately exposes the corrupt social structure that prevents black men from actively reclaiming their own individual identity, separate from the white man. Although Fanon deals primarily with masculine subjectivity, it is also useful when considering women's position in the transatlantic context. This reassessment reveals social structures as the source of conflict for all women in the eighteenth century, those who were "free" and those literally "enslaved" by colonial imperialism.

By recognizing social structures as a source of conflict for race and gender and by examining the intersection between race and gender in the Caribbean setting, we can gain a better understanding of female identity in the early American colonies. As Dillon notes, the formation of a national culture in the American colonies "required an erasure of colonialism" ("The Secret History" 28). The erasure of Caribbean colonization from early American texts such as novels by Hannah Foster—combined with the reconfiguration of female sexual desire—presents a problematic depiction of the development of national, sexual, and racial identities of the early United States. Women, like the slaves, rebelled against their socially and sexually

repressed positions within the colonies, thereby challenging the republican ideology of equality and freedom.

The questioning of the political and social structures during the formation of the early United States and the revolutionary actions occurring in the Caribbean facilitated the restructuring of the definition of masculinity and femininity. As Linda Kerber points out, “the great questions of political liberty and civic freedom, of the relationship between law and liberty, the subjects of so many ideological struggles in the eighteenth century, are questions that ignore gender” (15). The texts in this thesis reveal the exclusion of gender from the ideological discussion as well as the desire of women and slaves to create their own national identity in a Republic that will not recognize their crucial involvement. While gender affects the slaves’ position, race further complicates their position within the colonial colonies and the early United States. In many ways, the Europeans treated both male and female slaves the same. Women, as well as men, worked in the fields and underwent severe punishment for defying their masters or asserting even the slightest authority. The slave masters considered both males and females as property capable of equal work. Many women rebelled against slavery and promoted antislavery thoughts to the slave community; some women even led slave communities against their oppressors. While most people tend to associate change with a large uprising or revolt, the constant daily resistance on the part of female slaves often proved to be more effective than large rebellions. Also, in the history of slavery, men led the major slave revolts, which makes people assume that only males fought for change. However, as Barbara Bush notes, “the woman slave in history, like women in most cultures, has been the victim of historical invisibility” (147). The women participated in the daily acts of non-cooperation, thereby making the Europeans fear the power of the women over the men.

Even though female slaves, on some level, were equal to male slaves, gendered politics also occurred within the system of slavery. The women provided the means of literally (re)producing the economy. As Diana Paton and Pamela Scully point out, maternity gave legal authority to slavery because the status of the mother determined the status of the child (5). The female body (re)produced the colonial system, thereby continuing the slaves’ own enslavement. Under a patriarchal and colonial system, female slaves suffer from a double oppression. As a woman, her body becomes a prize possession for both white and black men; as a slave, white men claim authority over her body. According to John Locke, every man has his own property,

and the labor of his body and hands make the property his own (26). However, this Lockean concept does not apply to women; oftentimes their only recognized authority lies within their maternity, and even as a mother, men possess ownership of the child, which she literally produces through her labor. This limited position of slaves and women in terms of authority over the body and over one's own labor connects gender and race. Women, like slaves, must fight against this oppression and gain agency over their bodies. "Slavery," for writers like Foster and Sansay, becomes a metaphor for women's oppression. Dillon, for one, argues that women's and African Americans' apparent exclusion from the republic can be reversed to demonstrate that the exclusion itself includes white women and African Americans in an "externalized but foundational position"—that of property (*Gender* 17). Moreover, during the eighteenth century, as Bonnie Anderson notes, society identified traditional values and counterrevolution with women (64), a gendered identification through which men embodied radical actions, leaving the women to uphold the morals. In the revolutionary Atlantic, however, women and slaves simultaneously occupy a position of enslavement and rebellion.

Just as slaves came to recognize their own strength in the rebellious atmosphere of the eighteenth-century Caribbean, women used this same environment to free themselves from the controlling authority of men. As Michael Drexler notes, the intense strain that destabilized "socio-political hierarchies" during the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions is apparent in early American and colonial Caribbean writings (Introduction 21). Jurgen Habermas's vivid demonstration of the blurring of spheres supports Drexler's argument of the exchange of cultures occurring between the Europe and the transatlantic colonies of the Caribbean and North America, which leads to creating the kind of Creole identity I described above. Habermas complicates the ideology of maintaining separate spheres—a public and a private to reveal the overlap between them. He argues that the "private people relate to each other in [the bourgeois public sphere] as a public" and "the public's understanding of the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain (*Intimsphäre*)" (28). The private individual, through business, enters the public sphere and engages in a public discourse, thereby shaping the public's opinion and perception. The private individual, in a sense, collectively maintains the public. Drexler and Dillon, like Habermas, see the influence the private and public and the various cultures had on each other in forming identities. I want to

extend this blurred area to include the influence of race and gender on the forming ideologies of the revolutionary Atlantic. Even though racial hierarchies and slave rebellions have attracted a lot of attention in past scholarship, I want to further this discussion by looking at sexual relationships within this changing political environment, thereby making a connection between gender and race.

To show the similar yet varying methods women and Africans used to create a position for themselves within the colonized world, I explore the intersections between gender and race as evident in the depiction of female bodies, female language, and discourses of rebellion. I argue that the radical portrayal of women in numerous fictions restores the intersection between gender, race, and sexuality, thereby allowing women, regardless of race, to reassert their identity and power within the colonized atmosphere of the world that Goudie labels Creole America. For example, even as eighteenth-century society considered slaves and women to be property and thus set them outside the public political sphere, white women routinely adopted the “language of slavery” to encode “white women’s oppression” (Ferguson 23). More importantly, abolitionist discourse granted a kind of agency to enslaved blacks. Such configurations of agency and oppression place both women and slaves as prospective instigators of rebellion. Early feminist writers also objectified slaves but in a different way than the colonial system. They used the slave’s condition as property to bring awareness to white women’s enslavement in patriarchy. However, this comparison revealed the oppression slaves faced in the colonial system, which, in turn, granted white women agency over their own bodies. As Locke argues, the labor of one’s own body grants that person the private right over that labor, making it his or her own property. White women used abolitionist language to claim ownership over their bodies and the labor their bodies produced. Using the slave’s restrictive condition also reveals their claim to ownership over their bodies and labor.

This ownership of one’s body creates a sense of agency for a person in a limited state of autonomy. Agency, for my thesis, refers to the one’s gaining control over oppressive forces. Within a system that does not allow autonomous authority for females and slaves, they must exercise control over their bodies, which the patriarchal and colonial system uses to limit their individual control. Using the body to gain agency reveals this contradiction. Also, my use of agency refers to the author granting agency to the fictional characters in their texts. I understand the limits of this type of textual representation, and that the fictional characters themselves

cannot have agency. Instead, I argue that the authors create fictional characters who gain agency, or individual control, through the ownership of their bodies within the confines of the fiction itself.

To elaborate on this argument, in chapter one, I focus on maternity as the embodiment of rebellion. The representation of the female body, especially the pregnant body, spurs slaves into action in two key texts: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and William Earle's *Obi; or the History of Three-Fingered Jack*. In both texts, I explore the reproduction of rebellion and the maternal body as the instigator of revolt. In *Oroonoko*, Imoinda's reproductively laboring body becomes the signifier of the male's desire to rebel against patriarchal authority. Moreover, Imoinda's body becomes a vehicle for her own resistance to the patriarchal authority that enslaves her. In *Obi* the protagonist's mother embodies the desire for revenge against whites in the colonies, and, unlike Imoinda, she is granted a voice. Amri's narrative becomes the motivation for Jack to seek revenge for his parents and his African people. She literally reproduces her hatred of the white patriarchal society by giving birth to and educating her son, who will lead other rebellious slaves in their desire for revenge.

After examining these texts set in the Caribbean, in chapter two I analyze the position of women and slaves within the North American colonies. In the early United States, the people promoted a separation between the private and the public spheres, and the women upheld the private, domestic sphere, where the conjugal family operated. In Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*, Eliza steps outside the established female position within the domestic sphere, resulting in her failure within the community to become mother or a prominent woman of the colonies. However, as I argue, Eliza Wharton does not fail the republican ideology; instead, the contradictory position of republican women and the lack of female community force her to retreat from that society—one that does not allow her to obtain freedom—and turn inward to herself. Foster positions her novel within a well-known tradition of seduction novels like Richardson's *Pamela* and Eliza Haywood's amatory fiction, and, like Haywood, Foster challenges and questions the concepts associated with the coquette and marriage, but within a republican society. Moreover, Eliza, like Imoinda and Amri, rebels against her limited position of freedom and finds a way to use her body as a means of gaining agency and freeing herself from that restrictive society.

Even though Foster's Eliza "fails" in terms of the republican ideology of the American colonies, she successfully maintains control over her body and never alters her true desire of an open and free social sphere—a place that cannot exist in a republican marriage. However, because of the republican notion of separate spheres for women and men, marriage restricts Eliza, yet becoming a social outcast—not conforming as a republican lady—also limits her freedom. Therefore, removal from the public proves to be her only option. She becomes the sole proprietor of her body and withdraws from the public sphere. In this way, I argue, Foster's novel challenges the republican ideology and asserts that this type of control and government will produce only death for women and children; if the American colonists do not make alterations and find a equal place for women, then the republican ideal, like Eliza, will die.

In the third chapter, I reevaluate the Caribbean's role in the formation of the early United States by contrasting Foster's depiction of marriage and maternity with Leonora Sansay's construction of the rebellious woman. In *Secret History*, Sansay places Mary and Clara within the colonial setting of the Caribbean. Surrounded by the rebellious activities of the slaves and the Creoles, these two women form a supportive community and resist patriarchal control over their lives. Mary travels independently across the Atlantic Ocean to visit her sister Clara, and Clara, using the support of Mary and other women, separates herself from her husband's control. Sansay's construction of rebellious women, I argue, relies on military language to describe the females' behavior. The connection between maternity and military language reassigns the female body as a vehicle for change in the Caribbean setting. Thus, while Dillon notes the connection between the Creole black women and the Creole white women, which forms an inter-racial Creole community ("The Secret History" 18), I extend this argument by mentioning the other parallels between white and black women in Caribbean and early American literature. Women and slaves share a common status as a commodity of the patriarchal society, and they both endure violence committed by males.

Women and slaves did share a common position within the colonial structure, but colonization occurred across the Atlantic and not in one location. However, the trade and correspondence—through letters and sailors—united the problems all the colonists faced, which contributed to the mixing of different cultures. Eighteenth-century society viewed the Creole culture as separate from the metropolitan culture of the Europeans. To the Europeans, the Creole colonies only functioned as an economic investment. Therefore, they considered the Creole

culture as incapable of socially reproducing. The European countries that colonized the so-called New World feared this overlap between other races and cultures. For the Europeans, the colonial plantations were for economic production—not for cultural or social reproduction. Therefore, they maintained a clear distinction between production and social reproduction, but, much like the separation of public and private spheres, this distinction could exist only in theory. In Sansay's novel, I explore how the cultures of the metropole and the Creole community merge in literature as well as in history. According to Michael Warner, the colonial culture of the American colonies begins “to produce one of its least anticipated but most momentous effects: creole nationalism” (65). The trade and travel occurring between the transatlantic colonies result in the inter-mixing of different races and cultures, producing a creole nationality. While Goudie's assertion that the Americans appropriated many of the oppressive features of the British colonial discourse—the language that they had used to oppress the American colonies—the mixture of cultures and the need for a separate national identity allowed a Creole culture to emerge (8). By positioning her novel in the Caribbean during the uprising preceding the Haitian Revolution, Sansay exposes this blurring of the Creole and metropole cultures. Sansay, I argue, constructs a society based on a powerful view of maternity, where female values, regardless of race, allow the possibility of a shared community. Moreover, this feminized community successfully shows the interconnections between metropolitan and Creole cultures.

In the succeeding chapters, I reexamine the revolutionary yet hopeful atmosphere of the eighteenth-century transatlantic world and closely analyze the position that women, both white and black, occupy within its nations. As Goudie points out, “[Creole] discourses became internalized, resisted, and/or transformed by the colonists themselves in the New World”; the creole status indicated, to the Europeans, intellectual inferiority—a status that Anglo-Americans wanted to change (7). In order to distance themselves from this negative stereotype, Americans embraced the characteristics associated with the term Creole but made them American rather than Creole; they distanced themselves from the term by (re)claiming this combined cultural identity as their own personal identity. The term Creole indicated an “othered” position within the transatlantic nations, so the Anglo-Americans reverse the negative association with the Creole characteristics. Goudie provides an example of this reversal of terms: “the term ‘yankee’ in song and literature came to signify their resistance and independence, where in Europe it denoted their backwardness” (7). In other words, Anglo-Americans culturally embraced the term

that Europe used to denote their inferiority, thereby celebrating their freedom and separation from Europe.

In my Epilogue, I will discuss the implications of this strategy of reversal for a reading of contemporary African American women's writing. Contemporary African American women's writing echo several themes of the eighteenth-century texts. The problems of the eighteenth century continue in our contemporary society, and the decisions made during the past directly impact our current understanding of gender and race. Ian Baucom argues that "a diasporic philosophy of history" revises our understanding of the modern (34). The repetition of history along with the implications history has on the present impacts our interpretation of contemporary culture and literature. Looking back to the eighteenth century, we can begin to reassess our understanding of contemporary society. Currently, African American women face an "othered" position within their own race and society, and they must find ways to invert the negative stereotypes attached to them. The depiction of the female body and maternity as a means of inspiring rebellion and fear continues with contemporary work like Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*. Naylor's novel illustrates the power of the female body and female community within a patriarchal society, drawing on the similar themes of women containing both a domestic and rebellious spirit and of the power behind the collectivity of women. Moreover, Naylor's novel reveals a problem that began in the eighteenth century and continues into the present; black women face alterity within their own community. Patricia Hill Collins identifies five controlling stereotypes that dictate the ways that black women's sexuality has been represented: the mammy figure; the Black matriarch, responsible for the stability of the family; the welfare mother; the "Black lady," or the middle-class professional; and the jezebel. These stereotypes have been used to justify black women's oppression in the United States, and they allow social injustice to appear to be a natural existence in everyday life (Collins 69). Collins notes that because of these controlling images the importance and necessity of "creating independent self-definitions" in order for black women to survive (112). Naylor and other African American women writers like Toni Morrison attempt to reconstruct a positive place for African American women despite the stereotypes that prevent them from transcending their limited space.

With my consideration of these texts, I hope to expand our understanding of early colonial novels. For critics like Nancy Armstrong, the novel in the eighteenth century becomes a weapon against the old form of political power and a liberating force for individuals (98).

Armstrong states that in *Pamela*, Richardson changes the notion of women as forms of currency that only males have the power to exchange and empowers the female to assert herself as the controlling force of her own exchange (112). I will argue that, like Pamela, women in the Caribbean and early American texts I examine, through the construction of their bodies and language, position themselves as the controlling force of their bodies and their desires, which allows them to be equal with the men. This empowering act allows them a revolutionary freedom within the contexts of these novels, and how so far as the novels shaped the actualities of women's lives, contributed to the empowerment of "real" women too. The revolutions occurring across the Atlantic Ocean also contributed to the empowerment of "real" women, and these novels depict this influence as well. The following chapters show the revolutionary and contradictory atmosphere of the Atlantic; (re)positing gender and race within the eighteenth century complicates the definitions of freedom and equality, which the political discourse of the early United States proclaimed to achieve. The historical reality differs from the ideal ideologies recorded in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, and this reality excludes women and slaves from obtaining social, political, or sexual freedom. The women represented in these texts collectively blur the boundaries of masculine and feminine and challenge the stability of the social structures and republican ideology, which represses them socially and sexually.

CHAPTER ONE

EVOKING NANNY'S GHOST: THE DOMESTIC AND REBELLIOUS SPIRIT OF WOMEN IN APHRA BEHN'S *OROONOKO* AND WILLIAM EARLE'S *OBI*

Recently, Aphra Behn critics have turned their attention from Oroonoko to Imoinda, reading her as central to the overall development of the narrative. By placing Imoinda at the ideological crux of the text, a binary between the narrator and Imoinda emerges. The narrator, as a representative of the white, female European, stands in opposition to Imoinda, an African slave; in the binary opposition, the narrator positions Imoinda as “other.” According to Moira Ferguson, black women experienced a “dual nature of othering” (18). She suffers from a double oppression from the patriarchal rule and the colonial system. Through her race and gender alterity, she embodies the intersections of gender and race in the text. She contains a rebellious and maternal spirit and shows the potential threat and violence of female slaves in resisting the colonial system. The image of Imoinda’s pregnant body fighting the Europeans exemplifies a contradictory image of a female slave. Women, in general, were considered passive and submissive, and the status of a female slave only intensified this image. While Imoinda stands in opposition to the narrator, she also encompasses a contradiction with her own role within the text. Behn’s Imoinda anticipates the legendary figure of Nanny, the leader of the Maroons, during the first Maroon War, beginning in 1785.

As Jenny Sharpe notes that Maroon oral histories clearly document Nanny, and although her story is only recorded through folklore, not in European history, Nanny remains a strong presence in colonial narratives and in the contemporary lives of the Caribbean nation today (1). Sharpe highlights her strong presence in the Afro-Caribbean mindset by noting that “Nanny appears in more fiction, plays, and poems than any other Afro-Caribbean woman who lived during the era of slavery” (1). Currently, Jamaican currency bears the image of Nanny, showing her ongoing influence, and she has been designated a National Hero of Jamaica (Sharpe 17). Nanny embodies the spirit of rebellious women in slavery and inspires women to fight against their enslavers rather than accepting their assumed passive state. Her legend provides Afro-Caribbean women with agency and control over their body and actions. The stories surrounding Nanny establish her as an obeah woman for the Maroons; some stories even claim that she could catch bullets with her body and hurl them back at the Europeans. Her supernatural power of

using her body as a weapon against the colonists emphasizes the power of the female body as an agent of rebellion. Sharpe discusses the meaning of the term *Maroon*, which varies in its precise definition; however, Sharpe argues that all variations indicate a racial coding between Africans and wild, untamable beasts, noting the term was originally used to describe domestic cattle that escaped to the bush, thereby turning “wild” (4). In its more familiar use, Maroon describes the slaves that rebelled against their owners and escaped to form their own separate community. However, the fact that the Maroons remained free as long as they captured runaway slaves complicates their position.

In 1739, the Jamaican Maroons and the English government composed treaties, which positioned the Maroons as a special class of subjects of the English Crown and allowed them their freedom. In exchange for their loyalty to the colonial government by capturing runaway slaves, the Maroons received economic compensation and their own lands. The treaty proved that the Maroons posed a serious threat to the control of the colonial government. According to Barbara Kopytoff, the English government and the Jamaican Maroons signed the treaties, but their interpretation of the treaty differed considerably; while the English saw the treaties as a way to control the Maroons by making them a special class of subjects to the Crown, the Maroons considered the treaty to be a sacred contract that promised them freedom and a new life (46). By entering into agreement, the English admitted to their lack of authority over the Maroons; rather than enforcing laws, they contrived the treaties as a means of encouraging their support. Even though the treaties classified the Maroons as a special and separate class of subjects, as Kopytoff argues, it provided the Maroons with “a special if ambiguous position in the island society” (50). Rather than remaining a separate society, the Maroons occupied a unique position within the colonial society. The Maroons provide a clear example of slaves rebelling against their position as slaves, yet they also enter into an agreement with the very Europeans who enslaved them, promising to capture any other rebellious slaves. Like the term itself, the position of the Maroon within the colonial system appears contradictory. Moreover, the Maroons’ leader Nanny also embodies this contradictory dichotomy between domestic and rebellious. Thus, the term, the maroon community, and their leader complicate the thought surrounding the category of domestic or rebellious slave. While the colonists neatly divided slaves into these separate categories, the Maroons, especially through the figure of Nanny, challenge this dichotomy, showing the fluidity of the two terms.

