

# Interracial/intergender versus Intra-racial/intragender Antagonism in Postcolonial Literature

By

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## **Abstract**

Though postcolonial literature affirms what the oppressed have endured, not much scholarship, past or present, has addressed the infighting that people of the same kind have historically and continuously engaged in. *Kind*, in this context, refers to people who share a homogenous religion, race, gender, class, education, and so forth. This thesis will be a dual examination of the conflict theory with a primary focus on intra-racial and intragender hostility. This thesis will suggest that though the passionate outcry and resistance regarding interracial and intergender oppression is necessary and warranted, intra-racial and intragender antagonism should also be protested with the highest tenacity.

The unconventionality of this thesis includes an observation and analysis of postcolonial literature and postcolonial authors who have failed in emphasizing the detriments that occur with infighting. Spike Lee's films, which have preceded the Black Lives Matter Movement, address the plight African Americans or marginalized people experience from the dominant culture. The works of author Chinua Achebe and Gael Faye seem to suggest that colonialism is responsible for the impairments of the oppressed, even in the postcolonial era. Feminist authors, such as

Mariama Ba, also credit patriarchy to women's disadvantages. Nevertheless, Spike Lee and the aforementioned postcolonial novelists should include internal strife in their discourse as well.

This thesis will argue that although postcolonial works are competent with their motifs regarding external oppression, there should also be an examination of intra-racial and intragender conflicts in films and other postcolonial literary selections.



Interracial/intergender versus Intra-racial/intragender Antagonism in Postcolonial Literature

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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by

Mariot Valcin Jr.

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*“We might fight amongst each other, but I tell you this, we’ll burn this bitch down, get us pissed.”*

-Tupac Shakur

From “To Live & Die in L.A.”

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## **Introduction: The *dechoukaj***

“I didn’t leave my country, I fled it” (257).

These words represent the main character’s thoughts near the end of Gael Faye’s semiautobiographical novel *Small Country*. Faye’s novel captures the Rwandan Genocide and its impact on the African people in the region. The main character, Gaby, quickly sees his life in proximity to the violence and massacres from this tragic period, and he and his sister are soon forced to relocate to another country for safety purposes.

This departure from one’s homeland is reminiscent of my own upbringing as my family was also driven to flee our home country.

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A *dechoukaj* was the cause of my family’s deracination from Haiti. A *dechoukaj*, a Haitian Creole word, can be defined as violent and targeted attacks on people during civil unrest or anarchy, and it is usually politically driven.

The year was 1990 and I was nine years old. It was an election year in Haiti, and this presidential election would be the catalyst to my *dechoukaj* experience.

Similar to many countries’ elections, candidates appeal to and strive for supporters’ financial support and their votes. Living in a country such as Haiti, publicly supporting a presidential candidate can have dire consequences, so discretion during political season is wise. My father’s reputation as a pastor of a megachurch in Haiti’s second largest city, Cap-Haitien, caught the attention of politicians, yet he never publicly endorsed any candidates. My father became a targeted interest for a presidential candidate during the 1990 election; this man was running against the Haitian people’s favorite, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Aristide campaigned on the theology of liberation which is a social reckoning for the poor against the church and the elites

(Sheppard). In America, he would have been considered a radical leftist; therefore, many Haitian people adored him.

My father, nonetheless, hosted a meet-and-greet with Aristide's opponent in our home. This particular morning, we prepared to host the presidential candidate in our residence. Our home was cleaned and polished, and it was agreed that the three Valcin children be groomed with their best – like we usually are for church – for this special event in our home. Of course, I was adorned in a suit purchased and picked out by my father from a store in which the owner, most likely, was a member in his church congregation.

Near lunchtime, I remember looking out the window and seeing a procession of cars from afar driving towards our home. They entered our gated compound and drove around our roundabout driveway; one car specifically made its stop adjacent to the walkway that leads to our front door. While my parents waited outside to greet the candidate and his entourage, my two older sisters and I waited in the living room.

My family had lunch with Haiti's presidential hopeful that day, one who would have been a direct contrast to Aristide's presidential administration. Hours later, after the meal was served and eaten and pleasantries were exchanged between the adults, my family, led by my father and mother, escorted our guests out of our home and into our front yard. We said our "au revoir" to one another, and the politician, along with his entourage, exited off our property.

This visit was supposed to be secretive, reserved for only those on a need-to-know basis. Nevertheless, the news spread quickly around the entire island, concerning which presidential candidate the Valcin household was backing and that did not sit well with many. Life was never the same after that visit. Tension flared leading up to Haiti's 1990 election and directly after the electoral decision was announced.

Though the people's favorite won the election, his supporters began victimizing benefactors of the opposition. Haitian citizens who favored Aristide, the president-elect, took it upon themselves to violently protest against those who opposed the incoming president. Schools shut down, which was one of the first signs of an impending doom. Needless to say, weeks passed since my father held a church service. My family was persecuted during this time, including death threats through letters and phone calls, so my father made the choice for our family to go into hiding.

We stayed in American-operated hotels; we stayed with family members, and we stayed with friends whom my parents trusted, engulfed with fear for our lives. As we moved from place to place in a discreet vehicle as we could no longer use our own, I looked through the window and saw the chaos. The streets were filled with debris, storefronts were looted, unorganized protests were at hand, fires were burning in places where they should not, and tires were used to barricade several streets and intersections. We lived like fugitives on the run, and we practiced discretion with our every location. We only allowed some to know our whereabouts, some whom I assumed my parents could trust with our lives.

One night, I accompanied my father, as he was taking the preliminary steps to relocate our entire family to America. This tag-along with my father quickly became a nightmare. I witnessed my father's proximity with death as Haitian rebels barricaded our car on the street. My father was forced to exit his vehicle. While inside the car, I could hear the Haitian rebels threatening my father and I could see them holding their machetes, pointing them at my father's face while also dragging the machetes on the rocky road, creating natural orange sparks in the process. My father returned to the car, face drenched with sweat, and his breathing a little heavy.

He never spoke to me about that night again, nor revealed what he said that drove the rebels to allow him safe passage.

Several nights later after nearly seeing my father's death, our family scouted our home and assessed the risk factor, and it was decided that we would sneakily return to our home to pack important belongings in preparation of our relocation from Haiti. However, we succumbed to our tiredness from our constant moving around, and we fell asleep at home that night.

I was awakened by my father's stern voice: "Leve. Nou bezwen kite kounye a." There was urgency in his voice, as I was awakened from my sleep. My father continued with a stern expression indicating something serious was looming. There was the sound of a commotion coming from our front yard, on the outer side of the front gate.

Right away, I quickly put into practice one of the many scenarios that my father foresaw could happen to the family. We quickly grabbed some of our belongings which were already packed; then my father, mother, sisters, and others who were staying with us dashed out the back entrance of our home and into the backyard. We rushed out of the home and into a darkness which we were familiar with. I remember running through the darkly lighted backyard of our home. I was running alongside my entire family, escaping an imminent death if we were to be captured. We made a few turns after passing the outer homes and we headed towards the chicken coops. After clearing the chicken coops, we crossed a medium-sized, but manageable creek. We walked up a small hill which brought us on a road to a neighborhood community located behind ours; we ran left, bustling in search for safety and shelter.