Nanny represents both a domestic female as well as a woman who rebels and fights against men. Nanny's name evokes the image of a nurturer. Sharpe explains the terms associated with the name Nanny: "Since *Nana* is an Akan term of respect for ancestors and spiritual leaders and *ni* means 'mother,' folklorists suggest that her name is a corrupt New World version of these terms" (22). Nanny becomes a spiritual mother for the African people as well as a rebellious leader. According to the folklore, both Nanny and her sister were captured and brought to the New World; Nanny, unlike her sister, resisted her enslavement and fought for her freedom (Sharpe 6). In the New World, the maroons respected Nanny to the extent of naming Nanny Town, a maroon stronghold that was "virtually impregnable," in her honor, and some records position her as the wife, or one of the wives, of the leader Cudjoe (Sharpe 2; 12). While being responsible for implementing guerrilla tactics, the oral history also credits her with "feeding her people," making Nanny a symbolic mother over all the maroons (Sharpe 7). Also, Nanny relied on her female sexuality in her tactics against the British. However, rather than the domestic form of sexuality promoted by the missionaries, Nanny's defiant sexuality could return the violence the British impose on black women's bodies (Sharpe 13). Therefore, Nanny's character complicates the distinct categories of domestic and rebellious; she aligns these contradictory terms, thereby undermining this division. Nanny embodies a specific character in Jamaican folklore, but this type of revolutionary woman existed in fiction as well. Aphra Behn also uses this complicated position as a rebellious female and mother with her characterization of Imoinda.

Imoinda's maternal body and rebellious nature emerges with the comparison of her and the narrator. According to Stephanie Athey and Daniel Alarcon, as a slave, Imoinda "comes to be valued entirely for the (re)productive capacity of her body, and our narrator comes to be valued for her *metaphysical* qualities, her discourse and her moral sense" (44). At the onset, the narrator claims to be an "Eye-witness" to a majority of Oroonoko's story (1). When Oroonoko enters Surinam, the narrator becomes a more visible presence in the text. However, her interactions with Oroonoko revolve around the use of her words and not her physical body. She entertains Oroonoko and Imoinda "with the Loves of the *Romans*" and "Stories of Nuns"; through her discourse, she engages with Oroonoko, and acknowledges with pride her position as "his *Great Mistress*" (46). In plantocratic language, the narrator's assertion that she is Oroonoko's mistress clearly denotes his power and ownership over her. One expects a physical relationship to exist between the two; however, for the narrator, she does not associate her status as Oroonoko's

mistress with the sexual. Instead, she recognizes her discourse with him to be the source of her power. After calling herself his “*Great Mistress*,” she immediately states that “[her] Word would go a great way with him” (46). Her words, not her physical beauty, influence Oroonoko; therefore, Aphra Behn separates the narrator from the physical qualities associated with African slaves. Instead, the narrator’s power lies within her discourse, her language. The narrator acknowledges that “a Female Pen” records Oroonoko’s story, emphasizing her importance as a female author (40). She realizes the power of her story as well as her discursive, rhetorical power over Oroonoko. The narrator acquires metaphysical qualities, allowing her words to replace her body—her physical qualities never define her and her relationship with others. Rather than enter into a sexual relationship with Oroonoko, she uses her stories and words to become his mistress. However, her language and Oroonoko’s perception of it changes. Trying to advise Oroonoko to calm down rather than risking confinement, the narrator admits that “perhaps [her advice] was not so luckily spoke of [her], for [she] perceiv’d he resented that Word, which [she] strove to soften again in vain” (46-7). Before she claims power over her discourse with him, but the patriarchal structure challenges her authority and shows the constant struggle that even the narrator makes in trying to gain agency within this male-dominated society.

Moreover, the narrator’s physical presence, at the end of the text, is literally erased with her fleeing the violence surrounding Oroonoko. Athey and Alarcon note that the narrator, representing the white female body, alone retreats, thereby “removing [her body] from the scene of colonial struggle and leaving the white male to personify colonial power” (39). Twice the narrator quickly removes herself from the text. The first time occurs after Oroonoko rebels against the colonists; fearing his potential violence, she flees down river, literally removing herself from the scene. The final escape occurs after Oroonoko commits another violent act—killing Imoinda. The narrator claims “[Oroonoko’s] Discourse was sad; and the earthy Smell about him so strong, that I was persuaded to leave the place for some time” (76). She leaves the scene and only through her mother and sister does she hear about Oroonoko’s violent death. Interestingly, the narrator removes herself whenever colonial power and violence under this colony appears. She avoids being associated with the colonial power or with the sexuality of her own physical body. By either replacing her body with discourse or removing her physical body, the narrator escapes the violence imposed on slaves and enacted by slave rebellions, the

commoditization of women, the threat of rape, and the fear of miscegenation that accompanies the colonial system.

While the narrator relies on her words, Imoinda is positioned within the confines of the colonial and patriarchal system, and her presence within the text relies on her physical body. From the beginning, Imoinda is described in relation to her physical beauty and how others view her in terms of her physical characteristics; she represents: “the beautiful Black *Venus* to our young *Mars*; as charming in her Person as he, and of delicate Vertues. I have seen a hundred White men sighing after her” (9). This introduction to Imoinda sets her physical beauty as an object men and others desire. Moreover, the majority of her actions revolve around her body and the actions she exerts rather than her language. This type of romantic body language grows out of the language used in theaters during the Restoration period, which develops into the conventional language for the heroine in romance and later of sensibility. Robert Chibka discusses Imoinda’s ability to use her body in place of words; deprived of a voice, men read her body language (527). Imoinda communicates with Oroonoko and others through her body and her physical actions; she verbalizes her love for Oroonoko through her eyes. As soon as the Prince sees Imoinda in the Otan, where he keeps all of his mistresses, she speaks to the Prince with her “angry, but Love-darting Eyes,” revealing her powerful body language; the narrator refers to Imoinda’s capability of speaking with her eyes as a “powerful Language” (17). Here, the narrator’s description of Imoinda’s body language emphasizes Imoinda’s physical presence within the text. Unlike the narrator, Imoinda uses her body as text for her words and the voice she has lost due to her gender and racial alterity. Even with the King, Imoinda must depend on her body as a form of expression; their interaction centers on Imoinda’s body, which performs dances for the King. During one of her performances, which Oroonoko attended, “she alone gave [Oroonoko’s] Eyes and Soul their Motions” (21). Through her body, she gives motions to her thoughts and feelings as well as Oroonoko’s. Moreover, her body initiates the King’s jealousy when she literally falls into Oroonoko’s lap during her performance, communicating her desire for him over the King. Both the King and Oroonoko clearly understand Imoinda’s language, which she speaks through her physical actions.

Due to Imoinda’s lack of a narrative or voice, her physical body asserts itself as a form of text in which the Europeans and others can read her. The Europeans discern her to be noble from the markings of her body; the narrator explains that people of noble birth “of that Country, are

delicately cut and raised all over the Fore-part of the Trunk of their Bodies” (45). While both Imoinda and Oroonoko bear these markings because of their nobility, Imoinda’s marked body separates her from Oroonoko in the amount of markings on her body compared to his; again the physical quality of Imoinda’s body becomes a mode of identifying and classifying her. Unlike the brief mention that Caesar also had markings, the narrator specifically mentions how the Europeans noticed Imoinda’s marked body even before they knew her true identity. Also, the description of Imoinda’s marked body demonstrates the extent to which the Europeans associate her as Other through her physical presence. From her arrival at Surinam, the Europeans instantly notice the markings on Imoinda’s body; the narrator describes her markings as “being carved in fine Flowers and Birds, *all over her Body*” (45, emphasis mine). Her entire body embodies the marked text of her native country, allowing her body to again become text for the Europeans to read. Throughout the novella, everyone, including the King and Oroonoko, classify Imoinda based on her physical attributes. Even though Oroonoko’s body also bears markings, his marked body does not become the identifying source of his quality. Instead, the narrator describes his nobility based on his European characteristics. In the description of Imoinda’s marked body, the narrator provides the background of how the Africans distinguish their noble births by these markings; she states that “some are only carved with a little Flower, or Bird, at the sides of the Temples, as was *Caesar*”; this type of carving the narrator calls “delicate” (45). Imoinda’s entire body contains more than one image of both flowers and birds; her body communicates her African identity and her position as Other within the European colony. Oroonoko, however, bears a small, delicate marking on his temples, which the narrator quickly mentions in her general description of African markings. Imoinda’s body, unlike Oroonoko’s, clearly communicates her African identity.

According to Susan Bordo, the body is a “*text of culture*”; Imoinda’s marked body literally allows the Europeans to “read” her African culture (90). Not only does her female body mark her as a woman and commodity but the physical markings on her body identify her with her African culture and separate her from the Europeans. Oroonoko, who slowly accepts the European way of life, bears only a small marking. Unlike Imoinda’s complete embodiment of her culture, Oroonoko’s body almost bears no distinction between that of the European body. Even though Imoinda’s body becomes a clear indicator of her African culture, it becomes contradictory in terms of her agency. On the one hand, the emphasis placed on Imoinda’s body

language oppresses her and denies her agency. Bordo notes that the body is not only a *text of culture* but also a “locus of social control” (91). Her body marks her as female and African, which society uses as a form of control. Within her own country, her femininity marks her as a type of commodity, while the Europeans view her as a slave, capable of reproducing the colonial system. However, because of her physicality, she takes control of her body and agency. Even though her body can be socially controlled, ultimately denying her agency or individual power, she uses this same body as a way to communicate her own individual identity. By denying her a voice to express herself, her body transcends her limited state, becoming a text that communicates for her.

Athey and Alarcon argue that Imoinda is presented “as [an] active and material [body] with the capacity to reproduce or sabotage colonial relationships” (39). They also assert that “hymen is a form of currency” (Athey and Alarcon 46); in Coramantien, Imoinda is valued for her hymen. As a commodity, the males view her in terms of her physical and sexual value. Her virginal body becomes the battleground for the King and Oroonoko; the processor will ultimately become the possessor of power as well. However, in Surinam, the currency shifts from the hymen to her womb. In the colonial setting, Imoinda’s capability to reproduce marks her currency to the colonists. Both her hymen and her womb provide commodities that empower men. Interesting, while men desire Imoinda physically and sexually, Trefry desires Imoinda only for his sexual pleasure, not to reproduce her. Therefore, her value relies not only in her maternal value but also in her sexuality as a female. However, Imoinda inverts this power by taking control of her own body and making her own choices concerning her body.

Even though Imoinda is associated with the purely physical, she still exerts control over her body; within the confines of the patriarchal system, she manages to maintain control of her body. Race and gender complicate the interpretation of Imoinda as a person in control; as an African female in her home country of Coramantien, she operates within a limited status of control. Regarded solely on her beauty, the King and Oroonoko view her as a prize to win, placing her as an object of desire; the two men compete over Imoinda, and it appears she cannot exercise any choice in this restrictive patriarchal society. However, within the limitations of this environment, Imoinda uses her body in order to gain some control. From the beginning, she captures Oroonoko’s affection through her “Charms” (9). While he is attracted to her physically, the narrator describes his affection as Imoinda’s “perfect Conquest over his fierce Heart,”

allowing her the control; though her physical charms, Imoinda wins Oroonoko's attention (9). The narrator's words carefully place Imoinda in a position of power over Oroonoko, thereby reverting Imoinda as the passive object of desire for the males. This power continues even when confronted with the ultimate patriarchal challenge: the King's summons to become his mistresses. The King, aware that "duty wou'd compel [Imoinda] to" become his mistress, positions Imoinda in a situation that illustrates her gendered state within the patriarchal system as well her lack of control, but even though she must comply with the King's desire, she manages to maintain a degree of power over her body (12). Whenever she is forced to embrace the King, she can "only sigh and weep there, and think of *Oroonoko*; and oftentimes cou'd not forbear speaking of him" (15). Her reaction to unwillingly subjecting herself to him instills grief in the King, preventing him from completely robbing Imoinda of her body and her virtue. Instead, Imoinda chooses her sexual partner.

Not only does Imoinda manipulate the patriarchal system in her own country but she also exerts her power over the colonized, patriarchal system in Surinam. In Coramantien, Imoinda's situation represented the gender oppression that women faced; however, Imoinda's position as a slave in Surinam conflates the issues of race and gender, showing her double oppressive state in the colonial world. As a sexual commodity, the threat of rape lingers throughout the text. However, Imoinda avoids being raped and only gives herself to Oroonoko, the man she chooses. Ironically, Oroonoko himself articulates the oppressed position female slaves occupy within colonies; after arriving to Surinam, Oroonoko asks Trefry why "*Clemene should refuse Slaves, being as you say, so beautiful; but wonder how she escapes those that can entertain her as you can do: or why, being your Slave, you do not oblige her to yield*" (42). To Oroonoko's astonishment, Imoinda, renamed Clemene, rejects not only the white Europeans but also the male slaves; as a sexual object, he expects that all men could possibly rape her just as the King thought in Coramantien. Trefry responds to him by saying that he has tried to use his advantages as a white male over her but "*she disarms me with that Modesty and Weeping, so tender and so moving, that I retire and thank my Stars she overcame me*" (42-3). He credits Imoinda with the ability to exercise control over her body, thereby overpowering the advances of a white male within the patriarchal order. In both countries, Imoinda avoids being raped though her control over the men, using her tears and physical charms—not her words—to appear modest and

virtuous. Again, her physical characteristics empower her and provide her with a physical language that allows her agency over her enslaved body.

In Surinam, her body again becomes the object of desire. However, the desire shifts from possession of her virginal body to possession of the womb. As a pregnant slave, Imoinda offers more to the colonists; she is literally reproducing their labor, which makes her a more valuable commodity. Oroonoko, content with his position as a noble slave, refuses to act out against the Europeans. Instead, he enters into discourses with them and accepts his new status. However, the possession of Imoinda's body again alters his complacency with their situation. Like the Europeans, he wants to claim ownership of the baby inside Imoinda's body; after he discovers Imoinda's pregnancy, the narrator informs the reader that "this new Accident made him more impatient of Liberty" (45). In hopes of obtaining their freedom, he attempts to make deals with Trefry. However, he fears "they would delay him till the time of his Wife's Delivery, and make a Slave of that too," and "this Thought made him very uneasy" (45-6). The sight of Imoinda's pregnant body inspires him to consider the possibility of their freedom; the very thought of losing his child to slavery angers him to the point the colonists now fear his actions. At this point, he delivers a speech, attempting to unite the slaves against the Europeans and lead a rebellion against them. After an unsuccessful attempt, Oroonoko and Imoinda decide that he should kill her and then himself; death is their only escape. However, once he kills Imoinda and her lifeless body lies in front of him, he loses his will for revenge or to kill himself. Like the first time he assumed she was dead, he loses all of his power and control over his actions. Only through competition over the control of her body does Oroonoko find his strength to take action.

Clearly, Imoinda's body is a driving force for Oroonoko as well as for the King and the colonists, instigating rebellion against controlling powers; Oroonoko goes against the King's authority, and later he rebels against the Europeans. Moreover, Imoinda's body invokes her own rebellious spirit and as I argue, proves her own power and control over the men in the text. Throughout the text, she avoids being raped, showing her control in a patriarchal society that views her as a commodity. As her body begins to show her pregnancy, she becomes angered by the fear of losing her child to slavery, believing "if it were so hard to gain the liberty of two, 'twould be more difficult to get that for three" (59). Imoinda's awareness of her pregnant body, which will provide another source of labor within the colonial system, provokes her to stand beside her husband and fight for her child's freedom. She does not let the men struggle for

possession of her unborn child. Instead, she claims ownership of her child and her own body and fights to defend them both. She has controlled her body by choosing to give her virginal body to Oroonoko over the King, to fight against the Europeans, and to allow Oroonoko to kill her.

By mixing two oppositional views of domestic and rebellious as well as conflating motherhood and radical actions, Imoinda embodies a Nanny figure. The King as well as the Europeans place Imoinda in the category of a passive, domestic slave. However, she transcends this limited position by possessing agency over her own body and by ultimately rebelling against the colonial system that enslaves her. While Imoinda possesses the capabilities of being a mother and wife, she also contains a mutinous spirit. Toward the end, Imoinda's physical body clearly demonstrates the fluidity of the terms domestic and rebellious:

Imoinda, who had grown big as she was, did nevertheless press near her Lord, having Bow and a Quiver full of poisoned Arrow, which she managed with such dexterity, that she wounded several, and shot the Governour into the Shoulder; of which Wound he had like to have died. (64-5)

In this scene, Imoinda, with her visibly pregnant body, fights against the colonists, further complicating her role as a passive, domestic female. Instead, like Nanny, Imoinda shows that women can be both domestic and warriors. At this moment, Imoinda asserts control and possession over her pregnant body; at the sight of her growing stomach, she fights not only for herself but also for her child, and unlike Oroonoko, she wounds the Governor and almost kills him. Even in death, Imoinda exerts control while Oroonoko only weakens; the fear of Imoinda's vulnerable body being raped ignites him to action again:

Taking *Imoinda* [...] into a Wood, where (after with a thousand Sighs, and long gazing silently on her Face, while Tears gush'd, in spite of him, from his Eyes) he told her his Design, first of killing her, and then his Enemies, and next himself, and the Impossibility of escaping, and therefore he told her the Necessity of dying. He found the heroick Wife faster pleading for Death, than he was to propose it. (71)

While the fear of losing Imoinda's body to another excites Oroonoko to develop this plan, what is interesting to note about this passage is Imoinda's action of pleading for her own death, showing Imoinda's agency in choosing her own death. Rather than focusing on Oroonoko's decision to kill Imoinda, I focus on her again claiming ownership over her body and deciding to

allow Oroonoko to kill her. She wants to protect her unborn child from slavery, and because the rebellion failed, she chooses death. Imoinda chooses to let Oroonoko kill her, showing her bravery. However, after Oroonoko kills her, he, like before when the thought of her death caused his inability to fight or command the army, falls apart and cannot fulfill his plan. Imoinda, aware that she cannot survive in the colonized world, rebels against the Europeans and chooses death over the enslavement of her unborn child.

The Europeans rename both Imoinda and Oroonoko immediately after their arrival into the colonized system. Imoinda assumes the name of Clemene, and Oroonoko is renamed as Caesar. Even though the Europeans have renamed the two slaves, completely illustrating their position as a colonial subject, the narrator allows Imoinda to maintain her name throughout the remainder of the story while referring to Oroonoko as Caesar. Therefore, Imoinda distances herself from the Europeans, allowing her agency within this colonial structure. Oroonoko, on the other hand, embodies the European ideal, distancing himself from his position as an African prince. Imoinda remains a part of her African community while Oroonoko privileges his individual needs over his national identity as an African. Michael Drexler discusses, unity and “effective collectivity,” which the Haitian Revolution demonstrates, allows for a successful nation rather than economic motives (179). The United States, founded on national unity, develops economical motives and distances itself from the original ideal it sought to establish. Oroonoko’s character aligns Europeans and Africans, thereby eradicating race and showing the true problem to be emphasizing economic gain over a unified community. Oroonoko, like the Europeans and inhabitants of the early United States, focuses on economic gain rather than on national unity; he willingly offers to sell his slaves in return for freedom instead of creating a national unity with the other slaves. Therefore, when he later attempts to create a rebellion against the Europeans, it fails. According to Susan Andrade, the text attacks the practice “of enslaving this particular *individual*—who happens to be African” rather than the practice of enslaving Africans (194, emphasis mine). Oroonoko’s failed attempt at rebellion stems from his fear of losing his property, Imoinda’s body and child. His impulse to resist the colonizers occurs at the same moment he begins to fear Imoinda’s possible rape; the injustice of slavery alone does not motivate his actions. Instead, he, like the Europeans, desires to protect his individual property, which he considers to be Imoinda’s physical body. Set apart from the community of slaves, he cannot successfully create unity in order to lead a successful revolt. Instead, the

narrator positions him as an Other among the slave community; she aligns him with the Europeans, who consider him above the slaves yet ultimately he is still their property to be controlled. Imoinda, however, is motivated by injustice of slavery; she maintains her native names and native ways more than Oroonoko, who supports the institution of slavery to the point of offering slaves for his own freedom

Interestingly, the narrator reverses Imoinda's renaming. At the beginning of Imoinda's arrival into Surinam, the narrator refers to her as Clemene, sustaining the mystery of her true identity of Imoinda. However, after Oroonoko, now known as Caesar, discovers her true identity, the narrator briefly continues to refer to her as Clemene. Only after Oroonoko's marriage to Imoinda does the narrator's name for Imoinda finally revert. Moira Ferguson connects the loss of Imoinda's name to the loss of identity for women in marriage; this renaming process "raises the issue of 'native alienation,' of predators trying to expropriate the identity of their victims by renaming them" (351). Therefore, Ferguson links gender and race, showing how the loss of identity of women in marriage parallels the loss of identity occurring in slavery; through the renaming process, the colonizers took complete possession and control over the identity of the slave. However, after Imoinda's entry into slavery and marriage, the narrator reverses Imoinda's renaming process, calling her by her true African name throughout the remainder of the story. Oroonoko, however, still maintains his colonized name, showing his complete loss of identity.