While we sought refuge, Haitian rebels stormed our home. They ransacked the very place where my family ate, slept, laughed and told stories during blackouts or holidays. Our home was being expropriated similar to the Nazi's invasion on Jewish properties. They then torched our

home, setting it ablaze. I am sure we would have been incinerated if we were found inside by the Haitian rebels.

Meanwhile, our family gathered in a neighbor's home, which sat on a hill, watching the nightmarish spectacle from an elevated view. Through our neighbor's windows, we watched the yellow and reddish flames send clouds of smoke into the air. What once was our place of comfort and solace was being burnt to ashes.

My family was not attacked or hunted by foreigners. We were not besieged by outsiders who wished to impose their narrative on us, causing us to lose our identity. In actuality, my family was nearly murdered by those who look similar to us, those who shared the same skin color as us, those we considered Haitian brothers and sisters.

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To say that my near-death experience in Haiti was traumatic is an understatement. That event is the inspiration of this thesis; the *dechoukaj* in my early life, which could have been fatal, has resonated with me and has developed within me a new understanding of humanity in regards to conflict.

Black Lives Matter, (BLM), is a communal outcry to the killings of African Americans at the hands of white policemen; BLM is seeking long-overdue resolution for the societal and racial conflict which have plagued America for centuries. BLM has inspired a domino effect so to speak. Other minority groups in nations all over the world are also holding demonstrations to protest against their country's injustices. A *Time*'s article states, "It's no surprise that police brutality in the U.S. resonates with minorities in France, who are demanding accountability and transparency" (Godin and Douah). The outcry from the BLM movement has translated itself as an outcry from all marginalized people over the world. According to NPR's *Morning Edition*

program, “The Black Lives Matter movement became an international phenomenon in 2020” (Westerman, Ashley, et al), though incidents related to the BLM movement predate 2020. One can easily consider the case of George Zimmerman which according to CNN “Sparked fresh debates about race relations” (Ford). The Zimmerman occurrence took place in 2012, but the events of that crime were not new. History includes countless, racially driven acts of violence that have befallen many African Americans with the perpetrators usually being acquitted of their crimes. The Black Lives Matter remonstrations can be looked at as a result of intersectionality.

According to an article in *Vox*, intersectionality, a theory developed in 1989 by Professor and Civil Rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, can be described as how “Race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ with one another and overlap” (qtd. in Coaston). The theory attests inequality’s existence within humanity which causes a system of segregation connected to cultural universals in which individuals unknowingly occupy. Because of this, the theory of intersectionality desires to recognize these barriers imparted on individuals and is “Attempting to demolish racial hierarchies altogether” by creating an “Egalitarian system” (Coaston). This racial inequality often leads to unjust behavior which includes the killings of marginalized people by those in authoritative positions such as police officers. Thus, the Black Lives Matter movement was created to address interracial oppression in hopes of rectifying it. The theory of intersectionality is reemerging and is experiencing a momentum in the background of the Black Lives Matter movement. A 2017 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* states that more and more articles regarding intersectionality are being published yearly and that “More people searched for the term online after the anti-Trump women's march, in January, than at any previous time” (Bartlett). Women have also associated their feminism to intersectionality to protest their position in the hierarchy spectrum and the inequality they suffer from it.

Intersectionality has “Migrated from women’s-studies journals and conference keynotes into everyday conversation” and “Is now used to encompass other markers of minority identity” (Bartlett). Because of the minority status, African Americans have been the victims of oppression from the majority white culture; the same can be said of women who often fall victim to cruelty from men, specifically Black women. Intersectionality, therefore, is a “Hierarchy of oppression” (Coaston) and is the explanation of interracial and intergender domination.

The attack which occurred to my family in Haiti was not the result of interracial animosity. It was not the actions of foreigners, but that of other Haitians who sought to murder my family. Haiti’s 1990 election catapulted the country into disorder and into an internal division. This tumultuous time in Haiti translated into the deaths of many Haitian people at the hands of other Haitians.

According to psychological and sociological concepts, *infighting* and *splitting* occur with those of the same kind; in the context of this essay, “kind” refers to homogenous groupings such as gender, race, religion, class, etc. According to an article written in *The International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, “*Infighting* . . . is an inevitable part of life” and it “directs attention away from consensus and toward questions of contestation” (Ghaziani and Fine 55). According to the book *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*, “*Splitting* refers to a breaching or division within a group (interpersonally), between persons” (as cited in Ryan 19). In his book *Splitting and Projective Identification*, Psychiatrist James Grostein suggests “*Splitting* denotes a universal phenomenon which occurs throughout our daily lives in multifarious ways and a fundamental defense mechanism” (3). By way of explanation, rifts exist in any relational outlets including those among nations, families, teams, coworkers, and many more.

Postcolonial or anticolonial regime and feminism are engaged with dissensions that are legitimate as intersectionality proves that there is a hierarchy of external oppression. Their claim is valid. However, *infighting* and *splitting* also exist in homogenous groupings such as those which develop within race and gender. In other words, intra-racial animosity transpires when those of the same race fight each other and intragender animosity occurs when those of the same gender are pitted against each other. My family's experience in Haiti was the result of intra-racial hostility.

The objective of this thesis is to analyze postcolonial literature along with historical events and highlight the *infighting* and *splitting* in the background of the selected works and historical moments. Postcolonial literature and anticolonial activists have intellectualized decolonization, but have placed little to no emphasis on intra-hostility. This thesis will demonstrate that *infighting* and *splitting* are of concern as they are counterproductive towards race and gender relation in pursuit of equality. The works of African American Filmmaker Spike Lee will be examined along with the slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano and the works of postcolonial African authors Chinua Achebe and Gaël Faye as well as Caribbean author Caryl Phillips, and the examination of selected works from these artists will reveal the presence of interracial hostility; furthermore, the demise of Gandhi and Malcolm X will also support the *infighting* and *splitting* which occur within races. Likewise, an analysis of African feminist and author Mariama Bâ's semiautobiographical novel *So Long a Letter* and Zhang Yimou's award winning film *Raise the Red Lantern* will reveal women pitted against other women which is another example of *infighting* and *splitting*. This thesis aspires to shift intra-racial and intragender hostility to the forefront in order to resolve these issues which stem within homogeneous groupings.



This thesis recognizes intersectionality and the ardent protest resulting from it. However, the desire of this thesis is to encourage a similar fervor to intra-racial and intragender oppression that is typically associated with addressing interracial and intergender antagonism.

## Chapter 1: Protest Films

The name Shelton Jackson Lee is unknown to many, but his moniker Spike Lee is an established name to many people. If there is a Mount Rushmore of filmmakers who make conscience-driven films, Spike Lee will be one of its designees. Seeing the credit “A Spike Lee Joint” in a film’s opening is synonymous to a “State of the Union” address of life in America.