Not only does Behn allow Imoinda to maintain her native identity, she subtly creates a unity between the narrator and Imoinda. Even though several scholars, like Susan Andrade, Felicity Nussbaum, and Srinivas Aravamudan, focus on the narrator's position as desiring to be Imoinda in order to have Oroonoko, Behn actually allows the two women to create a secret community, where they help each other maintain their identity; therefore, the narrator turns the focus from Oroonoko onto Imoinda. Imoinda alone maintains her native name, exerts control over her own body and situations, and makes her own decisions regarding her body, which she alone possesses. Unlike Oroonoko, she rejects the colonial system and longs for freedom from slavery; Oroonoko only longs for control over his individual possessions, which positions him within the European mindset. Because of this individual protection, Oroonoko's rebellion and attempt to create unity among the slave community fails. Imoinda alone manages to wound the colonizer, showing her potential to become a part of the national unity needed to rebel against the Europeans. The narrator ends the text saying: "Thus died this great Man, worthy of a better

Fate, and a more sublime Wit than mine to write his Praise: Yet, I hope, the Reputation of my pen is considerable enough to make his glorious Name to survive to all Ages, with that of the brave, the beautiful, and the constant *Imoinda*” (78). Again, the narrator repositions the focus of the text from Oroonoko to Imoinda. Aphra Behn, the narrator, and Imoinda all long for freedom from the confines imposed upon them in the patriarchal system. Behn, a female author, decides to have the narrator, who is also female, to end the story with the name of the female slave Imoinda; the narrator also emphasizes that Imoinda is “brave” and “constant.” Of particular importance is Behn’s choice to use “constant” as a descriptive word for Imoinda not Oroonoko; this word choice supports my position that Imoinda maintains her African identity while Oroonoko loses his identity to the overall condition of the slaves. Imoinda, as a woman and a slave, faces a double alterity; therefore, she recognizes the importance of gaining agency in a patriarchal, colonized system.

William Earle’s portrayal of Amri in *Obi, or the History of Three-Fingered Jack* also evokes the image of Nanny; like Nanny and Imoinda, Amri complicates the distinction between domestic and rebellious women. However, Earle’s epistolary novel also shifts the focus from Amri’s body to her spoken narrative, which he captures in a written form. Whereas society values Imoinda for her physical body and fights to gain possession of it, the narrator of Earle’s novel begins the narrative with Amri and tells parts of the story through Amri’s perspective; Earle shifts the focus from the physical body to the construction of Amri’s own narrative, retelling her history. The advancement of the abolitionist movement and occurrences like the Haitian Revolution account for this shift and for Earle’s providing the black heroine with a voice.

The narrator emphasizes Amri’s role as a wife and a mother, thereby associating her with the domestic and maternal qualities of a female. The narrator states that “Amri’s bosom, though dead to every other feeling, still expanded to her son [Jack]” (115). Even though she never wants to live under slavery, she continues with the hope that she can reproduce her hatred in her son, who will continue to fight against slavery (115). By choosing the word *bosom*, Earle clearly highlights the maternal aspect of Amri, emphasizing her feminine qualities. At the same time, however, he erases clear distinctions between masculine and feminine qualities through her character. Her actions and resistance to being enslaved parallel her with the male slaves who actively disrupt and challenge their oppressor’s control and authority. On the slave ship, she refuses to eat, turning over the bowl rather than complying with the Europeans. For this

resistance, the keeper “beat [her] till the blood streamed down [her] back, and [she] was deprived of feeling” (87). The next day she again turned over her bowl and “persisted in [her] resolve” (87). Clearly, Amri possesses the strength associated with men in enduring extreme punishment. As Hilary Beckles notes, the slave owners feared the women as much as the men, and the laws provided no distinction between the punishment for male or female slaves except in not allowing women to be whipped during advanced pregnancy (153). Within the slave system, gender distinctions did not occur in punishment, and the one exception existed in the interest of reproducing the colonial institution. Makro asks Amri to live to revenge his death: “Take this girdle from my loins, and keep it in your possession. If the being to whom you are to give, be male, let him wear it from his earliest birth and whisper in his ear, till manhood dawns, what he owes to his country. Inspire his young bosom with revenge; tutor his early mind how to hate the European race” (90). Neither Makro nor Amri address the possibility of a female child possessing the capability to avenge her parents, which continues the erasure of female’s role within the colonial system. Amri fulfills her promise by teaching Jack to resist the colonial powers and avenge his parents and his African people. Makro’s request also reveals the issue of gender; even within the African society, men prevailed as the dominant leaders. However, as Hilary Beckles and Barbara Bush point out, women contributed as much as men, but the influences of patriarchal control erase, or refuse to acknowledge, their significant involvement. Amri admits her power by saying that Jack’s “mind was moulded to [her] most sanguine wish” (96). Jack does contain heroic qualities, but Amri’s contribution to his power is overlooked.

Amri, like Imoinda and Nanny, exhibits both a domestic and rebellious spirit. The characterization of Amri parallels with Nanny’s depiction as a healer, mother, and leader for the maroons and Behn’s representation of Imoinda’s pregnant body resisting enslavement. Amri “had vowed to curse the European race for ever; and had a son, in whose breast she never failed to nurture the baneful passion of revenge” (71). In this line, Amri’s disdain at being enslaved by the Europeans corresponds with the maternal act of nursing her child. Through her milk, she passes her hate onto her son—literally reproducing her disdain for the Europeans. Through her maternal guidance, she will teach her son not only to hate but also to avenge her and all Africans. After being sold into slavery, one of her masters brands her on her breast; she does not groan “but [holds her] bosom with fortitude to receive the impression” (95). Again, the narrator pairs the image of the breast, which corresponds with the image of a woman and a mother, with

violence and her bravery. Even as a woman, she can become a heroic figure capable of resisting her position as a slave, and this image demonstrates her ability to rely on her maternal strength to combat these oppressing forces. When called to court to reveal her son's secret location, she tells the court that she is "a poor weak mother" (120). However, within the next few lines, the narrator refers to Amri as a "heroic woman," able to undergo extreme physical torture to protect her son (120). This ironic contradiction emphasizes the stereotype of women being weak and maternal.

Women as well as men bravely fought against the oppression of Europeans. The narrator labels Amri as heroic—a term associated with males; her ability to withhold her son's location even at the cost of harsh punishment demonstrates her rebellious nature as well as blurring the line between masculine and feminine. The Europeans summon Amri again to provide information to help them capture Jack, and her refusal to assist them results in her being sentenced to die. At her execution, Amri, bound to a stake, "wanted not fortitude; the heroic woman was prepared to die" (147). Throughout the process, Amri never betrays her son and willingly accepts cruel punishment and even death in order to protect her son, whom she has instilled with the power to fight against the Europeans and revenge her and all Africans.

Amri's brave resistance indicates her dual position of being both domestic and rebellious. Moreover, her "voice" illustrates this binary. Unlike Imoinda, whose physical body and actions are described by the narrator, Earle's narrator is a recorder of Amri's voice. In relating her own history, Amri assumes control over her words and actions to gain agency over the Europeans. Earle's novel shifts the focus from the body to the narrative. Through her words—not her body—she communicates with Jack. After Jack is old enough, Amri informs him: "Now is the time when you should revenge my cause. You are arrived to maturity, and, to inspire you to revenge my injuries, I will relate the misfortunes of my life" (73). Rather than using her body as Imoinda, whose voice is silenced, does, Amri narrates her own history. Even Nanny's legend remains absent in written history; only through the Jamaican oral folklore tradition has her narrative continued to exist at all. Imoinda relies solely on her body to communicate; her voice is silenced. However, Amri uses her words to narrate her history and instill a rebellious spirit into her son, who will continue her story. She rebels with her narrative as well as her body, and through her words, she provokes her son's hatred for the Europeans. Moreover, Amri's words become a textual body for Jack to read and discover an understanding of his history. In fact, Amri interprets the European language to apply to her own history. After observing a branch

lying beside a tree, Harrop compares this sight “to a limb torn from you or me; it needs must die, receiving no succour from the body, to which it once belonged” (83). Amri evokes this same image when she recounts the horrors of the slave trade: “slaves [...] dragged from the bosom of their family [...] torn from their homes by the infamous Slatees” (84). Amri uses this violent image to teach her son the pain associated with being torn from one’s home. Like the tree, the detached limb cannot survive without its body. Through her narrative, Amri provides Jack with a body in which he can feed. Her words inform Jack of his motherland Africa and of the injustices committed against his people. They, like the branch, have been torn from their African homeland—their body, and Jack, along with his mother, fights to correct this injustice.

Amri’s narrative provides her son with a history of their African heritage and inspires her son to seek revenge for the African people. Like Imoinda, Amri maintains her African heritage and passes it onto her son. To do so, she distances herself from the Europeans. Her response to Harrop’s betrayal of their friendship is that she “could find no such deception in our own countrymen” (79). She maintains her African identity in spite of her placement within the European society, and she reiterates this identity to her son, trying to avoid his acquiescence into the European culture. She succeeds in imparting their African identity to her son. When Jack encounters a European who professes gratitude, he responds, “Gratitude is an expression used by *your* countrymen, but practiced by *mine*, who are unacquainted with its name” (106). Jack establishes a dichotomy between the two cultures, and he clearly positions himself in line with his African heritage—one that remains humane and avoids deception. For Amri and Jack, this distinction is crucial; by maintaining their African roots, they can exert agency over their enslaved positions and rebel against the oppressing forces.

Even though the titles of Earle’s and Behn’s texts center around the heroic, male slave, as their titles suggest, they both subtly underscore the participation of women in revolutions. As Barbara Bush mentions, female slaves posed a larger threat than males by their routine acts of non-cooperation, for example, refusing to perform labor or willful poisoning, but the historians focused on the large, violent revolts that usually males lead, thereby undercutting the daily resistance and rebellious spirit of the female slaves (148). Therefore, unlike the historians and the suggestion of Earle’s title, I position Amri as the central agent in beginning the violent rebellions, which contributes to the weakening of the white authority. Amri struggles daily by refusing to comply with Harrop’s and her master’s wishes. She overturns the bowl, showing her

determination; she refuses to reveal information about Jack's location, which leads to her brutal execution.

Earle's overt reference to potential threat and violence of slave rebellions, especially in relation to women's participation and his decision to give Amri a "voice" through the narrator, differs from Behn's novella. Earle writes his text around the 1800s—over a hundred years after Aphra Behn publishes *Oroonoko* in 1688. This wide span of time separating the two texts accounts for the change in characterization of the females. While it is still dangerous to publicly denounce the Europeans' involvement in slavery and praise with the slaves, the abolitionist movement, at this time, has undergone several advancements, furthering the inevitable emancipation of slavery. Therefore, Behn must subtly allude to Imoinda's potential violence—a fear and threat that is slowly materializing in the late seventeenth century. Earle, however, enjoys more freedom with criticizing the Europeans' inhumane treatment of the slaves and highlighting the inevitability of uprisings. Throughout the eighteenth century, slaves revolted against their masters and the European people began to question the humanity of slavery, asking if slaves were not human as well. Earle's narrator contains enough understanding that he reports his narrative through Amri's and Jack's perspective, literally assuming their voice; Behn's narrator, on the other hand, must maintain a distance between her narrator's voice and the slave's voice.

Although Behn and Earle use varying narrative devices in constructing their stories, they both expose the potential violence of all slaves, especially women—a threat prevalent with Earle's audience. Upon seeing Harrop at the jail, Amri remembers all of the injustice placed on his hands, and "she could have plunged Jack's saber to the hilt, to search the soul of her enemy" (117). While she refrains from performing such a violent action, Earle indicates her rebellious spirit and her potential to engage in such violence. Srinivas Aravamudan credits Amri with playing an important role in Earle's novel because she "instigates, organizes, and conceals Jack when necessary," illustrating the role of strong female figures in slave rebellions (20). Earle writes his *Obi* around the time of the Haitian Revolution, and he bases his text on the true occurrence of Jack Mansong, who leads several successful uprising against the Europeans. Aravamudan states that Earle based his story on "the suppression of a more complex story, of collective rebellion" by participants whose identities and fates remain untold (14). Earle attempts to recreate this suppressed history and call attention to the potential power of collective rebellions to undercut the colonial system.

Not only slave women but also white women occupy a limited position within European society. Earle inserts an additional story about Harriet in the middle of Amri's and Jack's narrative to demonstrate society's skewed definition of equality for all women as well as the man's obsession with economic gain. Harriet's story aligns woman and slaves in a similar position of being considered property for men. Harrop successfully separates Harriet from her love William by using his wealth to entice her father to accept his offer of marriage. Harrop does not love Harriet; the narrator claims that Harrop "naturally of no very tender feelings, was sufficiently satisfied with [not having her heart]; provided he enjoyed her property" (133). Harriet's father, Mr. Mornton, arranges her marriage to Harrop based on economic and social standing and refuses to allow her to marry William, her true love. When Harriet questions his authority, he tells her that she will obey him. Harriet, as a female, does not have any authority within the patriarchal society, paralleling her to the position of the slaves. Her father considers her property that he can exchange for the highest price, and Harrop considers her an investment, thereby allowing him to possess her body. Europeans view Amri, like all slaves, as property, refusing to accept them as human beings. Amri's husband Makro and Amri refuse to eat on the slave ship, wishing to die rather than listen to the Europeans. Harrop, fearing the loss of Amri and her unborn son, removes their chains and promises Amri her and her son's liberty once they land; his "inhumanity [gives] way to *private interest*" (88, emphasis mine). Harrop's decision to allow Amri and Makro to embrace each other one last time and his deceptive promises about freedom stem from his desire to own slaves and from his private interest in bringing more slaves to sell. He realizes that he must keep Amri and the other slaves happy in order to ensure no more rebellion against their impending fate. With Amri, he also sees unborn property rather than a human being. Therefore, his own economic investment in the slaves overpowers his desire to punish them for rebelling against him. Amri realizes once they make it to land, they will be "sold like cattle" (84). To the Europeans like Harrop, Amri represents property that can be exchanged in order to increase their own wealth; they do not regard them as human beings.

Even though Amri and Harriet occupy a limited position, as I stated earlier, Earle reveals the possibility of women to challenge their status. On the slave ship, Amri's husband requests for her to eat rather than killing herself by refusing food like he does. However, she "[refuses] even him who was as dear, nay dearer to me than life" (89). She makes her own decisions and does not allow even her husband to control her actions. Harriet also finds a way to gain agency over

her body and distance herself from patriarchal control. After Harrop's long absence, Mr. Mornton assumes him dead and contracts another profitable union for his daughter; however, this time, she obstinately refuses to comply with his wishes. This resistance serves as "a severe stroke to Mornton's avarice; he [expects] her compliance, and even [relies] on his authority" (153). When Harriet discovers her father's intention to force her into this marriage by arranging an immediate ceremony, she resolves "to fly from her importunate and disgusting lover, and at the same time from parental tyranny" (153). Harriet, like Amri, rebels against her oppressors, leaving behind her father and her next potential husband.

Earle's choice of the word *tyranny*, moreover, evokes the comparison to the American colonists fighting for separation from the tyranny of England. Earle writes *Obi* during a revolutionary time period for the transatlantic nations. The American, French, and Haitian Revolutions all attempted to gain freedom from political tyranny. Amri suffers from the tyranny of slavery and the patriarchal system, while Harriet suffers at the hands of the patriarchal structure that enslaves her and restricts her freedom over the possession of her own body. Earle also bases his novel on the true incidences surrounding Jack Mansong, who actually lead successful rebellions in the Caribbean. Drawing on the revolutionary atmosphere and the success of the slaves in uprising, Earle shows the potential threat all slaves and women present to the current patriarchal system. Women, as well as men, were capable of rebelling against authority and claiming agency over their own bodies.

The Haitian Revolution, which occurred in the 1790s, contributes to this revolutionary atmosphere that shapes Earle's and his audience's understanding of slavery and demonstrates the potential threat of collectivity among the slaves. In Behn's work, one gets a sense of the importance of maintaining native identity as well as working for a community's needs rather than merely for individual concerns. However, Earle's text, after many of the slave revolts, reflects the fear associated with a collective unity and recognizes the potential power of it. Amri realizes the importance of unifying in order to lead successful rebellions. Therefore, she relays her African history and establishes a strong connection between her son and his African people. She also arranges for Jack to learn the secrets of obeah. Through the mystical powers of obeah, Jack, like Amri's father, can unite the slaves to rebel together. According to Aravamudan, historical documentation, like Edward Long's narrative, reveal the white colonists' fear of obeah's power to unify the slaves to rebellion (21). Earle also portrays this fear with Jack's

obeah powers—powers that Amri arranges for Jack to learn. She understands the importance of obeah in organizing the slaves. While Amri and Jack eventually die by the end, they both manage to fight against the oppressing force enslaving them. Jack leads several successful rebellions, and Jack and Amri reveal the potential threat that slave men and women contain.

Jack, with superior strength and knowledge of obeah, prepares to avenge his parents but the narrator asks “could [Jack] alone stand against the united efforts of a whole Island?” (105). I argue that the answer—one that Earle realized himself—is no. Instead, he needs a collective group to rise against the oppressors of his countrymen. After witnessing Jack’s violent challenge against Harrop, the other slaves “flocked around [him],” and he addresses the slaves, producing a anti-slavery speech similar to Oroonoko’s (109). This speech unites the slaves and he calls for them together to throw off their chains and assist him in the fight against the colonial system. He understands that he is a single human being who needs the support of his fellow countrymen; only through the collective whole can they succeed in their fight. Amri and Mahali provide support and inspiration for Jack, and he needs this community in order to continue the ongoing fight against the Europeans. This strong power of Amri’s words allows Jack to continue to rebel; he needs the support from his mother to maintain his own sense of control. Therefore, I argue that Amri plays a bigger role in the rebellion than one might first assume. A brief glance through Earle’s novel or through the recorded history leads people to assume only men were physically and mentally strong enough to resist the colonial institution. However, a reexamination demonstrates the true powers that women like Amri possess and their capability to become active participants in the slave rebellions. Jack’s strength, in part, depends on his mother. Through her narrative, she influences his actions and his thoughts. Even in Jack’s imprisonment, his power originates with his mother’s body and words: “he invites [the Europeans’] tortures; they shall not draw a groan from his heart; but the thoughts of my mother being open to [the Europeans’] barbarities weigh heavy upon it, and more bitter anguish than all the cruelties [the Europeans] can exercise on my body” (113). Even later, the thought of his mother’s death serves “like a thunderbolt and [stagnates] the flow of blood, reason, life and all for a moment” (143). His mother’s words ruminate in his mind, showing her power over his actions. Her presence, both mentally and physically, assists Jack in maintaining his sense of identity and agency over himself. Therefore, she becomes a supportive community for Jack—one that he needs in order to

resist the colonial system. Amri, along with the other Africans, provide Jack with a body and a determination not to die but to resist at all costs.

While Amri reproduces her hatred for the white man in Jack, Mahali provides him with a close friendship and support. Mahali admits to Jack that “[his] life is so closely interwoven with [his], that the same blow which deprives you of existence will also be my death” (146). Ivy Schweitzer describes this ideal friendship—one that classical thinkers valued above all other relationships as being the most equal and ideal; based on this type of friendship, the one provides a mirror image of the other because they both possess similar qualities and desires (110). Jack and Mahali possess this type of friendship; they understand each other and both desire freedom from colonial control. This strong connection allows them to unite and form a supportive community for each other. Throughout the novel, Jack and Mahali fight beside each other, and Mahali even dies helping Jack with his plan to save Amri, showing their dedication to each other and their willingness to risk their lives for the other one.

Mahali’s and Jack’s lives and desires are linked, and together they can rebel against the disjointed forces that oppress them. With the slaves’ restrictive position as property, C. L. R. James comments on the slaves’ inability to create the opportunity to overturn the European powers; instead, they took advantage of the internal stresses developing between the main European powers and through this weakness, the slaves could shatter Europeans’ colonial control and create the possibility of emancipation (25-6). Wanting more control over the colonies in the Caribbean, the European nations began to turn against each other, allowing the slaves an opportunity to successfully organize and rebel against them. This division of the European nations weakened their control over the slaves, and the slaves formed collective groups, thereby empowering them even more. Moreover, the Europeans generated the slaves’ collective power. The 1739 treaties between the English colonial government and the Jamaican Maroons illustrate the role the Europeans played in the collective identity of the slaves; the treaties not only provided them with a special freedom and an ambiguous position within the island but also unified them and consolidated their identity. As Barbara Kopytoff notes, the treaties enhanced “the social integration of the Maroon societies,” allowing them to emerge as a unified, Creole society (51). Before the treaties, various ethnics formed the Maroons societies, which led to rivalry within the societies. However, the treaties stabilized the communities, allowing the members their own separate, free land; this stability lead to the unification of the cultures,

creating a Creole community. I want to extend Kopytoff's argument that the treaties, which resulted in the Maroons forming their own separate community, provided them with a common identity, allowing them to form an effective collective, thereby promising their continued success against the colonial government. Earle's *Obi* shows the potential of organized slaves, who share a common identity. Amri, Jack, and Mahali together rebel against the colonial society, and the rebellions that Jack leads succeed in weakening the colonial authority over the slaves. The white leaders resort to offering help financially, and eventually promising freedom, to the slave who can capture and end Jack's control. The unified slaves evoke fear from the white colonizers and weaken their control over them. Moreover, the leaders of the colonial government rely on the power of the other slaves to end the uprising and revolts. Like the English colonial government entering into an agreement with the Maroons, the white authority turns to Quashee, another slave, for assistance in controlling the power and authority of Jack.

Aphra Behn alludes to the power of a unified collective and of female slaves with her depiction of Imoinda and the failed slave rebellion against the white colonist. Earle, over a hundred years later, writes *Obi* and creates another strong female character, but because of the abolitionist movements and revolutionary occurrences across the Atlantic, he provides voice to his female slave and shows a successful, unified slave community that the white colonizers fear. Like Nanny, Imoinda and Amri, as mothers and wives, also embody a rebellious spirit and they show the potential violence of female slaves. These texts document the participation of female slaves in rebellions and show the decline of the colonial government in maintaining control over the slaves.

CHAPTER TWO

RECREATING SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN THE EARLY UNITED STATES: FAILED MATERNITY AND COMMUNITY IN HANNAH FOSTER'S *THE COQUETTE*

In traditional eighteenth-century epistolary novels such as Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*, women are given a limited voice within the society; Eliza narrates her story but only to her female community. The patriarchal society silences her voice, and the females, in her community, do not encourage her conversing with males. Instead, the republican society permits her with a limited voice, which, in turn, leads to her complete loss of voice. The restrictions placed on her narration of her story and the control over her body cause her decision to end her discourse with the female community—the only outlet the society gives her. This forced silence leads to complete destruction; she desires narrating her story without any gender restrictions placed on her. Therefore, this partial silencing causes her destruction. Foster situates Eliza as the primary narrator of her story through her own letters; her letters, except for two, are addressed to her female companions, especially her closest friend Lucy Freeman. Foster's novel raises questions about the republican ideology of community and the emerging liberalist discourse of the autonomous individual as well as the place of women in the public sphere. Eliza, for example, exercises a desire to be an individual subject, but in order to pursue that autonomy, she must reject the republican privileging of the collective. This rejection, in Foster's novel, ultimately leads to her ruin, but Eliza does *not* reject the idea of a female collective; in fact, she positions female friendship above the institution of marriage. The republican community of women, however, imposes the idea of marriage onto Eliza, causing her to revolt against the type of republican collective.

The republican ideology promoted a separation between the private and the public spheres and the republican woman upheld the private, domestic sphere, where the conjugal family operated. However, Jurgen Habermas complicates this ideology by finding the overlap between the private and public. He argues that the "private people relate to each other in [the bourgeois public sphere] as a public" (28). The private individual converses in the public, thereby shaping the public's opinion and perception; the private individual, in a sense, collectively maintains the public. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon continues this argument by showing how the private individual needs public recognition to gain an individual identity (*Gender* 119).

In other words, the public creates the individual. In Foster's novel, these republican ideals of maintaining a distinction between spheres also blurs, showing the interaction between the public and private. John Locke's theories on private property and female consent also shape the republican form of thought. According to Locke, private property results from an individual's own labor (26). In this sense, women should be allowed to claim ownership over their bodies and their physical labor. Instead, their fathers or husbands possess it. Locke's theory reveals the injustice women face in this republican society.

In the eighteenth century, Locke's and Rousseau's ideas concerning self-ownership and consent validated the reasons to establish republican governments, especially in North America. These republican governments controlled the rights of women, especially with marriage and their sexual relations with men. As Gillian Brown notes, Rousseau's concepts of female consent played an important role in connection with seduction and rape; in public places, where witnesses were present, people assumed that the woman consented to the rape because no one heard her voice, which would indicate her opposition (630). According to this consent theory, a coquette willingly places herself in a dangerous position and the result had to be punishment for her consent for her immoral actions. While Foster does use the typical seduction plot, which is obvious by the novel's title, and punishes the coquette at the end, she alters the well-known story in order to argue against women automatically consenting, against the female body representing true desire, and ultimately against the ideology surrounding the republican lady. Brown places Hannah Foster with other eighteenth-century women's rights advocates, such as Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Judith Sargent Murray, who adamantly opposed the association of the term *coquette* with deception (628). Like these other women, Foster worked against the well-known definition of a coquette and attempted to reveal the flaws with the typical seduction novel by using that same convention to invert it. Mrs. Richman, the woman Eliza is staying with in America, asserts that Eliza is an "object of seduction" for Sanford, which upsets her, so she elaborates by saying: "I do not think you seducible; nor was Richardson's Clarissa, till she made herself the victim, by her own indiscretion" (38). Through this statement, Foster evokes a well-known text of the time, one that the reader would instantly recognize. Samuel Richardson uses female protagonists like Clarissa and Pamela to redefine women's desire and to liberate the eighteenth-century woman from her political chains through gaining agency over their own words. Richardson inserts Pamela's voice, through her words, into the sexual contract

with Mr. B. Her written consent allows her to give herself as an exchange with another male, thereby exerting ownership and agency over her own physical body.¹ With Eliza, Foster creates a similar character—one who will challenge the limited social and public spheres assigned to women through her body and words. In Foster’s novel, Eliza believes that Mr. Boyer will “seduce [her] into matrimony” (66). This statement demonstrates Foster’s reversal from the usual notion of seduction. She takes the concepts of coquette, rake, and republican marriage and challenges the assumed roles and outcomes of these positions. For Eliza, marriage and the republican ideology become more threatening to her than her coquettish tendencies.

The first letter in the text, which Eliza writes to Lucy, informs the reader that Eliza did conform to the republican ideal of womanhood by forming an engagement with Mr. Haly, “a man of worth” and “real substantial merit” (5). However, his untimely death releases Eliza again from the threat of martial chains, and her parents send her to America to improve her spirits and her chance at obtaining another fitting husband. She confesses in this letter that Mr. Haly’s “fate is unalterably [...and] happily fixed”; he lived the life to which she hopes that her “last end maybe like [that]” (6). She hopes his life and death will make an impression upon her and “teach [her] the fading nature of all sublunary enjoyments, and the little dependence which is to be placed on earthly felicity” (6). She sails for America hoping to cultivate “the disposition of [her] mind” (6). Interestingly, her words indicate her joy at having a chance to live a full life and improve her mind rather than her distress at her loss of a potential husband, who would have offered her a position within society.

Society views Eliza as a coquette; her alleged coquetry results in social scorn and ultimately in her death. Eliza confesses that “these *bewitching charms* of mind have a tendency to keep my mind in a state of perturbation” (12, emphasis mine). Eliza adopts military language when she writes to Lucy informing her “again of conquests,” a topic about which she cannot remain silent. The conquest refers to her acquisition of Mr. Boyer’s attention the previous day. By referring to gaining the attention of men as conquests, Eliza uses men as objects she can capture and control, a position men usually occupy when talking of possessing women. Women become their property. Eliza inverts this language by assuming the role of being in control. Like a military officer who goes into battle and captures others, she possesses the men with her charms.

In the eighteenth century, people equated the ability to control one's body with social responsibility; in other words, self-recognition was part of the social contract of the wider community. This type of rationale sets women and black men apart from the rest, because their bodies were supposedly inferior to white men's. Men, as C. Leiren Mower mentions, claimed that women and black men contained small, childlike skulls and other physical deficiencies that limited their capacity to act in a rational manner (318). This assumption reveals the power of physical evidence—the body—to eighteenth-century citizens. Bodily signs displayed the true moral value of a woman. Eliza's body reflects her coquettish nature, and the community uses her physical actions to reprimand her. Within a society that privileges masculine reason, the men and the women, who uphold this patriarchal society, want to possess and control Eliza's body because as a woman, she is incapable of exercising rational self-regulation. The men long to gain possession over her by seducing her or by forcing her to enter into a marriage contract with them; after Eliza announces her desire to avoid marriage and maintain her freedom, the women surrounding her attempt to control Eliza's body and her behavior in order to force her into compliance with the social contract of the republican society. Eliza resists others' claims of authority over her body and continues to assert agency over herself. After Mrs. Richman lectures Eliza on the proper man she should desire and of the dangers of a known rake like Peter Sanford, Eliza quickly writes to Lucy that while she expects Mrs. Richman and the rest of the community to comment on her suitors, she retains the right of choice. Until she finds a man *she* desires, she declares, "I shall continue to subscribe my name" (22). Eliza is unwilling to concede to the marriage contract unless it is her choice and not that of the other women in the community. Eliza is aware that marriage will enslave her and that her community constantly judges her actions and prevents her complete freedom. Therefore, this republican society enslaves her either way. She recoils "at the thought of immediately forming a connection, which must confine [her] to the duties of domestic life, and make [her] dependent for happiness, perhaps too, for subsistence, upon a class of people, who will claim the right of scrutinizing every part of [her] conduct; and by censuring those foibles, which [she is] conscious of not having prudence to avoid, may render me completely miserable" (29). This passage demonstrates Eliza's awareness of her current situation within the republican community. In marriage, she will lose her self-control and identity not only to her husband but also to the entire community of his people. They will criticize her conduct and, as a result, will possess a degree of control over her body, which

symbolizes the physical manifestation of her moral conduct. The communities of women who condemn Eliza for her coquettish airs and want to gain control over her (un)republican body form a collective female chorus, preaching to her about the values of a republican lady. Eliza, as a woman of the republic, should enter the private, domestic sphere through heterosexual marriage; only this action will create solidify her identity with the public sphere of the republic. This female choir, then, serves as the public opinion that wants to reform her. Only through the individual's collective—public—opinion can Eliza become a Republican Mother—a private individual. Eliza desires to maintain control over her body and actions and cannot allow this female community of critical voices, which becomes a female choir for her, to take possession over her body.

Mrs. Richman, Lucy, and the other women and men read Eliza's body and her actions as a text; they objectify her body without caring about her inner desires. The community has a performed idea of how a virtuous woman behaves and looks, and since Eliza's physical text does not *conform* to the ideal, she needs to be *reformed*. Because Eliza's actions do not coincide with the ideals established under the republic society, the women never listen to Eliza's words; instead, they apply all of their attention to altering her actions in relation to men. According to Mower, "eighteenth-century culture simultaneously demanded both superembodiment and disembodiment" (319). People's bodies reveal the true nature of the self; however, the latter claim refers to the ability to detach oneself from one's body in order to allow the body to become the ultimate objectification and proof of the self's moral virtue, thereby, through a form of asceticism, the mind and body split. Therefore, Eliza's culture imposes certain expectations of feminine virtues on her body, but rather than conform to society's interpretation of her physical body, Eliza disrupts this notion of literally reading her moral virtue through her physical body by claiming possession over her body and using her body to communicate what she wants. She does not allow the culture to write or construct her body in a manner that conforms to the traditional role for a female. Instead, she publicly communicates her resistance to engaging herself in a marriage that will deny her freedom over her body and self. John Locke contends that the physical labor of people's body results in their ownership over the production of that labor (26). In other words, people's labor becomes their private property. Mower suggests that a wife's laboring body upholds and undercuts Locke's theory by exemplifying "both the labored object

and the laboring subject” (327). Women’s labor becomes the private property of their husbands or fathers rather than becoming their own.

The new Republic excluded women from the political realm and forced them to form their own separate community in what Linda Kerber refers to as “a woman’s domain” (7). Within this domain, women maintained their domestic duties of performing household chores and raising the children. Within this realm, women contributed to the revolution by running the house while the men fought for freedom and by spinning thread for cloth manufactures. Through these domestic duties, women became an important part of the political realm. Even though the people of the new Republic refused to admit that a wife and a mother could also be an independent political being, the few who believed that women could be both had to find a way to convince the others that political behavior in a woman did not threaten the domestic domain. Therefore, as Kerber notes, the term *Republican Motherhood* became the compromise ideal, where a woman through her domestic duties at home could be also claimed to be patriotic (36). This term blurred the distinction between domestic and political, allowing women to have some political role in the revolution. However, this term did not simply erase the exclusion of women from the political sphere. According to Kerber, women adopted a restrained, deferential, political role while the men fought against this deferential attitude (185). Women had to invent their own political identity while still remaining subjects to their fathers and husbands, and the ideal of Republican Motherhood became their solution.

Escaping this restrictive atmosphere she experiences in England, Eliza hopes for a new type of freedom in the American colonies. However, the American colonies prove to be no better than British imperialism. By having Lucy remain in England and Eliza travel to the American colonies, where she encounters a new group of women, a comparison can be made about the ideals of a woman in both England and America. The women on both sides of the Atlantic chastise Eliza for the same reasons; they all want her to conform to the ideals of a woman of the republic and enter into a marriage contract. This similarity of critiquing Eliza for her social and sexual freedom demonstrates the influence the British had over the mind-set of the colonies. Even though the citizens of the colonies struggle to form a separate identity, as Michael Warner argues, the American creoles sustained an awareness of the British imperial culture (56). The ideals and morals of a republican lady did not differ on either side of the Atlantic. Eliza’s relocation to the colonies does not grant her any more freedom than when she lived at home.

These republican women leave Eliza unsatisfied, forcing her into the company of men. Claire Pettengill interprets Eliza's ruin as a failure to practice the values of "sisterhood in separate sphere" (199). Pettengill also sees the ideological contradictions in this sisterhood. On the one hand, what republican women in Foster's novel reject is the liberating force driving Eliza, thereby reinforcing the ideal of republican mother and wife. The female society as a collective constantly encourages Eliza to marry Mr. Boyer and settle into the assumed role of a republican lady. By refusing to marry, Eliza positions herself outside the social structure. At the same time, the sphere of sisterhood contains a revolutionary, even "protofeminist function by placing ultimate value on women's experience" (Stern 74). Foster demonstrates this ideological contradiction throughout her novel. Eliza longs for a sphere of sisterhood that supports her decision not to marry *and* for a social structure that will allow her to participate in the public realm without having to enter it through the guise of a domestic wife and mother.

Eliza, therefore, longs to have the social and sexual freedom of men and enjoys their company, but the circle of women in her life only remind her of the republican ideal she is supposed to uphold. Kerber argues that sexual style is an adjunct of political style, so Eliza's desire for sexual freedom correlates with the limited political freedom granted to women of the Republic (20). Upon Eliza's arrival in America, she sees Mr. Boyer, a highly regarded gentleman of the town; Eliza becomes intrigued and filled with mirth at seeing him, which induces her to talk to Mrs. Laiton in order to obtain his name. However, Mrs. Laiton, a republican woman, gently reminds Eliza of her recently deceased fiancé, thereby discouraging Eliza's individual desire for freedom. She encourages her to uphold her position in the community rather than freely showing her true desires so shortly after her fiancé's death. As Eliza writes to Lucy, Mr. Boyer quickly rescues her by relieving her "from the impertinence of [her] female companion" (9). Eliza longs to act freely as she wants rather than adhering to the harmonizing song of republican responsibility, which the republican women, the female choir, echo throughout the novel in an attempt to *reform* her behavior. This scene illustrates Eliza's undesirable choices of embracing a sisterhood that does not allow for autonomous freedom. Ultimately, Eliza's failure lies in her inability to embrace the republican ideal of a female community; however, the female community stands against individual freedom and supports the republican woman, who lies outside the realm of private freedom and choice. Eliza asks Lucy why she should forgo seeing Peter Sanford "merely to gratify those friends who pretend to be better judges of my happiness

than [she is herself]" (86). She understands that the women in her community promote the virtues of a Republican Mother above the interests and freedom of individual women. Foster's novel demonstrates the inadequacies of the two dissenting sides of woman's place in the public sphere; in the end, Eliza fails to become a free individual and fails to find a female community that can understand her position.

Only the men, especially Sanford, understand the position Eliza wants to occupy within the American colonies. Even Mr. Boyer acknowledges that Eliza "sacrificed her own inclination to [her parents'] pleasure" by agreeing to marry a man she did not choose (11). He recognizes the desire to choose one's own life rather than having to sacrifice one's freedom to conform to society's expectations. However, he also understands that the social structure requires him to marry a suitable wife, which he intends to do. The social institution exhibits a strong power over the individuals within this community, which indicates a shift from political control to social control. Dillon explains this shift in terms of the seventeenth-century fear of losing religious and political order—emblemized by images of a headless body—to an eighteenth-century rejection of order imposed on the colony from England. The American Revolution literally removed the head of England—the King—from the political body of America and turned the power over to the people (*Gender* 117). Using the story of Ichabod Crane, Dillon continues to trace this shift, claiming that the bond of marriage displaces this fear of a headless political nation by the early nineteenth century. While some may claim that the political and domestic operate within separate spheres, Dillon disputes this assumption—at least in relation to the 1790s—when "contested models of marriage and contested models of the political body were much more visibly entwined with one another" (*Gender* 118).

The 1790s evokes the revolutionary period across the Atlantic—a time when people reassessed political and individual freedoms. In America, the power switched from the King to the people, yet the larger community—the public—accounts for the creation of the individual. Therefore, during the eighteenth century, as Dillon notes, "images of the body politic were radically reconfigured" (*Gender* 117). As Americans turned from political tyranny, a form of social tyranny began to emerge. The social institution of marriage replaced the headless political body, thereby calming the fear of the people. The new social head of the nation, which took the form of marriage contracts, created individuals and conditioned them to the public sphere; the issue of gender materializes under the new social head of marriage, as the body becomes

gendered. Therefore, the political body and marriage merge as the power of the nation shifts, and with this merger, gender becomes paramount in understanding the individual's new definition of freedom and power. Foster's novel explores the reconfiguration of gender roles and the socially imposed marriage contract. Eliza rejects and distances herself from marriage, a social form of power, in the same way that the colonists literally separated themselves from the King of England, who represented another form of sovereign power. The other women in the community uphold the marriage contract, which sets Eliza apart from them. While the men, like Mr. Boyer, understand Eliza's desire to be free from societal control, they also comply with the demands of the public sphere in order to become recognized individuals within the community. Unlike Boyer and the other women and like Eliza, Peter Sanford rejects the institution of marriage, so Eliza feels instantly attracted to him.