A Spike Lee Joint. The phrase means different things to different people. Some associate it with insightful social critique, others with contentious political activism, joyful cinematic creativity, self-conscious community-building, or skillful self-promotion. . . a Spike Lee Joint comes out of a particular set of conditions, while articulating specific principles and aspirations. (Fuchs VII)

Lee, who is an African American filmmaker, “has captivated audiences for more than 30 years with his depictions of life in Black America, infused with his signature mix of entertainment, activism, and rage” (Urbain). His longevity in the film industry has been accompanied with reverence from his peers, fans, and emerging filmmakers. For example, African American female and novice filmmaker Melina Matsoukas credits her film ambitions with the likes of Spike Lee among many others (Okeowo); therefore, it is no wonder that Matsoukas considers her directorial film debut, *Queen and Slim*, as a protest art (Zahed). An examination of most of Lee’s films can also be categorized as protest art which is why his works are considered controversial.

Spike Lee’s durability in the film industry has also garnered many accolades. This list includes multiple wins and nominations from the world’s film award community. In 2020, “The Cannes Film Festival, where he [Lee] launched his career,” selected Lee to preside over the festival jury, which made him “The first black jury head” though the festival was modified due to the 2020 pandemic (Ugwu). Lee’s films cast actors and actresses that have played roles in his

other films. Lee has also collaborated with others who excel in their industry including sports and music. Spike Lee is internationally decorated, he is innovative, he is groundbreaking, and most importantly, Lee has something to say to the world through his films.

Lee has, in his artistic medium, become a voice of African Americans. The aforementioned activism and rage which are associated with Lee's films center on the injustices and systematic oppression Black Americans endure in the United States of America from hegemonic forces. Watching one of Lee's films which deals with race relations invokes a cathartic reaction in the viewer as Lee reveals the plight of Black America. "Though he has, from the beginning of his career asked that he not be considered a 'spokesperson for the race,' he has also stepped up to articulate and represent what he sees as pressing problems" (Fuchs x). Recognition and criticism of his films mostly center on interracial hostility in America – white supremacy of Black America. Before the Black Lives Matter movement was conceived, there was *Do the Right Thing*, Lee's fourth featured film which was released in 1989.

With "*Do the Right Thing*, Lee takes a magnifying glass under-a-hot-sun look at black/white relations and the result – no surprise – is fire" (Fuchs 13). Within this film's plot, which occurs in one neighborhood filled with elaborative settings, multiracial and dynamic characters, and intersectional conflicts, a police brutality occurs in its climatic moment when police authorities murder a black man in public while attempting to restrain him. "*Do the Right Thing* takes up the message. Nobody wins when oppressive heat and Raheem's radio causes a meltdown in Sal's Famous Pizzeria" (Fuchs 14). The aforesaid Radio Raheem, an African American character in the film played by actor Bill Nunn, is the murdered victim which the police simply carry away in a cop car afterward and what ensues next is pure rage: the multiracial, marginalized community demonstrates its anger to the police murdering of Radio

Raheem by setting the neighborhood aflame. The following morning, debris fill the street and black fumes from burned-down buildings float in the air.

In a 1989 interview, Lee refers to various horrific crimes which have occurred in America against African Americans similar to what he portrayed in *Do the Right Thing*. “Howard Beach, Michael Stewart, Tawana Brawley, Eleanor Bumpurs. Nothing happens. The eight cops that murdered Michael Stewart – that’s where we got that Radio Raheem stuff” (Fuchs 17). In other words, Lee was addressing police brutality prior to the galvanized Black Lives Matter movement. Lee’s film, *Do the Right Thing*, can be quickly seen as rage and protest regarding white America and their injustices on African Americans, but what is not highlighted in Lee’s other works is the intra-racial hostility within the Black community. Lee himself suggested that opposition does not only come from external forces. In a 1991 interview with *Playboy* magazine, Lee states, “At the same time, I’ve never been one just to blame white people for everything, for all of our ills. We have to take some responsibility” (Fuchs 54). Though his films attract much attention regarding white America’s antagonism of Black America, the issues of *infighting* and *splitting* within the black community, which are evident in his films, should also be met with the same resolve by the media and public. Other films by Lee, such as *School Daze*, *Clockers*, and *Chiraq*, reveal a sickness that has plagued America: black on black crimes, or in other words, intra-racial hostility. The following close reading of the films *School Daze*, *Clockers*, and *Chiraq* will expose the internal opposition that falls within a homogenous group.

The exploration of *infighting* and *splitting* is at the heart of Spike Lee’s *School Daze*, his third feature film. *School Daze* is Lee’s rendition of a Broadway musical. The film is sprinkled with original musical selections throughout the plot and includes an unforgettable dance

sequence between the female characters. *An International Publication of the American Society of Cinematographers* describes Lee's masterpiece as the following:

School Daze is a musical comedy in the Grand Old MGM Tradition. There are five main characters, 75 speaking roles and a cast of thousands — Dickerson [the film's cinematographer] manipulates his camera so 500 extras look like 5000. There are also eight musical numbers and crowd scenes including one that stretches for a quarter of a mile into the darkness of the night. (Lynton)

However, in the background of the film's grandeur and entertaining formula lies oppression of African Americans by African Americans. *School Daze* is set in a college setting, specifically that of an Historically Black College and University, HBCU. These American higher education institutions were formed because "Prior to the Civil War, there was no structured higher education system for black students" ("Historically"). Many have recognized the importance of HBCUs and their contribution to African Americans. American President George Bush promoted his awareness of the impact of HBCUs when he stated, "At a time when many schools barred their doors to African Americans, these colleges offered the best, and often the only, opportunity for a higher education" ("Historically"). Ironically, these institutions, which were created as a result of oppression from white America, now have cruelty within their student populations which are predominantly African Americans. Ernest Dickerson, the cinematographer of *School Daze* "who has collaborated with Lee on every one of his films since they were both graduate students at NYU Film School" says *School Daze* reveals classism within Black America (qtd. in Lynton). The class conflict in the film is between African American subgroups "wannabes" and "jugaboos" where the former represents well-to-do, vain, conformist African Americans and the latter includes blacks which are first-generation college students, rebellious, and conscious. The

film portrays African American men and women in these subgroups and they repeatedly war with one another over frivolous motifs through various moments in the plot.

Another intra-racial hostility within the college community that Lee displays is through Greek life, or Greek Letter Organizations, also known as fraternities and sororities. In the earlier moments of *School Daze*, Big Brother Almighty or Julian, a member of Gamma Phi Gamma Fraternity who is played by actor Giancarlo Esposito, yells the following statement to a group of pledges: “I don’t know how many of you all will cross the burning sands” (10:36). The “Burning Sands” refers to the completion of the intake process an individual goes through in hopes of gaining membership into a fraternity or sorority. Fraternities and sororities preach brotherhood and sisterhood, yet these organizations often commit heinous acts to those that are interested in joining their ranks. This is shown in Lee’s *School Daze* when pledges are humiliated and physically beaten privately and publicly. These forms of harassment and assault are known as hazing and it must be mentioned that these cruelties are not solely evident in HBCUs. Though Lee captures these horrors amicably in *School Daze*, other films have not, including 2017’s *Burning Sands* directed by Gerard McMurray. Moreover, real life scenarios of hazing have led to homicide and jail time for offenders. An *Ebony* Magazine article rhetorically puts it best with the question, “How does one promote racial uplift in the Black community, but then turn around and physically abuse someone?” (Green, et al.). Florida A&M University, a prominent HBCU which is known for its marching band among other things, had an incident which went public in 2011 when a 27-year-old male band member was “Found guilty of manslaughter in the death of a popular drum major after a violent hazing ritual aboard a bus . . . The ritual involved walking down the length of a parked, darkened bus as 15 to 20 band members beat on a colleague” (Alvarez). These horrors occur constantly in HBCUs and in other

college sectors, but it is ironic when African Americans protest injustices from the dominant white culture only to victimize each other. “The Black community often focuses on external entities such as law enforcement and the pipeline to prison systems that are integral parts of these injustices. What about the internal systems like African American fraternities and sororities which can be also be destructive?” (Green, et al.). Hazing is present in Spike Lee’s *School Daze*, but many overlook its urgency in the film as Lee exhibits it lightly with humor.