Eliza's and Peter's similar desire for freedom allows them to develop a close friendship and distances Eliza from her connection with Lucy, who used to epitomize an ideal homosocial friend. In childhood, Lucy and Eliza had embodied the perfect friendship. Writers and philosophers articulate various definitions of ideal friendship. However, a common thread of seeing a friend as a second self, as one who displays "a reflective homonormativity that borders on interchangeability" emerges; the friends reflect each other, providing a mirror image.² This mirror image transcends other forms of relationship because this type of friendship coincides with the person's own desires and needs. The friends share a similar understanding of their world as well as certain expectations from that world. Therefore, the friends support each other, and they form the perfect community within each other. Throughout childhood and into adulthood, Lucy and Eliza had mirrored each other in their desires. However, Lucy, with her upcoming marriage, no longer desires individual freedom like Eliza. Lucy's impending marriage does produce a distance between the two; their ideal friendship can no longer exist. They only maintain contact through letters. As Ivy Schweitzer notes, Foster's decision to use the epistolary form illustrates the isolation of women from their social networks through marriage; the only form of communication women can have after marriage is through a textual exchange such as the one Lucy and Eliza share (115). Moreover, the letters enable Lucy to instruct Eliza, who exhibits signs of not upholding her place in society, which is to marry a respectable man. As Lucy and the American circle of women—Mrs. Richman and Julia Granby—fail to provide Eliza with the friendship she seeks, she turns her attention to Peter Sanford, who mirrors Eliza in many ways.

Even his language in describing marriage parallels Eliza's words. Sanford claims his parents "intend to *shackle* [him] in the bonds of matrimony" (34; emphasis mine), just as earlier Eliza tells Lucy about her views on marriage: "I am young, gay, volatile. A melancholy even has lately extricated me from those *shackles*, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me then enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize" (13; emphasis mine). Eliza only agrees to marriage, which she equates with slavery, out of filial obedience. Both Eliza's and Sanford's use of the term *shackle* illustrates their mirrored position within the social structure. They adopt abolitionist language when describing the institution of marriage, which they cannot escape. Female authors, like Foster, evoked pity by adopting the language of abolitionists and aligning the white women with the condition of slaves; feminists used the language of slavery to encode white women's oppression without actually condemning colonial slavery itself (Ferguson 23). Foster assumes the language of slavery to only demonstrate the restrictive role of women within marriage; this abolitionist language conveys her message about women, yet she does not actually want to promote the abolitionist movement. Instead, she uses it as a technique to focus on her main point about the oppression of white women in the patriarchal construct of marriage.

Eliza and Sanford possess more than just similar speech; they behave in the same manner, desire independence from marriage, and inspire fear in others with their revolutionary actions. Lucy and the other women in society accuse Eliza of having coquettish airs, a quality that aligns her even more closely with Sanford. Even the men view Eliza as a female rake; Selby, Mr. Boyer's friend, advises him to stop pursuing Eliza before he is made "the dupe of a coquette" and gently reminds him of Pope's statement about women's being rakes at heart (54). Selby's words position Eliza in a masculinized position as rake comparable to Sanford. Eliza also agrees with Selby's assertion by writing to Mrs. Richman about her desire to "[sow] all of [her] wild oats" before attempting to make a tolerable wife (68). Schweitzer notes this expression is usually reversed for men and links Eliza with "indulgence, anarchy, and the dubious gender 'privileges' exercised by Sanford" (119). By assuming this masculine role, Eliza attempts to break the gender boundaries set in place by society in order to gain a social and sexual freedom.

The fear associated with the term *coquette* stems from the blurring of feminine qualities with masculine traits. Eliza embodies this masculinized female, who stands in opposition to the republican mother. In the eighteenth century, to be autonomous meant to be male; women only existed as mothers and wives (Kerber 27). This autonomous, masculine position threatened the

domestic domain on which the patriarchal system relied. The coquette assumes the freedom of men by claiming ownership over her own body and rejecting the notion of marriage, which makes her the property of a husband. In this sense, women use the freedom allotted to males in order to challenge the patriarchal authority over them. Trying to steer Eliza away from her coquettish tendency, Lucy criticizes the women involved in the circus: “To see a woman depart so far from the female character, as to assume the masculine habit and attitudes; and appear entirely indifferent, even to the externals of modesty, is truly disgusting, and ought not to be countenanced by our attendance, much less by our approbation” (113). Eliza’s response to Lucy about various forms of public entertainment like the circus demonstrates her insight into the limited positions available for women: “I think it a pity they have not female managers for the theatre” (124). Women cannot occupy a role in the public sphere without being the private property of a man. Only males occupy the position as the managers of the theatre. Even Mrs. Richman recognizes women’s investment in the political sphere. After another woman makes a comment about how politics is not the business of women, Mrs. Richman replies that women are a part of the community and are affected by politics just like men and asks, “Why then should the love of our country be a masculine passion only?” (44). Mrs. Richman’s question reveals the unsatisfying political role women occupy within the new Republic. As a representation of a Republic Mother, she maintains a limited political role, yet she also realizes her deferent position to men. While Mrs. Richman does question the limited role of women, only Eliza attempts to change this position for herself. Eliza, like the females in the circus, also departs from the female characteristic of modesty by demanding her freedom. Rather than spending her time in pursuit of a marriageable partner like Mr. Boyle, Eliza spends her time with Peter Sanford because she enjoys his company.

In addition to being hyperfeminized and masculinized, the coquette also contains an element of sexuality and sexual aggression that complicates the clear division between gender roles. Eliza desire sexual freedom, and eventually she enters into a sexual relationship with Peter. Eliza’s and Peter’s sexual relationship does not occur until after he marries and his wife produces a stillborn son. Again, Foster alters the typical seduction plot, where seduction occurs before marriage. After seducing the woman, men escape punishment through marriage, leaving the coquette alone to be punished through death. After entering into a sexual relationship with Eliza, Peter’s wife leaves him because they never loved each other, and he claims that he is “debarred

from every kind of happiness” (166). Eliza, after this sexual encounter, turns inward, removing herself from society. Foster’s reversal of the seduction plot, I argue, reveals the failures of the republican society, which does not allow sexual liberation for women. In this failed republic, women are not capable of reproducing future generation, serving as a warning that the future republican must change or it will also die.

The social order does not allow for the rebellious and sexual nature of Eliza and Sanford. While Sanford has more social and sexual freedom as a man, he also feels the constant threat of marriage. Dillon notes the importance of women within heterosexual marriage; as property of their husbands, they confer on them a crucial status of masculine autonomy and agency within the liberal public sphere (*Gender* 143). Peter knows that he needs a wife in order to become a respected man of the public sphere, yet he does not want to give up his freedom. He admits that marriage is not a part of his plan and states that whenever he does “submit to be shackled, it must be from a necessity of mending [his] fortune” (23). Like Eliza, he aligns marriage with slavery and rejects it. However, he realizes that he must marry in order to fulfill his role in society and be financially secure. Marriage, for Peter, resembles a business transaction, and neither Eliza nor Peter wants to enter into that type of a contract.

Even though both stand outside the republican social order by refusing to marry, Peter’s position differs from Eliza’s in that he participates in the public realm of society—a place not accessible for women. For this reason, Peter understands that he eventually must marry a suitable girl who can advance his economic and political standing in society. Placing Sanford within the political realm, Schweitzer mentions his embodiment of the “dangerous tendency—anarchy—duly feared during the volatile decade of the 1790s” (118). Schweitzer’s reference to the volatile decade obviously refers to the critical time period following the American Revolution and during which the people of the newly independent America began to form their government. They no longer wanted a king; however, the idea of anarchy, still fresh in their minds, remained a constant threat. For this reason, following the republican ideals established by the American colonists became important; any divergence from these expected social norms aroused fear and anxiety—the threat of revolution always looming. Sanford stands outside the conventions of the public sphere by challenging his desire to marry or control himself around Eliza. Eliza also threatens the republican values by blurring gender boundaries and placing her personal freedom

above the concerns of the republic. Therefore, both of them evoke fear in the other members of their community and within their respective circles of friends.

Eliza and Peter represent two characters who threaten the basis of republican society in the American colonies; therefore, the others fear them and want to exert control over them. Foster uses the turmoil surrounding this revolutionary period to draw attention to the gender problems created and continued within the American colonies. Eliza and the other women, like the slaves in the Caribbean islands, contributed to the political and economical system yet were excluded from participating within it. Gillian Brown argues that through Eliza Wharton's history, Foster "restages the question of female character as an alternating conflict and consensus about consent in the early years of American nationhood" (636). Brown even calls Eliza a "republican heroine" for making her own choices about her life (636). Throughout the novel, Eliza constantly informs Lucy that she longs for freedom, which she "so highly prize[s]" (13). Freedom as a prize to be won provides the foundation for the formation of the United States, and in this respect, Eliza represents the ideal republican, yet as a woman, this freedom is unobtainable. This quality of Eliza connects her to American nationhood. However, she cannot represent all Americans; gender inequalities disrupt this ideal. Foster's novel demonstrates the impending need to reanalyze the forming republic in connection with gender.

Foster repositions gender in the framework of the revolutions by using the well-known seduction story formula for her novel. In this formula, marriage becomes the central desire of all women, and the coquette is punished for her refusal to act on this desire and her inability to refuse the seduction of a male rake. However, in Foster's novel, marriage—as opposed to seduction—is constructed as a temptation that Eliza must avoid. Instead, she wants to choose friendship, "a historically rooted social alternative [to marriage] and the contemporary political equivalent of independence" (Schweitzer 111). Her circle of friends cannot understand this desire for an alternative to marriage, so they as a collective fail to facilitate this possible independence for Eliza. This failure results in Eliza attempting to form a friendship with Peter, which also fails under this republican society. When Mrs. Richman says that Eliza's friends, concerned with her welfare, wish to see her "suitably and agreeably connected," Eliza replies, "I hope my friends will never again interpose in my concerns of that nature" (13).

Eliza's hopes for independence, however, remain unfulfilled as the chorus of women continues to assume control over her body and her concerns. The women's attempts to control

demonstrate the shift from the private body to the public I have discussed above. Eliza's private concerns become public property, so the public community of women can scrutinize and alter them. Drawing on John Locke, Mower notes an important distinction between owning the body and owning the laboring body; for Mower, the management of the labored body represents self-ownership, and he mentions the unstable position of women and slaves because of the vulnerability of their labored bodies to be owned by white males rather than themselves (325). As with female slaves who attempted to obtain control over their bodies, Eliza longs to take possession of her labored body and inscribe her own written text on it. Moreover, she wants to publicly display her self-ownership in a culture that does not allow women to have that kind of freedom. It is important to note the distinction between slaves' laboring bodies and Eliza's. The slaves exert physical and sexual labor within the colonial system. Eliza, on the other hand, only exerts a social and sexual labor with the American colonies. Through her social interactions and conversations and her sexual relations with Peter, she wants to possess control over her body's sexual and social reproduction. The chorus, obviously, indicates the culture's expectation of all women, including Eliza, to uphold the marriage contract. Furthermore, the chorus illustrates that the private body becomes public property if people refuse to regulate themselves according to the public desire; society will exert control over the individual self in order to maintain the established rules of liberalism. Because Eliza does not consent to the marriage contract, the chorus of females tries to persuade her to reconsider. Rather than accepting Eliza's decisions, the public opinion—the female chorus—insists that she conform to the republican ideals, thereby moving her private body into the public. When Eliza decides to pursue happiness over conforming to society's ideals, the chorus of women attempts to take over control of her body by controlling her actions.

Within her community of friends, Lucy, as she fears, slowly disappears from her life. While she maintains a friendship through letters, Lucy is no longer available to comfort Eliza or be her support. Eliza predicts this separation, and for this reason she loathes the idea of marriage. Rather than becoming the property of her husband, she wants to maintain a community of women who support each other as they attempt to gain freedom and legal rights within the community. At Lucy's marriage, everyone, pleased by the marriage, wishes the couple the best. Eliza's tongue "only was silent" because "the idea of a separation perhaps, of an alienation of affection, by means of [Lucy's] entire devotion to another, cast an involuntary gloom over [her]

mind” (70). Eliza, unlike the other women, realizes the restrictive role marriage plays in the republican society. After she is “undone” by the loss of Mr. Boyer and her chance to conform to the liberal society, she writes to Lucy insisting that only a friend “in whom [she] could repose confidence and with whom [she] could freely converse, and advise, on this occasion, would be an unspeakable comfort” (105-06). However, Lucy as a married woman can no longer fulfill the role of a female companion for Eliza, so she sends her female companion Julia Granby to take her place.

Eliza realizes the slavery of marriage, and she rejects being confined to a domestic sphere. Instead, she longs for an open social life. Even Mrs. Richman, the ideal Republican Mother, perceives the limits of a domestic life, saying that all of her happiness “is centered within the limits of [her] own walls” (97). The domestic life does not allow for freedom; instead, the walls of the house become a cage for married women. Dillon argues that Eliza, the tragic heroine of the novel, “emerges brilliantly into the social space of bourgeois civility” (*Gender* 187). However, her failure—within the republican society—lies in her misconception of this social space; rather than seeing this social space as one that will gender her through heterosexual marriage, she views it as open. Eliza desires a homosocial community over heterosexual marriage; an effective homosocial community would maintain a sense of freedom while the latter merely restricts her to a domestic space. Eliza declares her preference for friendship in a letter to Lucy:

Marriage is the tomb of friendship. It appears to me a very selfish state. Why do people, in general, as soon as they are married, centre all their cares, their concerns, and pleasures in their own families? former acquaintances are neglected or forgotten. The tenderest ties between friends are weakened, or dissolved; and benevolence itself moves in a very limited sphere. (24)

Her reference to marriage as the death of friendship makes the ending of the novel ironic. Even though Eliza avoids marriage, the novel ends with her death and only a gravestone marker remains as proof of her existence.

At the beginning of the novel, Eliza eagerly enters into the public sphere and attempts to keep her freedom. However, her desire to remain unmarried forces the community to position her as an Other. Because the women do not provide her with a supportive community, she shifts her desire from entering freely into the public to more private modes of communication. She moves

from publicly displaying her body and her voice—through correspondence in letters—to turning inward to her own body as the stage for acquiring her desire for freedom. She ultimately becomes her sole-proprietor rather than relying on the republican community. This shift reveals a paradox. Turning inward to her body constricts Eliza as much as being in Mrs. Richman’s house. This form of sole-proprietorship is not an answer to her problem. It is an alternative restriction, but one that does allow her the sole-proprietorship over her body. Therefore, I interpret Eliza’s physical decline, at the ending of the novel, as a positive action rather than a negative consequence of her actions. Her decline does not result from inappropriate desire. Instead, she still exerts agency over her body by *choosing* to withdraw from a society that will not support her desires. She admits to Lucy that “the agitating scenes, through which [she has] lately passed, have broken [her] spirits, and rendered [her] unfit for society” (98). Peter, on the other hand, conforms to society’s expectations by marrying a suitable woman. After Peter’s marriage, Eliza goes to see him and informs him that she “is not now what she once was” (123). Seeing Eliza’s visit alone with a married man as a compromising position, Julia quickly comes to rescue her, fearing what others will say. Eliza replies that she does not care about the opinions of others because “it is an ill-natured, misjudging world” and she refuses to sacrifice in order to please it (123).

Once Eliza realizes that she cannot remain in the public sphere as a free, single woman, she retreats from public view and its criticism and finds solace within her own body. Mower claims that “this shift registers an authoritative *extension* and *expansion* of her proprietary claims” (335). The lack of a female community forces Eliza to turn inward and to stop writing. After Julia’s arrival and the encounter with Mr. Sanford, Eliza claims she “must lay aside [her] pen; for [she] can write nothing else” (110). This scene proves to Eliza that she cannot continue to live freely in her community. No one will understand her desires, and she refuses to comply with a world that misjudges her. At this point Eliza abdicates even her limited powers of narration, and Julia begins to correspond with Lucy on Eliza’s welfare, in effect, taking over the voice and narrative of Eliza. When Eliza does correspond with others, her letters are very brief. At one point, she addresses a letter to both Lucy and Julia rather than writing separate ones. She no longer desires to voice her thoughts in the public—a public that will only misunderstand her.

The women inscribe Eliza’s physical characteristics as a text to understand her desires. Brown notes the common assumption during the eighteenth century, apparent in Jean-Jacques

Rousseau's writings, that "the female body and its operations [...] provide a supplementary—and contradictory—language to a woman's verbal articulations" (629). Women can deceive with their mouths but not with their bodies, so people read the female as a text in order to fully understand her true moral position, thereby deeming her speech as deceptive and unnecessary. Eliza tells Julia that she has "studiously concealed every symptom of indisposition. Whether it were any real disorder of body, or whether it arose from her depression of spirits, she could not tell; but supposed they operated together, and mutually heightened each other" (138). As her body weakens, she mentions the possibility of her mind and body mutually affecting each other rather than the two being separate. Her voice and body, in other words, communicate the same message instead of her body's being the true text and her mouth's being deceptive as in Rousseau's description. Upon Julia's return, Eliza merely sits alone without moving, and Julia writes to Lucy that a great change has come over Eliza. Eliza's desire to remain in control of her body does not change; instead, her desire to publicly display her body for others to criticize alters. Finding the public a restrictive audience, she relies on herself. Julia and Lucy observe this decline in her physical form and assume her coquettish desires have ruined her. After allowing Peter to have full possession over her body, Eliza insists that Julia notice her "decaying frame, [her] faded cheek, and tottering limbs," as evidence of her withdrawal from society to a place where she will "be insensible to censure and reproach" (142). Instead of understanding Eliza's frustration with the society's misreading of her body, Julia tells her that she cannot rest with the guilt on her head. Again, the community of women fails her. Gillian Brown argues that Foster's novel reveals that agency alone is not enough (627). Even though Eliza exerts agency over her life, her ultimate desire to live publicly as she wants fails.

Her body continues to be read as a text and affirmation of her consensual downfall with her pregnancy. In the eighteenth-century seduction story, the coquette's desires result in her pregnancy and usually her death in childbirth. Thinking of the Lockean consent theory, Brown states that the pregnancy becomes the visual proof of consent, and this immoral consent accomplishes both creating and destroying bodies (635). While Foster does continue with the characteristic punishment of the coquette, she complicates it by allowing married women to suffer the fate of losing their own children as well as punishing Peter, the rake of the novel. All of the children in the novel die. Even Mrs. Richman, the icon of a Republican Mother, loses her daughter without any explanation. Peter Sanford's wife gives birth to a stillborn son while other

women never give birth. Therefore, if all the children die, then death through childbirth or death giving birth to a stillborn child cannot be punishment only for a coquette or for one who rebels against the republican ideals. Also, Foster punishes Peter Sanford, whereas typical seduction novels reserve the punishment for the women. After Eliza's death, Peter echoes Eliza's words by writing to his friend that he is "undone" and he knows that he will never "eradicate from [his] bosom the idea of her excellence; or the painful remembrance of the injuries [he had] done her! Her shade will perpetually haunt [him]!" (164-65). In addition to living with his guilt for his actions toward Eliza, his wife leaves him, forcing him to live alone. While Foster does use the other children's deaths to reverse the notion that pregnancy and witness provide evidence of the female's consent, I want to take this argument further to say that Foster also uses these reversals to demonstrate the failure of the republican ideal and reinforce the impossibility of women to continue without change.

In addition to Eliza losing her voice and allowing her body to become her retreat from the republican society that will not allow her the public freedom she desires, the novel ends with a reference to her gravestone, which has been written by the other women in Eliza's community. Only in death Eliza can no longer exert control over her body. She becomes malleable like the wax figures in the museum that Lucy idealizes. While alive, Eliza continued to exercise agency over her life; her assumption of being her sole-proprietor aligning her with the men, who legally possess self-ownership. Again, this calls to mind the circus, with its blurred gender distinctions, evokes fear and apprehension from Lucy. Instead, she prefers Mr. Bowen's museum. According to Mower, the wax figures in the museum maintain a realistic appearance while actually being "disembodied, fetishized objects" that are capable of being manipulated and reshaped (333). In death, Eliza's body becomes manipulated like the wax figures in the museum. Lucy and the women try to (re)shape Eliza's body because she fails to uphold the status as a republican lady. Eliza's mistake, in Lucy's eyes, is in wanting to enter the public sphere and roles allotted only to men; this desire for self-ownership and power masculinizes her and forces her to become an outsider to the society. However, Eliza does not give up her desire to become a wax object that can be remolded into what society expects or demands. Only in death can the female chorus reshape her body, thereby retelling her narrative.

In this weak position, the female community and chorus finally take control of her lifeless body and erect a marker bearing the inscription:

This humble stone, in memory of ELIZA WHARTON, is inscribed by her weeping friends, to whom she endeared herself by uncommon tenderness and affection. Endowed with superior acquirements, she was still more distinguished by humility and benevolence. Let candor throw a veil over her frailties, for great was her charity to others. She sustained the last painful scene, far from every friend; and exhibited an example of calm resignation. Her departure was on the 25th day of July, A.D.—, in the 37th year of her age, and the tears of strangers watered her grave. (169)

The novel ends with this record of Eliza's death, and her tombstone bears the words others use to describe it and her. Eliza's circle of female friends reconstructs her history with the gravestone; these words do not coincide with the narrative Eliza composes. Instead, as Brown notes, the words on the tombstone "recall less the history of Eliza Wharton than the 'truly republican' creed of female consent" (642). Like a history of the slaves, the female chorus of republican women disregards Eliza's history and creates a history that acquiesces to republican ideals. Schweitzer reads Foster's *The Coquette* as instructional, showing "a discourse of 'equalitarian friendship' as a social alternative to unequal and privatizing Federalist marriage" (107). Eliza fails to be a republican woman, and her friends fail to be an effective community of support for her. Foster, through these failures, warns the reader of the social structure in place in early America and shows the importance of maintaining female friendship and gaining freedom. While its citizens learned how the new nation would work, women needed to collectively assert themselves as being both domestic and political without having to rely on the marriage contract to provide them with an identity. Brown also argues that Foster opposes the notions of witnesses accounting for female consent by invalidating Eliza's witnesses; the conflicting opinions and viewpoints through the various characters, both male and female, along with the re-inscription of Eliza's narrative on her tombstone undermines their credibility as accurate witness to her consent or her desires (643).

Brown recognizes Foster's intention to "throw out evidence" associated with a woman always consenting and again this intention places her in a tradition, along with other feminists of the time period who would question or rearrange the well-known seduction stories (635). Foster uses this formula because she realizes her audience will quickly recognize and understand the plot; however, she redefines this seduction story in order to challenge the notion of gender and

the position of women in the eighteenth century. Moreover, she sets her story in the American colonies, a place where ideas of equality and freedom are being formulated and discussed. By aligning her novel with the tradition of seduction stories and the formation of the United States, Foster's text holds larger implications toward the incongruity between the reality of freedom for women and the idealized freedom desired for all Americans. The republic requires women to literally reproduce this patriarchal society, yet it excludes them from the public sphere and represses them socially and sexually. Foster's novel challenges this republican society. Through the deaths of all the children—not just Eliza's—Foster suggests the failure of the republic in relation to gender. This failure results in a republic that can no longer reproduce itself. Only by reassessing the gender inequalities will the American colonies have a chance of surviving.

CHAPTER THREE

SECRET COMMUNITIES: REBEL WOMEN IN LEONORA SANSAY'S *SECRET HISTORY*

Women writers' concern with the restricted role of women in the eighteenth-century public sphere can also be seen in the work of Leonora Sansay. For Sansay, women derive agency from their body, through language, and within female communities. Like Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*, her *Secret History* presents an all-female community and privileges women's independence. Sansay's novel, however, contrasts more sharply with the traditional seduction novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than Foster's. Using the Haitian Revolution as a backdrop, Sansay successfully reverses the depiction of women as silent and enslaved by portraying a female community where independent women fully gain their voice as they divorce themselves both literally and physically from men. The female body and the female community position themselves away from the gendered notion of being a silent figure only capable of reproducing the patriarchal society. As I will argue, her characters not only reverse this notion, but also demonstrate their capacity to sustain political revolution. Sansay's women organize a strong female community through the use of letters, and through the epistolary form, Sansay constructs a matriarchal society that contrasts with the established patriarchal society.

To begin, Sansay's title *Secret History* invokes the tradition of women's amatory fiction of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which the carnival setting or masquerade scene provides the opportunities for subversion. Carnivals and masquerades emerged in both the cultural life and the fictional texts of the time. The masquerade scenes, which authors like Fielding and Richardson incorporated in their novels, provided a different view of the nature of the culture as well as embodying a liberating escape from the status quo (Castle 904). During the masquerade, people successfully disguised themselves and their position; therefore, gender and class blurred, breaking the pre-established rules of the cultural society. Women, disguised as men, experienced sexual freedom, and with their distorted identity, they entered the public sphere and gained control over men. Masquerades also allowed members of both upper and lower classes to enter the scene on common ground. Therefore, masquerade and carnivals broke the traditionally established social hierarchy. In terms of gender and class, then, the emergence of females into male prescribed positions within the public sphere posed a threat to established cultural society. Terry Castle notes that the disappearance of the masquerade topos in fiction as

well as in cultural reality by the late eighteenth century correlates with the French Revolution; the rebellion and revolts which this revolution caused decreased the need for “the utopian reversals of masquerade” (913).³

Sansay, I argue, draws on this parallel to create a new type of masquerade novel. For Sansay, the Caribbean setting enhances a setting of a carnival or masquerade. The unknown setting of the Caribbean and the political unrest, which revolutions complicate, allow the characters in Sansay’s novel to build upon the traditional patriarchal society. Within the novel, only women are allowed to leave Cape Francois, in Saint Domingue; men have to seek disguises to escape. Even Clara’s French husband St. Louis disguises himself as a fisherman in order to sneak past the British soldiers; again, Sansay recalls the tradition of disguise masquerades, yet she reverses this topos by having mainly male characters rely on disguises to easily maneuver the islands. During the uprisings, Clara, accompanied by her sister Mary—the American narrator of the story, travel to around the islands for their protection. This traveling emulates the interaction between all the Atlantic, and in the various islands, Clara learns something new from each culture. At one point, they stop in Barracoa, where Clara assumes the costume of the Spanish; in this dress, “the beauty of the bosom, which is so carefully preserved by the French is lost,” and even though Clara looks beautiful in the costume, she “felt uncomfortable” (109). This scene exposes the feminine myth of power, proving that it is not a desirable solution. The disguise hides her bosom, a part of her female identity; only with her female body and language can she successfully exert control over a patriarchal society and break the myth of freedom, encouraged by the disguise. Therefore, the disguise makes Clara uncomfortable and does not allow her true freedom—a freedom she can only claim with her own body. Just as women could function as men when masked in male attire, Sansay’s females assume control over the male characters and position themselves as independent women. Instead of ending her novel with a suppressed female removing her “mask” in order to be reincorporated into a heterosexual union, Sansay reverses this conclusion and ends her novel with the potential for continued happiness in the company of women.

Sansay’s novel lies outside the normal boundaries of the Atlantic, both in positioning and in theme. Unlike in other traditional American or British seduction novels, women, in this text, possess the possibility of obtaining freedom and forming their own community. The Caribbean setting creates the rebellious environment that allows for this possibility as well as emphasizing

the importance the colonized world had on forming the new Republic. Ivy Schweitzer's brief mention of the revolutionary 1790s, as well as the fear of anarchy, has implications beyond the American Revolution, of course (118). Sansay's novel, set in the Caribbean colonies, also clearly invokes two other important revolutions that plagued the minds of the transatlantic: the American Revolution (1775-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1799). In relation to fear of rebellion and the importance of forming an effective collective, I will focus on the implication of these revolutions in relation to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and the text.

Michael Drexler states that three different perceptions of freedom emerged from the three great revolutions of the eighteenth century (Introduction 7). The American Revolution carried the idea of freedom as self-governance. While the French Revolution shared this idea, it remained within its geographical nation-state; therefore, the French overturned their monarch and altered the social structure, attempting to level out the class distinctions. With the Haitian Revolution—just concluding in 1808 when *Secret History* appeared—the motivational factors of the two other revolutions directly affected it. According to Drexler, the white planters on Saint Domingue wanted more political control in the French Assembly, and requested seats based on the population of the island—including free black men and black slaves—to obtain it (Introduction 8-9). Throughout all of the revolutions, the drive for political equality arose, and in the Haitian Revolution, the request to consider slaves as men while also viewing them as merely property, complicated the ideals of freedom and equality, which all three revolutions promoted—a problem that arises later in the United States and leads to civil war. Sansay's reference to the volatile period surrounding the 1800s clearly implies all three revolutions. The Haitian Revolution brought the issue of race directly to the forefront of the problem of freedom, and as Drexler argues it also “put the test to the philosophy, rhetoric, and practices of the revolutionary period” (Introduction 4). The American and French Revolutions fought for a contradictory freedom, an ideal equality that in reality could not exist without reconsidering the institution of marriage and the colonial system. Slavery and the limited social and sexual agency allotted to women undercut this ideal freedom, yet American and France could avoid dealing with it for the present. Because the patriarchal system was still intact, the white leaders focused on maintaining their economical and political independence from the other countries, and slavery was crucial to the economy—especially of the United States. The Haitian Revolution, however, demanded the attention of race in addition to political control and freedom from authority. In this revolution,

one race separated itself from white authority, thereby ending slavery within Haiti and repositioning race within the public and social realms.

Sansay not only chooses the Caribbean as her setting but she also uses the specifically historical event of the Haitian Revolution as the backdrop to her novel. Drexler discusses the intense socio-political change occurring during the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions. Although most writings focus on the latter revolution in terms of the liberation of Haiti's slave population, Sansay, in her novel, examines how the revolutionary environment affected marital and sexual relations.⁴ Sansay purposely chooses the location of her novels and, in doing so, invites readers to liken women's condition as slaves in marriage and as property of men. While Clara struggles for her freedom from her husband and all the men who want to seduce her, the slaves revolt against the European powers in control; thus, Sansay makes women and slaves interchangeable in their positions. Because the patriarchal society allows only a private, domestic space for women to occupy, women aligned themselves with slaves in order to emphasize their condition as property of men. Moira Ferguson argues that "anti-slavery protest in prose and poetry by Anglo-Saxon female authors contributed to the development of feminism over a two-hundred-year period" (3). Women align themselves with slaves while claiming to be separated by race, gender, and class; authors align female attributes with slaves in order to evoke pity. Women refer to their marriage status as being in chains; both slaves and women are treated as property. Some men viewed marriage as a market, and the laws under the patriarchal system considered women as subjects under their husbands. Even though women upheld the class and racial distinctions, they attacked the patriarchal power by overlapping their condition with slavery. Through anti-slavery discourse, women could transcend their prescribed social roles as "philanthropic domestic angels to become political activists" (Ferguson 299). Ferguson's argument focuses on the comparison of slavery and womanhood while also illustrating women's entrance into the political sphere.

Physical reproduction and social reproduction also merge in Sansay's novel between the creole culture of the Caribbean and the metropole culture of the European. For example, from the beginning, Sansay establishes a contrast between physical comforts and social comforts. The characters overcome the physical discomforts of the heat by the social company of others and various social entertainments. With this distinction between social and physical production, Sansay criticizes Europeans' societal customs and ideals. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon illustrates

how social reproduction resembles physical reproduction, in that Europeans view the creoles in economic terms in the colonies (“The Secret History” 15). With colonial expansion, Europeans feared the possible contamination of other cultures. In their minds, only Europeans, as the elite group, could engage in social entertainment. For them, the colonies—along with the Creole inhabitants—were only capable of economic reproduction, which, in turn, increased Europe’s capital and proved to increase their naïve hold over their superiority as a culture. Only Europe, as the Europeans think, can distinguish itself with culture and fashion. This parallel between social reproduction and physical reproduction of labor demonstrates the connection between gender and race. Europeans consider both women and slaves to be an economic investment. However, as Dillon argues, both are capable of contributing to the social reproduction of culture and fashion (“The Secret History” 15).

The European women concern themselves with social reproduction, distancing themselves from creole women, who cannot obtain this type of reproduction. As Benedict Anderson notes, the Creoles’ shared “fatality of trans-Atlantic birth” accounts for their shared fellowship, which led to a mutual national identity (57). The metropoloes separated themselves from the Creole colonists, which promoted their unity. Sansay’s mixtures of characters and cultures demonstrate the close connection the Creole share with the metropoloes as well as the distancing of the Creoles’ identity from Europe. The overlap in the cultures allowed the Creole nations to quickly form their own national identity and stable economy, yet the distinction of the metropoloes from the Creoles also aided in the separation of one nation from another. Anderson states that the climate and ecology had a direct impact on culture and character, which the Europeans used to strengthen their claim that the metropole differed from the Creole colonies (60). The Creoles stayed within their colonial territory, increasing their sense of “imagined community.” With the arrival of General Rochambeau, the different life between the metropolis and the Caribbean becomes evident:

Nothing is heard of but balls and parties. Monsieur D’Or give a concert every Thursday; the General in chief every Sunday: so that from having had no amusement we are in danger of falling into the other extreme, and of being satiated with pleasure. (33)

The life of the metropolis enters the Caribbean with the arrival of the French and English society, which undercuts Europeans’ assertion that colonialism only reproduced economically—not

socially. As Dillon argues, the creole “is precisely the individual who cannot, within colonial modernity, be socially reproduced” (“The Secret History” 15). Dillon acknowledges the unsuccessful attempts to form boundaries between the cultures, thereby maintaining their cultural distinction. With this notion of the Caribbean colonies only reproducing capital, the European culture should contrast with the life of the creoles. In Sansay’s novel, however, the women blur this distinction, ultimately showing a creole community capable of socially reproducing. Dillon argues that Sansay creates a creole novel and notes that the madras handkerchief provides a link between creole black women and creole white women.⁵ Because both England and France forbade women from wearing the handkerchief, it, Dillon contends, embodies an exclusively creole culture, which the white women, living in the Caribbean, acquire for themselves (“The Secret History” 16-8). Therefore, the connection between both white and black women in the Caribbean becomes an inter-racial female community, which ultimately develops into a creole community.

I want to extend this argument by mentioning the other parallels between white and black women in the novel. As I stated before, Sansay aligns women and slaves in order to show their status as property of the patriarchal society. Moreover, both white and black women undergo the violence of males. While traveling through the islands of the Caribbean, Mary and Clara discover several women who have experienced violence and cruelties at the hand of men. Mary reports one scene of barbarity when a girl of colour attempts to rescue a Frenchman from a mulatto, who wants to kill him, by offering all of her trinkets in exchange for his life. Mary describes the girl’s generous nature while showing the cruel nature of the mulatto:

She continued her entreaties in the most caressing tone, which for some time had no effect, when softening all at once, he said, I will not deprive you of your trinkets, not is it for the sum proposed that I relent, but for you alone, for to you I feel that I can refuse nothing. He shall be concealed, and guarded by myself till the moment of embarking; but, when he is out of danger, you must listen to me in your turn. (171)

The girl heard the mulatto’s words with “horror” (171). The mulatto wanted to possess the girl for himself and valued her more than money. Sansay’s having a mulatto, rather than a European man, treat the female as a commodity, eradicates the racial distinction and again positions both white and black women in a similar situation.

Clara finds herself in a similar situation; St. Louis treats Clara “with the most brutal violence” to the point where she finally escapes from his control. Therefore, both white and black women find themselves countering the tyrannical men, erasing the distinction between European women and creole women. Moreover, Sansay provides a contrast between the life of the metropolis—identified with Europe—and the life of the creole, and in the Caribbean setting these cultures blur, forming only a creole community among the women. C. L. R. James continues the notion of separate society interests by pointing out that Europeans feared the colonies and stayed away from them, allowing a manager or overseer to run their plantations; rather than risk being a creole, Europeans returned to the life of the metropolis in Europe (29). Through the women, Sansay capitalizes on this fear and shows the influence the Caribbean exerted over the Europeans, and in the process, she reproduces an inter-racial female community.

The Caribbean setting also illustrates the enslaved position and rebellious nature of both women and Africans. Even though women and Africans both occupy a position of private property, white women did occupy a higher status than slaves. For this reason, women and slaves sought different venues for gaining their voice and freedom from their own particular situations. While the slaves relied on a sense of African spirituality to collaborate and rebel against the Europeans, for example, women found escape in another form: writing letters. Through the epistolary form, women could experience a similar spiritual freedom.⁶ The letters allowed women to express their own independent voice without constraint and to organize themselves in a position to support each other and free themselves from the patriarchal society, creating their own matriarchal society. However, each group relied on forming its own communities to replace the established structure that positioned its members as “other.”

Sansay, like Foster, uses the epistolary form in constructing her female society; however, her epistolary form differs from more traditional eighteenth-century novels like *The Coquette*. As one sees in Foster’s novel, coquettish women threaten the safety of maternity, as defined in male hegemonic discourse, resulting in failed maternity. However, in defense of Clara’s actions, Mary states a reversal on this notion of coquette and the traditional notions of marriage and social reproduction:

It is true, Clara is said to be a coquette, but have not ladies of superior talents and attractions, at all times and in all countries been subject to that censure? Unless indeed theirs was the rare fortune of becoming early in life attached to a man

equal or superior to themselves! Attachments between people last through life, and are always new. Love continues because love has existed; interests create interests; parental are added to conjugal affections; with the multiplicity of domestic objects the number of domestic joys increase. In such a situation the heart is always occupied, and always full. For those who live in it their home is the world; their feelings, their power, their talents are employed. (222-23)

Dillon argues that through this statement and Mary's offer to include Aaron Burr in this alternate female community, Mary not only rejects marriage and social reproduction but also produces "a revolutionary ethos of social reproduction that is predicated on feminized creole values of mobility and internal sensibility" ("Secret History" 22). With Mary's revolutionary view on creating an alternate social reproduction, Sansay, I argue, distances her work from works like *The Coquette*; instead of producing a failed female or failed maternity, Sansay constructs a society based on a powerful view of maternity, where female values, regardless of race, allow the possibility of a shared community. Moreover, this female community successfully shows the interconnections between the metropolis and the creole cultures.

Clara, who embodies this power of maternity, successfully escapes her oppressive husband and the other men in her life because her body, in effect, becomes a vehicle of rebellion.⁷ She uses her body and its charms to weaken the power of the men, and she literally uses her body to walk away from her husband and travel to another island. General Rochambeau's and St. Louis's attempts to control her physical body allow Clara to transform her body into a weapon against them. Sansay demonstrates this reassigning of her body by using military language to describe Clara's actions. Therefore, the object of males' desire, represented by her physical body, ultimately embodies the vehicle to convert that desire into one of freedom and control, and through her words, she describes her sexual identity in terms of warfare. As Dillon notes, love, metaphorically, is "colonial warfare," and this "colonial warfare ultimately offers Clara a surprising escape route from her husband" ("The Secret History" 4). When discussing love and relationships, both men and women adopt the language and the actions of warfare. After gaining the affection of General Rochambeau, Mary notices Clara's delight "with a *conquest* she now considered assured" (32, emphasis mine). Clara's "conquest" over the general's affections shows her victory in love, which ultimately results in her power over him. Clara's husband St. Louis uses military tactics in keeping his wife as a prisoner of war; he even

has a guard stand outside her door. In this way, her focus on domestic freedom and the plight of women in the Caribbean connects to the discussion of war and rebellion happening in the colonies due to the revolution, thereby conflating domesticity and war.