*Infighting* and *splitting* within the African American community are also portrayed in Lee’s ninth film, *Clockers*, and his twenty-second film, *Chi-Raq*. Both films acknowledge the concerns of Black America regarding the impediments to a quality life such as racial profiling, inadequate and ineffective social services, and the damaging effects of gentrification, but these concerns can be viewed as a pretext in addressing another issue present in the films, which is intra-racial hostility. *Clockers* evinces the volatile drug world within urbanized governmental housing in New York City and *Chi-Raq* displays the senseless and baseless world of gang violence in Chicago. The commonality of both films is the expense of lives that are taken as a result of these perilous lifestyles.

*Chi-Raq*, released in 2015, is creatively constructed as it is based on a “Story of Lysistrata by Aristophanes, a [Greek] comedy where a woman decides to withhold all sexual activities from any pursuing partner in hopes that it will result in the men putting their weapons down to resolve their homeland's conflict” (“Chi-Raq”). Lee brilliantly adapts the ancient Greek comedy and transforms it in relation to the constant gang wars that have permeated Chicago, Illinois in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As mentioned earlier, Lee has not been immune to the public’s criticism, positive and negative, and *Chi-Raq* definitely garnered polarized response. While some understood and accepted Lee’s “Stylistic movie,” others saw it as a “Distasteful mash up of

Chicago's street violence and the devastating war of Iraq” which the film’s name derives from – a play on the words Chicago and Iraq (“Chi-Raq”). Nevertheless, what cannot be misconstrued regarding *Chi-Raq* is the war between street gangs “Trojans” and “Spartans” and the effects this feud has on the black community which the film captures. The leader of the “Spartans” is Demetrius or Chiraq, played by actor Nick Cannon, who is relentless at living this dangerous life and who shows no sign of quitting even though he is approached by others who suggest an alternative lifestyle of peace. In one scene of Lee’s film, Lysistrata, who is played by the talented actress Teyonah Parris, converses with the concerned neighborhood pastor, played by actor John Cusack, about the shooting at the AME church in Charleston, SC by Dylan Storm Roof, but what is significant about their conversation is when Lysistrata states, “Now the brothers on the block, they do the white man’s murdering for him” (53:25); of course she is referring to the black on black crimes occurring in Chicago. The opening of *Chi-Raq* reveals stark statistics attesting to the murdering plight in Chicago: a recorded death rate of 4,424 from the Iraqi War between 2005-2011 and a recorded 7,356 murders in Chicago from 2001-2015 (03:45). At the height of the Black Lives Matter movement in the tumultuous 2020 year, the summer in Chicago once again experienced violent weekends due to senseless gun violence and children were often wounded from stray bullets (Berman, et al.). Though many oppose Spike Lee’s portrayal of the “Windy City,” the behaviors in the city, specifically within the black community, allow it to be compared to that of a war-torn zone.

*Clockers*, released in 1995, illustrates to viewers the livelihood of an African American drug dealer named Strike, played by actor Mekhi Phifer, who comes to a crossroad after a murder occurs which upends his personal life and illegal trade. Two scenes which summarize the film’s intra-racial destruction occurs when a concerned neighborhood mother approaches



Strike and says to him, “You are selling your own people death” (1:20:00). This is of course due to the fact that Strike is selling the drug “crack” to other African Americans in his community. In the final moments of the film, a couple of policemen investigate a crime scene and their conversation once again supports the idea of *infighting* and *splitting*. When one white police officer suggests that governmental projects should be obliterated in order to defuse tension in the black community, the other officer, played by actor John Turturro, responds with, “Why bother, they’re going to kill themselves anyway?” (1:56:40).

*Chi-Raq* and *Clockers* are reminders that problematic issues do not only stem from external opposition as both films are evidence to the unpopular acknowledgement of intra-racial hostility. Lee’s signature “Wake up” statement, which has been shouted and spoken by several characters in many of his films, is not only a directive to white America, but it is also a protest to the *infighting* and *splitting* within the black community.

## Chapter 2: The Irony in Decolonization

Decolonization promotes an awareness of the interracial evils that took place during colonization. Decolonization has been gaining global momentum as many seek reckoning of past atrocities that have had lingering effects on colonized people. The word colonization conjures a connection to specific regions of the world including Africa, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean. The former in comparison to the others, “once known as the dark continent, has frequently attracted world attention in modern times” (Wesley 324). This alleged attention, however, was a selfish objective by European colonizers to further their economic expansion and power. As a result, scholars appropriately conferred this historical era with the title “The Rape of Africa.” According to an article written in *Hypatia*, rape is a vile violation of humanity where one benefits from another and “the condition of being raped is a harmful condition as well as a harmed condition insofar as it has a tendency to generate further harm-anxiety, feelings of degradation and other psychological states which may interfere with the victim's pursuit of other” (Baber 126). This idea suggests why the continent of Africa is still considered a developing continent today, why it is still suffering economically from the interracial antagonism of colonialism, and why its people have experienced a loss of identity. “Predatory profits were the dominant motives” (Wesley 326); furthermore, the seven European nations’ dissipation of African land “presents modern Africa with problems which, taken in conjunction with inherited economic and political difficulties, severely impede progress towards complete independence” (Griffiths 204). It is to no surprise then that the African continent is seeking compensation as “the proliferation of demands for reparations for historical injustices has so far involved more than anything else the righting of injustices based on racial hierarchies” (Torpey 335).

European's colonization of the African continent dehumanized its people, exploited its resources, and contributed to internal divisions in African communities.

Postcolonial authors have taken it upon themselves to utilize their artistic medium in addressing colonialism. Postcolonial literature seems to center on providing cognizance to the world regarding concrete reality of colonialism and colonialism's long-lasting consequences. Authors attempt to capture this by highlighting the hegemonic forces' covertly and overtly seizure of other countries. Authors also use characters in their postcolonial literature to demonstrate the physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological damage colonized people have endured. Additionally, colonized women, specifically women of color, have suffered the worst in what is considered patriarchal subjugation. This awareness that postcolonial literature missions itself to do can be considered as decolonization through the art; "The conscious or unconscious quest for decolonization is present in all kinds of artistic production" (Hedeen 244).