Nancy Armstrong emphasizes the importance of understanding sexuality in terms of desire and the novel; she asserts that through Foucault's writing, one can consider "sexual relations as the site for changing power relations between classes and cultures as well as between genders and generations" (10). According to Armstrong, reading the novel in this way allows the novel to become a weapon against older forms of political power and a liberating force for individuals (98). Armstrong states that in *Pamela*, for example, Richardson changes the notion of women as forms of currency that only males have the power to exchange to empower the female and assert her as the controlling force of her own exchange (112). I argue that, like Pamela, Clara, through her language, positions herself as the controlling force of her body and her desires, which allows her to be equal with the males. This empowering act allows her the freedom to leave St. Louis. Ultimately, Clara gains freedom from the oppressive patriarchal world by translating her body into her own language. While in the male-dominated environment, she relies on using her body as a weapon to gain power over men. However, once she escapes, she literally writes her rebellious body into her own language; for the first time, she engages in correspondence with her sister, telling her version of the story.

Even though Clara and Foster's Eliza appear to be radical opposites, they share many traits. Society views each woman as a coquette; however, only Eliza's coquetry results in social scorn and ultimately death. General Rochambeau's movements center on Clara; he submits to her power. He asks Clara if she has "not employed all the powers of magic to enslave" him, to which Clara responds that she used no art to attract his attention (94). However, the general does not believe that anybody "who possesses [her] charms can be ignorant of their power" (94, emphasis mine). Clara, aware of her power over others, uses her charms to gain control over the men who want to possess her, thereby subverting their power over her. Just as Eliza, in *The Coquette*, adopts military language, Clara uses her physical body and military language to describe her power over men. Her body becomes a weapon with charms she can use to entice men and gain advantage over them. Clara enslaves General Rochambeau, and his power within the revolution weakens; his ultimate desire becomes possessing Clara for himself—a passion that causes him to lose his control as military leader. Ironically, as Clara acquires "military" power,

General Rochambeau loses it. His fascination with Clara as well as his fascination with his social parties undercuts his success with suppressing the impending revolution. Clara refers to her power over General Rochambeau's actions as her own "conquest" (32). Again, words like *powers*, *enslave*, and *conquest* all evoke the image of a military struggle, and General Rochambeau should use this language to describe his military victory over the slaves. Instead, Clara adopts this language to show her success in capturing the power of General Rochambeau and contributing to his ruin with preventing the uprising. Even though both Clara and Eliza live a coquettish life, they share a similar desire of remaining free of the oppression of marriage. Clara desperately wants to leave her husband, and Eliza openly declares her intention never to marry:

I recoil at the thought of immediately forming a connection, which must confine me to the duties of domestic life, and make me dependent for happiness, perhaps too, for subsistence, upon a class of people, who will claim the right of scrutinizing every part of my conduct; and by censuring those foibles, which I am conscious of not having prudence to avoid, may render me completely miserable.
(Foster 29)

Clara, like Eliza, longs for an open social life and a different social structure that will allow her this type of freedom rather than confine her in marriage. Both Eliza and Clara desire a homosocial community over heterosexual marriage. An effective homosocial community would maintain a sense of freedom, while the latter merely restricts them to a domestic space.

Clara, unlike Eliza, successfully operates within a homosocial community and separates herself from marital control. Two reasons account for Clara's ability to live a homosocial life while Eliza's fate is heterosexual marriage or death. First, the American colonies, along with the women in the novel, uphold the notion of separate private and public spheres. Habermas's ideological definition of liberalism relies on the distinction between these spheres, where property owners viewed themselves as autonomous and beyond governmental control. By claiming the right to hold this autonomous (private) position, these individual engage in the political sphere (public) (46). While the distinction between public and private is maintained in theory, in actuality, the two spheres intertwine and produce a complicated position for the individual. Dillon redefines narrative liberalism and includes gender within Habermas's notion of separate spheres. Narratives constantly produce women's private bodies and labor in order to continue the existence of the autonomous liberal male in the public sphere (*Gender* 24-25).

Dillon continues Habermas's argument that the private and public spheres blur, but she takes his argument further by showing how the same distinction cannot apply to women and men operating in separate spheres. Even though women occupy the domestic, private sphere while men engage in the public, political sphere, Dillon argues that the individual must be "publicly produced" in order to gain social standing within society (*Gender* 119). Gender complicates the separate spheres even further; if women remain in the private, domestic sphere and cannot enter into the public, political sphere, then they should not be recognized as an operating member within the public. However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, through marriage, women enter into society and the political sphere. Through women's domestic work, women support the men, who then engage in political and economical transactions. Therefore, indirectly, women contribute to the overall economic and political activities of the public sphere yet cannot act as members of that sphere.

Foster's novel illustrates the subjective nature of the female position, which exists both inside and outside the public sphere. As an outsider, women cannot inhabit an open social space; however, their placement in the domestic sphere, which supposedly lies outside the political sphere, perpetuates the bourgeois society and males' autonomous position within the public sphere. Therefore, women work within the public sphere and maintain its boundaries while this public sphere relies on casting them as confined within a private, domestic sphere. The liberal narrative depicts this distinction, thereby continuing the illusion of female autonomy. The characters in Foster's novel force Eliza to succumb to this liberal narrative. She considers a homosocial society to be her only escape, and in that sense the women in the novel account for the second reason Eliza fails. The women willfully uphold the bourgeois society and encourage Eliza to marry well. They chastise her for her flirty nature and warn her about the dangers of being a coquette. Eliza realizes that the domestic life and the scrutiny of others will render her miserable, yet she cannot find an escape from this life.

Sansay has Mary observe the limited freedoms of women, commenting on the necessity of women "to be married to escape from the restraint in which [they] are held whilst single"; "liberty" can only be enjoyed through marriage because "a husband is necessary to give [women] a place in society" (80). Mary's words accurately expose the harsh reality women face during the eighteenth century. Without a husband, women cannot enter into the public sphere and have a respectable place in society. However, even in marriage, women occupy a limited freedom,

which makes the term liberty appear ironic in Mary's statement. Without a careful reading of all the revolutionary actions occurring at the hands of women, one might take Mary's words as praising the republican ideal of marriage. However, Sansay contradicts this statement later by including a story revealing the instability of putting all of one's liberty into the hands of a man. A woman and her daughter Clarissa move to the island to be with the woman's husband, who has taken a mistress. The wealthy husband devotes all of his time and material possessions to his mistress rather than to his own wife and daughter. The daughter falls in love with a man who has lost his fortune in a shipwreck; desiring her daughter's happiness, the mother allows the two to be married. However, Clarissa's illness disrupts their happiness, and they cannot afford to pay for her recovery. The father, again, refuses to acknowledge his responsibility, so the daughter dies. After the horrible conduct of the husband, the wife's friends encourage her to separate herself from him. Mary comments: "How terrible is the fate of a woman thus dependent on a man who has lost all sense of justice, reason, or humanity" (130). This statement counters her previous claim of finding liberty through a man and also shows the problematic position a woman faces; she cannot have a place in society without depending on her father and ultimately her husband—but men may not always protect her. If women could depend on themselves, then they could enjoy a certain freedom and liberty—one that Clara longs to have for herself. Through Mary's contradictory statements, Sansay reveals the weakness of the republican society and its insistence on women's entrance into a marriage contract.

Clara's situation differs from Eliza's in that the Haitian Revolution serves as her backdrop and the females in the novel support her because they are also strong, independent women. Through the language of the novel, Sansay aligns Clara with the slave rebellion. Immediately following Clara's conquest over General Rochambeau, Mary remarks on how the slaves "have at length acquired a knowledge of their own strength" (34). Through Mary's observation, Sansay subtly hints at the possibility of women also recognizing their powers in this rebellious atmosphere. Clara is aware of her powers over others and uses them to fulfill her own desires and gain freedom. Just as the slaves realize their own strength against the Europeans, Clara recognizes her own potential to rebel against patriarchal control. At the height of the revolts of the slaves and the horrible acts of violence, Clara decides to leave St. Louis because she has encountered enough masculine violence. Sansay upholds Ferguson's claims by aligning women and slaves in her novel. During the eighteenth century, as Bonnie Anderson notes,

society identified traditional values and counterrevolution with women (64). Society divided the spirit of revolution by gender; the men embodied radical actions, leaving the women to uphold the morals. However, using the Haitian Revolution as a backdrop provides Sansay the vehicle to show women's rebellious spirit. Clara rebels like slave leaders; both overthrow the dominating male presence in their lives. Mary describes Clara as "proud and high spirited" and "will submit to no control" (45). Ferguson indicates that the "language of slavery most aptly encoded white woman's oppression" (23). Therefore, Sansay relies on terms used in slavery to describe women's situation. In addition to embodying a rebellious nature, Clara's female companions provide support for her. Mary, as I stated earlier, defends the position of Clara as a coquette, and Clara finds solace in a female friend, who protects her when she leaves her husband.

Even the descriptions of the horrors associated with the rebellion reflect women's superior strength. At the commencement of the revolution, Mary notes that the wife of a black chief changes her demeanor and becomes "a very devil" (69). Out of jealousy, she destroys any white woman that attracts the attention of her husband. She does not reserve her rage just for the white women. She also kills a white male "with her own hand" because he offended her; she "had him bound, and stabbed him with a penknife until he expired" (70). The French sentence the same black chief and his wife to death, and as they walk to their execution, the chief's face displays his fears while his wife goes "cheerfully along" and "refused to have her eyes bound"; she continued to show her bravery by receiving their fire "without shrinking" or "uttering a groan" (69). This description illustrates not only the violence surrounding the uprising but also the power and participation of women within the revolution. The rebellion provoked this woman's rebellious nature, allowing her the strength to defend herself. Sansay portrays both white and black women as powerful and brave. In the novel, the women do not rely on men; instead, they inspire each other to escape their enslaved position. The rebellion allows the women to overturn the corrupt society that enslaved them. While the white women remove themselves from their oppressors, the black women assume a more violent approach to gaining their freedom and exerting control over their situation. However, through this violent description, Sansay hints at the violent potential in all women who suffer under such oppression. Clara, along with the other white women, begins to resist the male figures controlling them, and the possibility of their own violence hovers at the end of every page in this novel.

Both the correlation with slave revolts and the emphasis on female community combine to form a potential plan for achieving freedom for women rather than merely distancing themselves from men. In particular, one scene merges the concept of collectively rebelling, showing Sansay's underlying motivation behind the novel. In Clara's escape from St. Louis, she spends the night in a hut, where one of the female companions screams in fear at a strange noise and at something seizing her hand. The noise, along with her friend's scream, wakes Clara, who asks the guide the reason for the noise; the guide informs her that it is merely land crabs, which come "in countless multitudes from the mountain" during this particular season in order to lay their eggs on the shore (201). The noise arises from the crabs' striking "their claws together as they move" and "no obstacle turns them from their course" (202). The guide informs Clara of the crabs' responsibility in preventing the English from capturing St. Jago. A few years earlier, the English had traveled to that very island and seized a Spaniard in hope of finding and possessing St. Jago. During the night, the English heard the loud noise and asked the Spaniard what it was, and he replied that it must be a large army of Spanish preparing to attack them. As the noise increased on all sides, the English, "fearful of being surrounded, embarked, and in their haste suffered the prisoner to escape," preventing their successful possession of St. Jago (203). The English mistook a natural occurrence for a possible uprising, and their fear prevented them from conquering another island in the Caribbean.

According to Drexler, Sansay considered Haiti as an example of "effective collective action" ("Brigands and Nuns" 176). While Sansay did not proclaim herself to be an abolitionist and did not directly identify with the Haitian Revolution, she used the successful strategies, employed by the former slaves of Saint-Domingue, of organizing themselves collectively against their enemy in order to achieve victory as a conceptual tool to evaluate "the social institutions that define women's lives," which, as Drexler contends, she had previously understood "as constrained to a spectrum comprising the nunnery, marriage, and the bordello" ("Brigands and Nuns" 176). The nunnery, marriage, and the bordello all exhibit places where women are confined or valued only as an economic exchange or property; none of these institutions allow for women's freedom or for their recognition as a contributing member in society. In fact, these institutions demonstrate women's correlation to slaves, who were also considered an economic investment and restrained in their liberty. Earlier, I mentioned Moira Ferguson's assertion that women adopted abolitionist language, regardless of their feelings toward slavery, in order to

argue against women's enslavement in the patriarchal society. Sansay employs this tactic in her *Secret History*. She recognizes the slaves' success in the Haitian Revolution with collectively organizing against the Europeans in order to overthrow them and gain their independence. With her novel, Sansay draws attention to the limited freedoms allotted women and reveals a possible plan for undercutting this unjust system.

Sansay uses Mary's and Clara's letters to illustrate the potential power of an effective collective; their letters illustrate the powerful influence of women and portray an all-female community, completely separate and independent from men. The novel relies on Mary's narration through her letters to Colonel Burr. However, it is interesting to note Mary's independence from Colonel Burr in initiating her letter-writing as well as her own voice. From the beginning of the novel, Mary states that her "fate is [...] intimately connected with that of [her] sister"; Mary realizes the female situation and knows that Clara's possibilities and limitations represent her own (62). After Clara escapes from her husband, Mary leaves St. Jago de Cuba with a woman, who wants to become independent, to go to Jamaica. Similarly, Clara leaves St. Louis and retreats to her female companion's resident in Cobre, where "there is a magnificent temple, dedicated to the blessed Virgin. Its ornaments and decorations are superb. The image of the Virgin, preserved in the temple, is said to be miraculous and performs often wonderful things. The faith of these people in her power is implicit" (195). Clara claims the sight of the extravagant temple "[fills] the mind with awe" (196). After seeing the temple, their guide sings songs to the Virgin. The placement of the scene is significant; only after Clara successfully escapes from her husband's cruel power and unites with her female friend does she experience the temple and hear the guide's songs. Dillon notes the importance of evoking the image of the Virgin Mary because she "embodies an ideal of female social reproduction without the assistance of men" ("The Secret History" 22). Sansay constructs the possibility of a female community without the reliance on men. Women use their bodies as weapons to distance themselves from patriarchal control, and once they leave the male-dominated society, they successfully find their voice and form female communities, thereby reassigning the control and power onto the female body, which the Virgin Mary exemplifies.

After gaining freedom through the help of independent women, Mary writes to Clara, commanding that she "speak," so they can return to Philadelphia, "where, in peaceful obscurity we may live, free from the cares which have tormented you, and filled myself with anxiety"

(184). This letter prompts Clara's response and, for the first time, her written voice enters the novel and articulates her own story. Through the sister's correspondence, they gain strength through their language and plan a way to rejoin each other. In one of Clara's letters to Mary, she insists that she not consider leaving Jamaica until she can be reunited with Mary, believing that only "together [they] shall be happy" (205). However, the arrival of Don Alonzo, one of Clara's former admirers, prevents her from immediately leaving the island; Mary writes to Clara, instructing her to leave instantly and "fly from the *danger* that surrounds [her]" (215, emphasis mine). To Mary, Don Alonzo represents an impending danger to Clara's safety; Don Alonzo, like the other men, only oppresses Clara, not allowing her freedom and happiness. Mary insists that Clara leave behind these dangerous men in order to live a happy life with her, an act which demonstrates the power of the female community. At first, the lurking horrors of rebellion by the slaves appear to torment Clara and fill Mary with anxiety, preventing their happiness; instead, the violence and dominance of the males threatened to ruin their chance at freedom. After Clara removes herself from her tyrannical husband, the audience hears Clara's own voice for the first time. Only through her independence from him can she gain her own voice and begin to write her own story; Clara, whose story Sansay tells through Mary's character, becomes the narrator of her own life after she leaves her husband. Sansay's females not only maintain their voice but they acquire stronger voices as they distance themselves from men. The novel ends with the sisters reunited, emphasizing the importance of a female community rather than the loss of voice that occurs in other seduction and epistolary novels.

The novel emphasizes women's independence not only by allowing women to have their own voice and form female communities but also by distancing men from the story. Instead of the Europeans' uniting, they fight against themselves, which, in turn, leads to the slaves' ability to successfully overtake them. Mary tells the reader that "in every man that approached [Clara, St. Louis] saw a rival" (186). To St. Louis, the men become enemies, and he devotes his time to attempting to control Clara as well as his competitors. Instead of leading a successful colony, General Rochambeau occupies himself with acquiring Clara for himself by removing her husband. During a crucial attack from the slaves, the general places St. Louis in a "disadvantageous position," resulting in the death of forty European men (55). The general's internal struggle for possession of Clara leads to the downfall of his men and the slaves' successful rebellion. At first, Sansay aligns the women in a position with slaves; however, she

then transfers this association onto the males and slaves. She uses the horrors associated with the slave rebellions to demonstrate men are the ultimate danger to women. Sansay portrays the men as violent with each other as well as with women. While in St. Jago de Cuba, Mary comments on the corruption and violence all around the island, which has become a common scene. Mary writes about a tragic love affair, where the rejected lover, in his jealousy and rage, kills the woman, not the other man, by “[seizing] her arm, and plunging a dagger in her breast” and fleeing while she lies lifeless on the ground (141). Then, the true lover of the woman punishes the rejected lover by killing him in return. Mary emphasizes that this scene, which demonstrates males’ violence over women, is common on the island. Clara also experiences such violence and writes to Mary about her husband’s “intention to destroy [her]” physically, which prompts her decision of finding a way “to escape from this *monster*” (186-87, emphasis mine). Clara’s choice of referring to her husband as a monster not only justifies her decision to leave him but also aligns him with a word used commonly to describe the actions of Africans during slave rebellions. Now, Sansay compares men with the violent disposition and horrors associated with African slaves in the colonies. Sansay’s comparison eradicates race and conveys the true problem of the colonized world, which is the violent nature of the males. Males dominate both the slaves and the women and prove to a destructive force to themselves.

The war between France and England, which Sansay mentions throughout the novel, further illustrates the internal conflict and destruction of males. As C. L. R. James states in his historical account of the Haitian Revolution, the three forces of colonization—the proprietors of San Domingo, the French bourgeoisie, and the British bourgeoisie—had to stay united to uphold the colonial system (26). James claims that the Black Jacobins did not create the opportunity for rebellion; instead, they seized the opportunity by taking advantage of the internal conflicts arising between the three forces, “which would shatter the basis of their dominance and create the possibility of emancipation” (26). Like the internal war between the countries of Europe, the French men, in Sansay’s novel, also turn against each other; both of these internal conflicts illustrate the weakness of the white, patriarchal society. This weakness provides the slaves and the women an avenue to revolt and form their own community. Therefore, the women in the novel separate from men and begin to rely on each other. In fact, the men depend on the action of women. Mary leaves Colonel Burr to find her way to her sister, while Clara literally divorces herself from her oppressive husband. The women manage to silence the men rather than enact

the traditional plight of women who lose their voice based on the actions of men. Clara's strong presence forces General Rochambeau to retreat to another town and he loses his voice, his charms, and his ability to lead. The internal fighting among the European men demonstrates the weakness of the patriarchal community; in the end, only creole females and slaves unite.

Through *Secret History*, Sansay frees women from the patriarchal restraints, and in the process she frees herself. Michael Drexler argues that by adopting the alter ego of Clara, Sansay "reverses her own objectification by the male gaze" (Introduction 25). Sansay, like Clara, faced the problem of having men desire to possess her; a position from which she desired to be freed. In the introduction to her expanded edition of *Revolution and the Word*, Cathy Davidson revisits the impact of postcolonial theory on discussions of the early works of America. Drawing on Jacques Ranciere's idea of division, where the inside and outside can be joined and his discussion of the excluded as invisible, thereby unrepresented, she applies his ideas to American ideals of *men* being created *equally* (18). This statement highlights the excluded groups—all women and non-white men. Therefore, American history of disagreement is rendered "invisible by branding disagreement 'un-American'" (18). Women and non-white men fall outside the traditional boundaries of what society accepted as American and allowed in the public sphere. Sansay's novel, excluded from the canon, repositions the "un-American" as dominant characters in the construction of American history. Relying on the Caribbean atmosphere and the Haitian Rebellion, the women and slaves, viewed as "other," successfully unmask their limited positions and reverse the order of power. Through her military language, Clara positions maternity with rebellion, reclaims her body, finds her voice, and acquires power over the men. The image of a rebellious woman and the integration of social customs align the white and black women of the novel, and through this parallel, Clara and Mary rewrite the patriarchal society, empowering the female creole community.

Sansay ends the novel with Mary's hopeful statement about leaving for Philadelphia to meet Colonel Burr, where "she will find in [him] a friend and a protector, and [they] may still be happy" (225). Mary's final statement sounds naïve after the previous events; America cannot guarantee happiness or freedom for her. Instead, she must continue to fight against the established patriarchal structure in order to ensure her fate does not parallel Eliza Wharton's. Throughout the entire novel, Sansay demonstrates the power of an effective collective over unstable governments looking for ways to increase their power; she also highlights the willing

participation and potential violence of the women, both white and black, in resisting their oppressors. Her critique of marriage and the false and often uncertain protection of men contrasts with Mary's closing lines. Mary and Clara may return to the American colonies but the society that greets them will not allow them any more freedom than the volatile world they leave behind. Throughout the novel, Sansay challenges and questions women's role within the colonial and patriarchal societies, so Mary's final, naïve hope that America will provide women with a freedom that cannot obtain in the Caribbean, appears to undercut Sansay's project. I, however, interpret Mary's final statement as ironic, and with this irony, Sansay again questions the patriarchal and colonial systems—the one in America. The Caribbean colonies and the Haitian Revolution serve as a backdrop to discuss the broader implications of colonialism and to show a possible solution to overthrowing this oppressive patriarchal system. As Drexler argues, the collectivity for black revolutions, Irish expatriates, and Cuban peasants empowers them, but the women's collectivity "begins with a repressive institution that aims to remove women from the experience of the world" ("Brigands and Nuns" 192). Foster's Eliza battles this oppressive force alone, without the aid of a collective of women. Sansay reveals the oppression women and slaves face in the Caribbean colonies, and with Mary's final, naïve hope that America will offer her freedom and happiness, Sansay leaves the reader to question and challenge the patriarchal and colonial society of the United States. In order to avoid the same fate as Eliza, Mary and Clara must unite and rely on their learned experiences from the revolutionary actions in the Caribbean; they must rebel against the society that erases their position with the political and public sphere and write their own narrative into existence.

EPILOGUE

The preceding chapters reposition gender and race in the revolutionary context of the eighteenth-century transatlantic world. However, I did not consider the implications of the position of males, as well as females, in the century leading up to the American Revolution. I mention the contradiction imposed by the United States in proclaiming equality while maintaining the institution of slavery and limited freedom of women, and I trace this contradiction to the European ideologies that the United States adopts in creating its own national identity. I could extend this project by looking at the potential revolutionary language and progression for equality preceding and following the revolutionary period, when Americans engaged in discourse specifically about national identity. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker accurately uncover the “ever-changing heads” of the many-headed hydra that all contributed to inspiring revolution. However, many of these “heads” have remained historically invisible because of political restructuring of “history” in forming a new nation (4).

While my preceding chapters deal with the body politics of women, both black and white, and female rebellion against oppression staged to gain agency over their bodies, I did not have the time to consider the other heads that contribute to this reshaping of national identity and politics. In this epilogue, then, I want to briefly discuss ways this project could be expanded to include political, economic, and religious instability surrounding the revolutionary Atlantic of the eighteenth century. In the future, I also want to explore the contribution of commerce, with the slave and mercantile trade. Sean Goudie argues that intercolonial commerce inspired the anticolonial, or creolization—values “that lead to armed revolution and the overthrow of British empire” (4). By allowing the American colonies to trade with the West Indies, the colonists began to desire their own independence from Britain. Therefore, this inter-mixing of cultures instigated the revolutionary attitudes of the colonies. The colonist began to debate the qualities that make a successful nation, and after experiencing inequality under the political rule of Britain, they placed equality at the forefront. The political leaders of the American colonies fought against Britain and composed documents proclaiming the equality of all men, yet they kept the institution of slavery and increased the slave trade. Slavery provided the American colonies with economic stability, rendering it almost impossible for them to abolish it while trying to maintain enough capital and political power to become their own nation.

While my analysis of the eighteenth century provides a foundation for understanding the political re-structuring of power occurring with the emancipation of slaves and the redefining of freedom for men and women, women's and slaves' struggles did not cease at the end of this century. Slavery continued in the newly formed United States until the Civil War, beginning in 1861. The close proximity of the people of the early United States and their bond of nationalism quickly dispersed as the western frontier expanded. As Anderson notes, this rapid expansion combined with economic incongruities between the North and the South lead to civil war, revealing the elasticity of nationalism (64). Nationalism united the Creole colonies of America, but a century later, this same "imagined community" begins to sever its comradeship, forming into two sub-nations. By expanding my thesis into the nineteenth century, I could trace changes in conceptions of the "nation" and the way these changes defined nationalism in nineteenth-century America.

Also, women continued to fight against their limited position well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, women, especially African American women, continue to re-write their narrative and claim their identity in a society that perpetuates preconceived notions and stereotypes about them. My study configures race and gender into the larger context of the transatlantic political and social interactions, but I have not addressed the limiting positions African American women occupied when coming to terms with both race and gender. My chapters align race and gender as points of identity that influenced the African American women's fight for freedom, but I never deal with the combined problem of a free black woman trying to combat years of negative stereotypes forced upon her by the literary world as well as by the wider culture.

As gender and race enter the political and literary world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, black women faced a double alterity. Just as women struggled for a political identity within the early United States, black women fought against negative stereotypes within the United States and within their own black community. Therefore, contemporary authors like Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and Austen Clarke continue to struggle with the black woman's place in society and they use techniques of constructing rebellious women, similar to those used by Behn, Foster, and Sansay. These techniques allowed them to depict women who use their bodies and language to gain a sense of control and empowerment over the negative stereotypes imposed by males and society.

Gloria Naylor reminds me of the female authors during the eighteenth century and her characters reflect a similarly rebellious yet domestic spirit found in the texts I previously discussed. Naylor's *Linden Hills* repositions gender within the history surrounding slavery. The community of Linden Hills begins with Luther Nedeed selling his wife and children to obtain the money to move up north and build Linden Hills. In order to populate his new community, he buys his wife back. From the beginning, Linden Hills position men as masters over the women, evoking the image of a female slave. Within the economic system of slavery, female slaves possess a dual nature by producing labor and (re)producing slaves. Also, within this novel, men view black women as commodities based on their sexualized bodies. However, like the preceding chapters, my analysis here focuses on the ways black women manipulate this patriarchal system by using the power of their bodies to gain agency in *Linden Hills*. Naylor constructs multiple identities and narratives with the wives of Luther Nedeed. Through various domestic objects, the past wives instruct Willa, the current Nedeed wife, on how to free herself from her husband. Therefore, through their lives, Willa gains a voice, rebelling against the patriarchal society that enslaves her. Willa exhibits domestic qualities but she also gains agency over the men in the text, thereby embodying both a domestic and rebellious nature like the ancestral figure of Nanny. Through the spirit of Luwana Packerville, Evelyn Creton, and Priscilla McGuire, Willa Prescott gains agency over the patriarchal society of Linden Hills, redefines herself, and uses her domestic and rebellious qualities to assert control over her newly defined identity.

The beginning of Naylor's novel evokes the image of women as economic and reproductive slaves. The narrator notes that it is rumored that the original Luther Nedeed "actually *sold* his octoroon wife and six children for the money that he used to come North and obtain the hilly land," which he named Tupelo Drive (2; emphasis mine). Instantly, Naylor ignites a comparison to female slaves and the women living with Luther Nedeed or in Linden Hills. Luther's wives become his property valued only for their (re)productive function within the community; they literally reproduce the next Luther Nedeed while also laboring within the home. Even though the women appear to be meaningless within Nedeed's society, they actually occupy a crucial role in maintaining the Linden Hills community.

In order to link Naylor's novel to the slavery of the Caribbean, I draw on the folklore surrounding the figure of Nanny, the Caribbean maroon leader, who remains alive only through

oral histories and folklore. Nanny exhibits the qualities that many African American women capture in contemporary literature. Willa, in Naylor's novel, successfully relies on her ancestral past in order to achieve her own narrative and agency over the patriarchal society. By mixing two oppositional views of domestic and rebellious as well as conflating motherhood and radical actions, Willa assumes those characteristics of Nanny that have been preserved in the oral histories. Also, like Jenny Sharpe's attempt to uncover and reclaim Nanny's lost voice and history, Willa seeks to discover and unleash the true identity of the previous Nedeed wives. Naylor, with her description of the women of Linden Hills, shows the duality of their position much like the duality female slaves adopted in the Caribbean. As Barbara Bush points out, Caribbean slaves outwardly conformed and adopted the values of the Europeans; however, they covertly rejected these same values and the system that enforced them (152). The women of Linden Hills also occupy a dual position of appearing to adopt the ideals of Luther Nedeed and the patriarchal society he creates while secretly rebelling against this structure in subtle ways.

The first domestic item Willa discovers is Luwana Packerville's Bible, which bears her maiden name; in this Bible, Luwana maintained her voice and agency in the form of marginal notes. Evelyn Creton's recipes and Priscilla McGuire's photographs reveal their history as well as depict their gradual loss of identity in the Linden Hills community. All of these women serve as a community and support for Willa, who also has no one with whom to talk. The historical documentation each woman left behind forces Willa to reflect on her life before and after Linden Hills.

The fragments of the Nedeed women surrounding Willa anger and frustrate her to the point where she wants to destroy the existence of their memories and their enslaved positions. Their memories force Willa to realize her own loss of identity—a realization that she cannot easily absorb. However, Willa stares at a photograph of Priscilla McGuire, whose eyes “slowly drained away [Willa's] desire to destroy their owner, but even if she still wanted to, the finely arched brows told her they would understand” (206). Priscilla's eyes convey understanding because she too has been in Willa's position. This photograph illustrates the communal effect each woman's possession has over Willa. The sense of another woman understanding her position as well as her fear, frustration, and anger repositions her anger at herself and the other women to the true object—Luther Nedeed and the oppressing patriarchal system.

Each woman in her own individual way resists the complete erasure of their identity, and Patricia Hill Collins notes that “individual acts of resistance suggest that a distinctive, collective Black women’s consciousness exists” (98). The individual narratives left by these women through the various domestic remnants collectively provide Willa with an African American, female community. Through black communities, which might be considered safe realms, women can freely express themselves and resist their objectification as the Other; this safe realm begins to embody a political entity, where African American women can challenge the negative associations society and media places on them. Through conversations with one another African American women affirm their own right to exist as well as their humanity (Collins 102). Willa symbolically enters into a conversation with the former wives, forming a community through which she finds her own humanity.

Willa experiences a freeing incident with the pot of water she is holding; after staring at the hole, in Priscilla’s final picture, that once contained Priscilla’s face, Willa “reached her hand up and began to touch her own face” (267). She looks down at the aluminum pot and discovers that by holding the pot steady at her waist, an image formed; what Willa sees reflected in the pot of water is her own face, the one she had touched a few minutes before. She no longer doubts her identity and states that she can rebuild. This experience of physically seeing and touching her face allows her to reform her own self-identity. For the first time she knows her entire name is Willa Prescott Nedeed; she has erased the single identity of Mrs. Nedeed. She realizes that “she had owned that first name for as long as she had the face she was now certain that she possessed” (277). By defining themselves in such ways, black women reject the assumption that others are the authority allowed to interpret the reality of African American women; instead, black women provide their own self-definition, thereby validating black women’s power as human subjects (Collins 114). After losing her past identity of being someone’s mother and wife, Willa reexamines her current self-identity. After claiming agency over her actions and choices, including the decision to enter the basement, she understands that she left her rightful identity upstairs and now she can claim it for herself.

While Willa does exert agency over her personal situation, she can only come to this awareness after listening to the histories of her ancestors. Alice Walker notes the unvoiced creativity within the grandmothers and mothers of the past:

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists;

driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because there were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. Throwing away this spirituality was their pathetic attempt to lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear. (41)

This statement shows the importance that ancestors have on African American writers. Gloria Naylor illustrates this ancestral importance with the women of Linden Hills. The former wives embody a mother figure for Willa. However, they could not express their voice or agency in Linden Hills, so their artistic spirit found no release, slowly driving them insane just like the women to whom Walker refers in her article. Willa draws on this community of females and their artistic remnants in order to give agency not only to her life but also to their lives.

The past wives also communicate to Willa through the body of her son. Willa sees a resemblance to the females of the family rather than the usual pattern of identically matching Luther. Willa's son evokes the generations of Nedeed women, which inspires her to regain her identity and complete the destruction of Luther Nedeed's control over these women and the community. Luther acknowledges that Willa's birth of a white son destroys the five generations of Nedeeds. Christopher Okonkwo assigns Willa's unusual birth as completing "the call-and-response continuity of a woman's collective" (125). While Daniel Braithwaite, the historian of Linden Hills, documents that Nedeed's spirit lives on in his children, thereby continuing the Linden Hills community, he ignores the collective spirit of the Nedeed wives. As Okonkwo points out, the unusual birth illustrates the communication of the women and shows how they work through each other. Through the strong spiritual connection with the other women, Willa metaphorically gives birth to herself, reclaiming her lost and silenced identity. Her body becomes a vessel for communication with the spirit of the Nedeed wives as well as the enforcing agent in reclaiming her control over her house and community.

While some critics consider Willa's return to performing domestic acts as a failure, I read the ending as a positive affirmation of her newly gained sense of self-identity. According to Patricia Hill Collins, change does not occur only in the public sphere; it can also happen within the private, personal space of an individual woman's consciousness, allowing the changed consciousness to function as the sphere of freedom for the individual (118). Willa's change

occurs within her domestic, private space, but this space allows her the reaffirmation of her own free consciousness. Like Nanny, Willa contains a dualistic nature of domestic and rebellious. The final scene provides the crux of the dualistic image of Nanny. While holding her dead son in her arms, she fights against Luther because he makes two fatal mistakes: He assumes that Willa is leaving her house—revoking her position as wife—and attempts to take her child from her arms—threatening her status as mother.

Okonkwo successfully argues Willa's death should not be read as a suicide or an act of self-destruction; instead, he assigns her death "as positive, as deliverance and self-sacrifice that open[s] a new millennium with the possibility of multiple choices for the subdivision's residents, particularly its Black women" (129). I want to extend Okonkwo's argument to include the dual elements of domestic roles and rebellion. While people associate females with domestic roles such as mother and wife, they do not attribute resisting authority to women. Willa embodies a domestic spirit like the other Nedeed wives, and when her domestic space is challenged, she rebels against the oppressive force. The figure of Nanny inspires many Black women today to embrace both their domestic and rebellious spirit in order to achieve freedom from oppression and maintain self-identity. Because this contradictory image goes against the male-dominated ideology, society allowed the erasure of strong females like Nanny from the history. Gloria Naylor addresses this problem by allowing Willa to bring the true spirit of the Nedeed women to the surface.

Linden Hills clearly continues to explore the themes of female agency, community, and domestic/private space that consumed the pages of eighteenth-century texts, as the preceding chapters illustrate. However, Naylor's writing goes beyond the concerns and problems of the eighteenth century to include the current issue of African American women (re)constructing their identity; even within their own race, African American women face negative stereotypes. Even though African American women finally have gained agency over their words and can write their own narratives, they must overcome stereotypes that began during the colonial atmosphere of the eighteenth century. The abolitionist movement and emancipation did not absolve all the problems associated with race and gender, so in the future, I want to continue this project by looking at the continued enslavement of Africans in the newly formed nation of the United States.

Also, women continued to struggle for equal recognition within this new Republic. This thesis reveals the complicated and often contradictory position that women and slaves faced in the eighteenth century; both contributed economically and politically to Europe, the Caribbean, and America, yet the governments and leaders ignored, overlooked, or excluded women and slaves. Recognizing women's and slaves' involvement in the revolutionary Atlantic challenges the established patriarchal and colonial institution. While this thesis exposes this problem, woman and blacks continued to struggle for political rights into the nineteenth century. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the Declaration of Sentiments for the New York Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. This declaration echoed the Declaration of Independence, which was composed a century before. Linda Kerber discusses how this is not a lack of imagination or originality with Stanton and the other women at the convention; instead, she claims the Declaration of Sentiments makes a deliberate political point by revealing the exclusion of women's private and public demands in the previous declaration and with the Revolutionary vision of the eighteenth century (xii). In the future, I want to expand my research to include the nineteenth century and see how the established Republic shifts politically in order to include the role of women and slaves within this "free country."

The United States purposed equality and freedom, realizing its financial and political need to restrict the freedom of women and slaves. In forming its national identity, the United States adopted many of the practices and ideologies of its former nation, Britain. While Britain's ideology transferred to their colony in America, the revolutionary action of the people in France and the slaves in the Caribbean influenced the actions of the American colony forming its own Republic. The revolutionary ideas of freedom and ideological problems of the placement of women and slaves within the colonial system circulated the Atlantic Ocean. This exchange of ideas influenced and shaped the early United States, the European countries, and the Caribbean, revealing the interconnection of the transatlantic triangle during the eighteenth century.

NOTES

¹ In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong provides a detailed analysis of Richardson's treatment of Pamela. The letters about Pamela's body transform her body into a text, and through her writing she achieves power over Mr. B. The letters deflect Mr. B's desire for her material body and leave him longing for her written word. Therefore, the letters transform her physical body into a body of words; through this transformation, Pamela gains control over her body and shifts Mr. B's desire for her material body to her written body. (See "The Rise of the Novel," 108-34.)

² See Ivy Schweitzer's *Perfecting Friendship* for a detailed discussion of the discourses of friendship (110).

³ However, as Mary Anne Schofield states, the masquerade "successfully articulates this feminine myth of power and control," but it is only a myth (8). Schofield provides a counter-argument to Castle. Finally, the masquerade ends, revealing the reality of the female's suppressed and unhappy state. The unmasking reveals the true horror, where women are not allowed the freedom outside of the disguise. See Schofield's introduction to *Masquerade Novels of Eliza Haywood*.

⁴ See Drexler's forthcoming introduction in Leonora Sansay's *Secret History* for a discussion of the influence of the Haitian Revolution and the reason for its erasure from the development of the early United States.

⁵ See Dillon's article "The Secret History of the Early American Novel: Leonora Sansay and Revolution in Saint Domingue" for a full discussion on the connection between the madras handkerchief and the creole culture.

⁶ Slaves used obeah as a source of power and influence over the Europeans, and this spiritual connection allowed the slaves to collectively rebel against the colonial structure. Yvonne Chireau demonstrates the magical and spiritual elements of the practices like hoodoo and obeah. She also discusses the Caribbean religion Vodun and shows the overlap with miracle and magic. Like religion, this magical spirituality heightens the slaves' community and their power of resistance against their oppressors. See Chireau's *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*.

⁷ Clara mirrors Leonora Sansay's own personal life. Sansay also marries a man named Louis, who previously owned a plantation in Saint-Domingue. Michael Drexler, in his article "Brigands and Nuns," discusses Sansay's active role in Aaron Burr's contra-national plans; both within her writings and without, evidence exists, providing proof her political active involvement (187). This parallel further illustrates Clara's domestic and rebellious spirit and her contradictory position within the republican society. As a wife, she occupied the private, domestic spirit, but she complicates this by assisting Burr in his political dealings. (See *Messy Beginnings*, 175-199.)

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lindsey Phillips completed her B.A. in English from Georgia Southwestern State University in 2004. She received her M.A. in English from Florida State University in 2007. In the fall of 2007, she will continue her graduate education and pursue her Ph.D. in English at Florida State University. She is interested in transatlantic studies, especially Caribbean and early American, and African American literature.