Gael Faye's semiautobiographical novel, *Small Country*, produces a violent, savage, and historical depiction of the Rwandan Genocide. There are moments in the novel when characters credit and declare their intra-racial plight as a result of colonialism. Near the end of the novel, the mother to the main character, Gaby, experiences an emotional breakdown after seeing lifeless bodies of her family members. She blames the French as the culprit to the horrors she has witnessed. "She ranted and raved, insulting us in every language, accusing the French of being responsible for the genocide" (Faye 230). Faye's novel proposes the existing hatred between African ethnic groups, Hutus and Tutsis, is due to colonialism's regime of controlling the narrative in another country. An article in *The Guardian* attests to European's perpetration in dividing African nations between Burundi's and Rwanda's ethnic groups with an oppressive tactic emphasized towards their physical appearance – "the Hutu, 'short with wide noses', the

Tutsi, ‘tall and skinny with long noses’. This crude stereotyping, introduced to the region by Belgian colonists, has fueled cycles of communal violence” (Mohamed).

Even in the postcolonial era, European nations have continued exercising their power on Africa. According to an article written in *Cross-Cultural Communication*, European colonists industrialized Africa, and as a result of this, classes generated in African communities thus “The African petty bourgeoisie maintained . . . relationship with the erstwhile colonial masters and this is why they run the economy and political administration of their states in the same manner as the colonialists did” (Ocheni and Nwankwo 52-53). European colonists spawned a system that fueled hatred within African communities:

In the colonial period . . . The colonial ruler appoints one group to a ruling position. Therefore, the indigenous people are divided into a privileged ruling group and an unprivileged ruled group. The colonial ruler instructs the ruling group to transfer the resources of the indigenous people to the colonial ruler. This setup captures the indirect rule in the colony. (Mizuno and Okazawa 406)

Postcolonial author Caryl Phillips is himself a representative of the diaspora. Born in St. Kitts, Phillips soon relocated to England with his parents at an early age then to the USA (Cooper). He has traveled the world throughout his life and seeing the African diaspora across different countries has been at the center of his works. At the heart of Caryl Phillips’ novels, *A Distant Shore* and *Foreigners*, are the notions of alienation and belongingness. In *A Distant Shore*, Solomon, an African, who believes life would be better upon calling England “home” soon finds hatred targeted towards him from racist individuals in England. In one of the three different tales Phillips pens in *Foreigners*, the narrator in “Dr. Johnson’s Watch” comes to an epiphany after being informed of hostilities a black man has endured at the hands of whites in

England, and this narrator comes to the conclusion that “the blacks should [have] left our country and journeyed back to Jamaica or to Africa . . . for I was now convinced that English air . . . soon reduces these creatures to a state of childish helplessness” (Phillips 59). In *Foreigners and A Distant Shore*, the black diaspora is subjected to atrocities from the white majority. In a 2004 NPR interview, Phillips suggested that it is the effect of colonialism which has manipulated African people in considering England as their home because of the familiar colonial language and the idea that “Britain is a country of decency and good manners, civility” (Phillips). It is also the regime of colonialism which has stripped the identity of the colonized to the point of seeing themselves in the eyes of the colonizer. Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon theorized the predicament of the colonized in their pursuit of an identity in the postcolonial era. “The psychic dislocations Fanon points out are most likely to be felt by . . . colonized individuals who (like Fanon himself) have been educated within and, to some extent, invited to be mobile within the colonial system” (Nagy-Zekmi 134).

Postcolonial literature clearly shares its insights regarding the lingering devastation plaguing the African continent as a result of colonialism. Nevertheless, what must also be acknowledged is the intra-racial violence that existed in Africa prior to the arrival of colonizers. Though European’s colonization of the African continent is a factor in its underdevelopment and internal conflict, *infighting* and *splitting* have also existed in Africa in the precolonial era. Therefore, it is safe to say that the African community was destructive with one another without the assistance of foreign interferences. Nairobi political and social commentator Tee Ngugi supports this reasoning in an article in *The East African* in which he mentions that Africa too often credits colonialism for their struggles and disgrace. “While it is true that colonial governments emphasized ethnicity in their policy of ‘divide and rule,’ they can hardly be said to

have created ethnic divisions. Pre-colonial ethnic groups operated as independent mini-nations and were quite often hostile to one another” (Ngugi).

Through a trilogy, the novelist Chinua Achebe pens a multigenerational depiction of an African civilization, the Umuofia people of the Igbo tribe. In the first novel of the series, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe captures the Umuofians living in a colonial-free environment. The novelist reveals baseless conflicts which have existed in African nations before the colonial regime took place. Though socio-economic classes were not evident prior to the colonial era, tribes did exist in Africa, and some tribes affirmed their sense of superiority over others which resulted in conflicts. Achebe displays the savage nature of the Umuofians in their dealing with one another as war is always looming or vile compromises are reached in order to prevent war between common villages. Intra-racial hostility permeates many pages of this novel, especially with the main character, Okonkwo, who is a warmonger warrior recognized by the community for his exertion and aggression on his people. Philosophy and Religion Professor Patrick C. Nnoromele, in an article published by John Hopkins University Press, recognizes Okonkwo as a hero when he opens the article questioning Achebe’s development of the character, stating “Why did he [Achebe] let Okonkwo (the hero of the novel) fail?” (146). A closer reading of the novel would proclaim a differing opinion of the character. Okonkwo, in actuality, is the opposite of a true hero; Okonkwo is more of a prototype of a tragic hero in ancient Greek theatre. Though readers are compelled to sympathize with the colonization of his tribe at the end of the novel, readers may have little to no remorse for Okonkwo as he behaves in a hostile fashion towards his family and his own tribe.

Several instances in *Things Fall Apart* allude to Okonkwo’s aggression directly. In the beginning of the novel, Achebe chooses to inform readers of Okonkwo’s desire to be unlike his

father, Unoka, who was not respected and feared throughout the village as they did so of Okonkwo. “Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things . . . he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars” (8). This is one of the earliest indications in the novel of intra-racial hostility involving Okonkwo. Achebe further contrasts Okonkwo’s barbarism to his father’s tenderness in the novel stating, “he [Okonkwo] was not afraid of war. He was a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father, he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia’s latest war, he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head, and he was not an old man yet” (10). The father to son dichotomy shows itself in different forms in the novel, yet it is driven by a commonality which is Okonkwo’s discontent with the peaceful nature of his father and his own son, Nwoye, for he wished they carried a fierce persona similar to his reputation. Achebe describes Nwoye’s nuisance as his father tries to impart the savage history of their culture to him with the following: “Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell” and her stories are usually lighthearted which is what Nwoye preferred (53-54). Not only is Okonkwo an archetype of a tragic hero, but his community also exhibits *infighting* and *splitting* which holistically makes them antiheroes, collectively. The novel reads, “Umuofia was feared by all its neighbors . . . so the neighboring clans who naturally knew of these things feared Umuofia, and would not go to war against it” (11-12) because of their expertise in warfare, so it is ironic in the latter sections of the novel when the African tribe, which is at the heart of the plot, blames external forces for their division (174-176). In actuality, the division has already existed within their community. The culmination of Achebe’s novel is best put through the words of Dr. Imafedia Okhamafe as he states, “things begin to fall apart in this nine-village Umuofia clan long before a European colonialist missionary culture inserts itself there” (134). Achebe’s trilogy

makes a clear point in signaling humanity's self-destructive nature with *infighting* and *splitting*. The author seems to suggest that internal strife is an impediment to progression and that it serves as a leeway to susceptibility. An article in *Peace Research* declares the following regarding Achebe and his novels:

Achebe does give noble action a place in the trilogy, but he also accords due recognition to the greed, selfishness, and dishonesty that continue giving rise to war. Although the author makes clear in the war-related tales that the enemy has reduced the proud people with whom he sided to utter ruin and desperation, he balances insights about war, tracing its roots to common human impulses and choices, irrespective of sides. Such balancing exemplifies the author's "middle ground" utterances—which characterize his literary voice. (Lynn 174)

Another prose that is associated with postcolonial literature are slave narratives. “The slave narrative took on an unprecedented urgency and candor, unmasking” (Gates and Smith 84) truths to the uninformed. Slave narratives deliver focal firsthand accounts of those who actually endured this oppression from being captured in Africa, to being sold and transported during the transatlantic slave trade, and finally to their gruesome experience in the Americas. According to the editors of *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Olaudah “Equiano was not the first African-born former slave to recount his experiences in bondage and freedom. But he appears to have been the first to write the story of his life himself” without the assistance or revision from others which is why his slave narrative is critically valued as evidential events in comparison to other slave narratives (Gates and Smith 112-113). However, the irony in *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* is the persecution of African people by other Africans. Equiano walks readers from his journey in his



African village and home to his arrival on the coastline where he is bounded into a European slave ship. Prior to this arrival, Equiano, who is at a young age during this time, states, “our manners are simple” (Equiano 117) in reference to his African community. Nonetheless, this simplistic life is also a cruel system of reprimanding others which includes the kidnapping and enslavement of fellow tribe men/women as compensation for unwanted acts that have been committed. Furthermore, death is the consequence that is usually carried out for others’ acts such as adultery. Equiano further reveals practiced behaviors throughout his village which contrast the simple life he declares his people live by:

We had been all at work in it one day as usual, when our people were suddenly attacked. . . There were many women as well as men on both sides; among others my mother was there, and armed with a broad sword. After fighting for a considerable time with great fury, and after many had been killed our people obtained the victory, and took their enemy’s Chief prisoner. He was carried off in great triumph, and, though he offered a large ransom for his life, he was put to death. (Equiano 120)

Later in his narrative, Equiano tells of his kidnapping and his transition into slavery at the hands of his African people. He is sold over and over again until the climaxed transaction which eventually forces him into the transatlantic slave trade. Equiano alludes that there is no equivalency between his experience as a slave to Africans and his experience as a slave to Europeans. Nevertheless, slavery between the African people is evidence of *infighting* and *splitting* which also deserves reckoning.

Though colonialism has fractured the African continent, an ongoing and much needed dialogue should be reserved regarding the universality of *infighting* and *splitting* within

homogenous groupings. This chapter focused on the issue within the African continent and its people, but as Tee Ngugi mentions, “before unification in Germany and Italy, for instance, the different principalities and regions saw themselves as independent nations that were often hostile to one another.” The idea of *infighting* and *splitting* thus is not a unilateral dilemma, but it is a prevalent one which needs to be addressed accordingly.

### Chapter 3: The Killing of Heroes

Real life tragedies have also been indicative of intra-racial victimization as activists who have dedicated their lives to dismantle hegemonic forces and promote equality for their people ironically lose their lives for the same people they fought to upkeep. It is nothing short of heroism when individuals commit their lives in the pursuit of equality, not only for themselves, but for an entire group of people. Such is the case of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, better known to the world as Gandhi, and Malcolm Little, better known as Malcolm X. These iconic activists' approaches in seeking equality were different, yet they accomplished much regarding their resistance of injustices to their people. This is why they are highly celebrated years after their deaths. Nonetheless, the subject of their murder is worth examining due to the irony of their assassinations. Gandhi, born in India, was killed by an Indian man, and Malcolm X, an African American, was gunned down by several African American men. What caused these intra-racial hostilities? Religious differences have been the catalyst to moments of *infighting* and *splitting* in homogenous groupings in history, and Gandhi and Malcom X became victims of devout separatism. Gandhi and Malcolm X challenged the norms of practiced religion and this was met with contestation which eventually led to their demise. They were a threat to an established system.

In the early moments of the biographical film *Gandhi*, in which Sir Ben Kingsley plays the titular character, the funeral procession of the heroic activist is displayed and reenacted. There is a sense of admiration for Gandhi upon seeing the countless individuals who were present at this memorial. In the film during the funeral, a speaker commentates how “man, government, and dignitaries from all over the world have joined hands today to pay homage to this little brown man” (04:50). The speaker further continues quoting American General George

C. Marshall in which the former U.S. Secretary of State stated that “Gandhi has become a spokesman for the conscience of all mankind” (05:15). Nevertheless, this love that Gandhi promoted to all humanity could not prevent one from murdering him. The *infighting* and *splitting* in India which resulted in the death of Gandhi stems from the division of Muslim Indians and Hindu Indians. Though the film and many scholars attribute India’s partition to the country’s intra-racial victimization, Historian Yasmin Khan, in her book *The Great Partition*, suggests that “in the three decades preceding Partition a self-conscious awareness of religious ethnicity – and conflict based on this – had undoubtedly escalated in intensity and was becoming more flagrant” (19). Therefore, it is affirmation that religious differences preexisted in India prior to its partition, and these differences drove individuals to behave heinously. Gandhi, a Hindu, avoided devout separatism as he welcomed beliefs from other religions and his perspective did not sit well with many.

On January 30, 1948, Nathuram Godse approached Gandhi in the midst of others, and shot and assassinated him in New Delhi, India. Godse undeniably admitted his guilt to the crime and he has never been dismissive about his action; however, he was not the sole culprit behind this tragedy. Many influences contributed to Godse’s decision to murder Gandhi. A culprit whom scholars credit in masterminding the assassination plot of Gandhi is Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. According to India’s Secretary Pramod Kumar Das’ book *Famous Murder Trials*, “Savarkar had a glorious selfless background as a fiery revolutionary. The history of an independent India cannot be complete without a reference to him” (20). Das further alludes to Savarkar’s impact on India as the head of the Hindu Mahasabha, a nationalist organization who “insisted on freedom of the country . . . and advised people to refrain from Moslem appeasement policy” (21). One of these people Savarkar is referencing is Gandhi who encouraged

compromises across religious lines so the antagonizing of Gandhi was inevitable. Godse, the man who pulled the trigger, was in close proximity with Savarkar's philosophy as Godse was also affiliated with the political organization Hindu Mahasabha. The director of the film *Gandhi* also highlights the titular character's will to compromise with all, regardless of their religion near the end of the film. As Hindu Indians protest for Gandhi not to appease Muslim Indians, Gandhi rebuts them by saying, "I am Muslim, and a Hindu, and a Christian, and a Jew" and that a divided India on any merits is not the India Gandhi aspires for (2:32:15). Courtroom recordings have informed readers of Godse's confession in which he stated the following:

I do say that my shots were fired at the person whose policy and action had brought rack and ruin and destruction to millions of Hindus . . . I bear no ill will towards anyone individually, but I do say that I had no respect for the present government owing to their policy, which was unfairly favourable towards the Muslims. But at the same time I could clearly see that the policy was entirely due to the presence of Gandhi. (qtd. in Saha)

Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's speech after Gandhi's death attests to the idea of intra-racial antagonism as a theme of the assassination. During the ceremony for the immersion of Gandhi's ashes, Nehru states, "Our country gave birth to a mighty soul and he shone like a beacon not only for India but for the whole world. And yet he was done to death by one of our own brothers and compatriots" (qtd. in Markovitz 56). Though Gandhi used his passion to decry the wrongs those of Indian descent have had to endure from British imperialism, Gandhi was shot, and his life ended prematurely at the hands of a man of Indian descent.

The Civil Rights Movement in America cannot be spoken of without the name of Martin Luther King Jr. This resentment is similar to the existing association of Malcolm X at the

mentioning of King. The two men are connected in discussion pertaining to the Civil Rights movement as they garnered and earned praises from their peers and world leaders respectfully. There is, however, much divisive speculation about these American activists. Nonetheless, Peniel Joseph, University of Texas professor and author of *The Sword and The Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcom X and Martin Luther King Jr.*, suggests in a CNN article that these men should be inseparable regarding their contribution and impact on the Civil Rights Movement. Despite their heroism in the fight for African Americans' equality in the 1960s and 1970s, their lives were both cut short, and in the case of Malcolm X, his assassination has a resemblance to that of Gandhi in which religious differences fueled the hatred that resulted in the following description of Malcolm X's death.

A man in one of the front rows held up a sawed-off shotgun and fired at Malcolm's chest. As Malcolm keeled over, slumping into a row of folding chairs on stage, three men stood in the front row pumping bullets into him. After he was motionless, the gunmen emptied their revolvers into his prone body, wounding him twenty-one times. (Steele "The Assassination: Pt 1" 5)

Similar to Godse who confessed his wrongdoing of murdering Gandhi, Talmadge Hayer has admitted he was one of the individuals responsible for the assassination of Malcolm X (Bates). Hayer, a member of the Nation of Islam, describes in length his association to the assassination plot:

We had decided that we were going to move on Malcolm. We were going to kill him if we possibly could on the 21st. We visited the Audubon Ballroom the night before. There was a dance. We went to the dance like anyone else. We looked the place over, cased it. When we left, on our way back to Jersey, we decided that we

would move on the situation at the Ballroom the next morning. (qtd. in Steele  
“The Assassination: Pt 2” 2-3)

Many relevant events preceded Malcolm’s demise on February 21, 1965, and an examination of these events attest to the existence of *infighting* and *splitting* as the catalyst that ultimately took the spirited activist’s life.

“The NOI [Nation of Islam] is an African American religious and political organization formed in 1930 with the goal of improving the economic and spiritual conditions of the African American community. Malcolm X joined the group in 1952” (Bates). Malcolm X, however, with his gift of gab, his enthusiastic approach, and his militant ideologies, soon outshined the NOI which inevitably attracted negative attention. According to University of Texas Professor Peniel Joseph, “Malcolm's increasing fame and popularity attracted envy and criticism from his opponents and allies alike.” Those allies were members of the NOI which Malcom was a member of, and the opponents were governmental entities who were observing a man’s transcendence into a powerful movement. Malcolm X challenged the status quo of these establishments which is what catapulted him to be seen as a threat. Many suppositions over the years have centered on governmental agencies’ involvement in Malcolm’s assassination. It is commonly known that federal departments such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Department of Investigation have resorted to illegal surveillance of those they considered a danger to America’s established order. It is also commonly known that Malcolm X inspired the Black Power Movement, not only in America but, throughout the world (Franklin 197). “During the early 1960s the Black Power movement was striving for more direct protest activity. Demands for change were mounting against the established order” (Steele “The Assassination: Pt 1” 1). Because of this movement, America targeted Malcolm. “On June 6, 1964, FBI Director J.

Edgar Hoover sent a telegram, which later became public, to the FBI office in New York City that said, ‘do something about Malcolm X’ (qtd. in Bates). Many details regarding the day of Malcolm’s death allege that authorities were instrumental in creating the opportunity for him to be killed. Additionally, the aftermath regarding the investigation of his death was done lackadaisically which hinted to many of a conspiracy between Malcolm’s murderers and authorities. The 2020 Netflix documentary *Who Killed Malcom X?* has resurrected the ongoing debate about that complexity of Malcolm X’s death which has “resulted in New York reopening the investigation into Malcolm’s assassination” (Bates). Although there is an awareness of federal, state, and local agencies’ involvement into the demise of Malcolm X, another undeniable truth implicates members of the NOI, which are African Americans, as the actual murderers.

The matter of intra-racial victimization comes to the surface as facts reveal that African American men pulled the triggers that ultimately killed Malcolm X. These men were later identified as members of the religious and political organization which Malcolm also joined. This separatism is most likely due to the fact that Malcom began to shift from the organization at a later part of his life. Some may credit it to Malcom’s insubordination to the Nation of Islam, but it can also connect to Malcom’s eschewing of the organization after Elijah Mohammed’s sexual indiscretions transpired which Malcolm did not support.

After placing the Messenger in a divine status, admitting this scandalous fact was utterly grotesque to Malcolm and other devout followers. The thought of Elijah Muhammad betraying the reverence of the trusting members of the Nation through the implications of his immoral behavior tormented him [Malcolm].

(Steele “The Assassination: Pt 1” 2)



Ultimately, “Elijah Mohammed was the literal messenger of God” (Joseph), so when news of his infidelity emerged, Malcolm became uneasy with the practices of NOI as other men in the NOI still revered Mohammed. Malcolm was reprimanded further by the NOI, so this comes as no surprise that after his banning from the organization, “Malcolm went on to start two new organizations, Muslim Mosque, Inc (MMI) and the Organization of Afro-American Unity” (Bates). This indifferent opposition proved to be costly for Malcolm as many began to view him as a defector to the Nation of Islam’s objective. This translated to the fateful event that occurred in New York City on February 21, 1965.

The same story which is similar to Gandhi resonates with Malcolm X. Though these two men invested much time and effort in protesting for their people, it was their people who pulled the triggers that ended their lives. Malcolm became an advocate for African Americans against systematic racism, yet he was eventually murdered by a group of African American men. Gandhi sought an independent India from British rule, yet he was gunned down by a native Indian man. In the end, these heroic men were murdered victims of *infighting* and *splitting* which developed out of religious differences. These activists’ deaths are a reminder of an obligation to address a hostility that afflicts the homogeneous grouping of race.

## Chapter 4: Gender Oppositions

Women seem to solely attribute the oppression they have endured to external forces. Patriarchy is at the center of feminism and feminist movements. More literature and scholarship are available on the notion that men are the impediment to women's development and independence. Francophone Professor Mutunda exclaims the following:

The common belief among most feminist critics . . . is that men are the worst enemies of women. These feminist scholars have denounced men, accusing them of being the major source of women's unhappiness particularly in the family. They claim that men oppress, mistreat and *exploit* women by inhibiting and restricting their self-realization. (91)

Feminism should not be shunned, shamed, nor slandered, for the indignation towards patriarchy is valid. There is an intersectionality between genders which is why feminism is a universal movement that has spanned over many periods in history and will persist until there is true equality between the genders. Though women from all over the world are justified in their claims, women of color from colonized nations have experienced the worst brunt of patriarchal oppression to what is recognized as "triple marginalization" according to Dr. Seodial Deena, a multicultural and English professor at East Carolina University (20). Postcolonial literature addresses years of patriarchal oppression of men who failed to complement their counterparts.

There is another side to women's suffrage. While men are stereotypically known to resort to physical conflict with one another, women are known to be systematic and indirect while fighting one another. A stand-up special which features comedian John Mulaney has a great comical moment in which he predicates a collaboration of women in the context of the heist film *Ocean's Eleven*. Mulaney states, "You could never put together a heist with women.

Like *Ocean's Eleven* with women wouldn't work because two would keep breaking off to talk shit about the other nine” (Polito and Szymanski). He credits this due to the “passive-aggression” approach women use in their attacks of other women. The novel *So Long a Letter* and the film *Raise the Red Lantern* are a protest and an outcry to patriarchal driven society; however, not enough focus is centered on the women characters from these texts who also contribute to other women’s jeopardy. These texts reveal a pattern amongst women which can be summed as a survival mechanism where women resort to extremities as a way to prosperity. An examination of these texts will reveal the *infighting* and *splitting* that occurs within the female gender.

Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*, a semiautobiographical epistolary novel, is connotative with feminism, but women are conduits of other women’s suffering. The perpetrator of the intra-racial conflict in Ba’s novel lies specifically with the elderly women characters. This group of women, despite their wisdom and experience, choose, instead, to pursue their own selfish desires while simultaneously ruining the lives of other women:

It is clear that in her criticism of African societies with regard to marriage, Ba exposes the patriarchal oppression of women. However, in addition to denouncing certain masculine behaviors in her novels, Ba also examines critically the role of some women –especially those of the older generation - in a couple's life, revealing comportment that contributes to victimizing the wife. (Mutunda 100)

The novel *So Long a Letter* is written as an actual letter from the main character Ramatoulaye – who is a reference to the author - to her friend Aissatou. The main theme of the letter surrounds the polygamous relationships both women have been entrenched into and their response to their adulterous husband’s choice of marrying a second wife. The novel, however, portrays that men are

not the only pursuers or instigators in having a second wife, but it also reveals that the benefactors of second wives happen to be elderly women. Aissatou's monogamous marriage to her husband, Mawdo, metaphorically ends when Mawdo's mother decides that another woman should marry her son. According to Professor Mutunda, "Mawdo Ba and his wife Aissatou were happily married and satisfied with each other until he began to get external pressure from his mother as to how best he should manage his marriage" (100-101). The solution, according to Mawdo Ba's mother, is to wed another woman. In Ramatoulaye's case, her compromise to her husband's second wife was inspired by the second wife's mother who is the character known as Lady Mother-in-Law. Lady Mother-in-Law encourages her daughter to pursue a married man for vanity gains as she is aware that her daughter's marriage to the married Modou will bring "the offer of a future trip to Mecca" (Ba 39). Therefore, "Lady Mother-in-law destroys another woman's home" (Mutunda 104) for the sole purpose of fulfilling her vain desires.

Though elderly women are aware of the difficulties younger women have to experience in life and specifically marriage, these women are the same who disregard the sacredness of marriage by encroaching upon it in order to fulfill their own self-interested agenda. These elderly women are antagonists and a hindrance to women's fight for a peaceful life and equality. The actions of the elderly women in *So Long a Letter* are similar to the cases with other women in authoritative roles who impose their domineering rule onto others. "As Irene Gebara has observed, it is women in leadership positions who are authoritative and thus limit choices for other women by often ruling their organizations with cruelty and jealousy" (qtd. in Macule and Nadar 361). The cliché of "power corrupts" seems to also be evident within the female gender and it represents the catalyst to the *infighting* and *splitting* that infects the feminists' movement. Rather than unifying to overthrow male dominance, women have also become conducive to the hostility of other women.

“They have internalized patriarchal theologies and worldviews and, instead of resisting them, actively promote them” (Macule and Nadar 361).

Whereas elderly women are the proponents of oppressive behaviors in Mariama Ba’s novel, it is fellow women at the center of the film *Raise the Red Lantern* who mission themselves to detract other women’s opportunity of a prosperous life. The film can be summarized as “wives and concubines . . . preying upon one another in order to win the favor of the despotic husband” (Chow 151). *Raise the Red Lantern* is directed by Zhang Yimou who “has inscribed his name into Chinese film history and has achieved international recognition” (Cui 833). Yimou, along with a few others, are the exceptional Chinese filmmakers who have made films that are timeless and universal. The fact that *Raise the Red Lantern* is a feminist film affirms that Yimou is willing to address controversial subjects as this film is a revelation to “an oppressively feudal China” (Chow 143). Nevertheless, Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern* wants viewers to sympathize with the inevitable life choices women have to succumb to when they are left with no other options. Furthermore, options are menial when other women are instrumental in exacerbating an environment that is seemingly hopeless instead of coming together to overthrow oppression. In the opening scene of the film (1:00), the main character, Songlian, speaks to her motherly figure regarding her decision to be married. The marriage, however, is not based on love but from the discourses she has been groomed under by her mother and other women. They have instilled the ideology to Songlian to marry a wealthy man as this is the best situation a woman can hope for. Songlian then moves into her husband’s mansion as the fourth mistress – the husband is known to viewers as master – and what follows is pure debauchery between her and the other three women who are residing in this mansion. Yimou systemically conceals full transparency of the master’s face. The argument can be made that Yimou artistically chooses to do this in order for his audience

to focus their gaze on the atrocious behavior of the female characters. The *Mise-en-scène* of the film can be described as the following:

The high, massive walls divide the wives and concubines according to their status yet combine them under the same patriarchal authority. . . Inside the sealed house, the drama unfolds as the four wives and concubines compete for the master's favor. . . After the lantern is placed in front of the chosen one [wife/concubine], the drama of female competition takes center stage inside the walls and between the chambers. (Cui 835)

The red lantern is symbolic in the film as it represents patriarchal dominance and a catalyst to the women characters' *infighting* and *splitting*. In an early part of the film (14:35), a male servant of the master yells "light the lanterns at the third house." This announcement serves as a verdict on who the master would sleep with for the night amongst his four wives/concubines. Consequently, this represents which woman has earned the perks that accompany such a title. Because of this, the women characters in the film inevitably become the antagonists to one another throughout the plotline. The plot reveals "the catfight among the women. The third wife charms the master with her opera singing and challenges the "sisters" with her competitive force. The second wife, who possesses neither youth nor skill but 'a Buddha's face and a scorpion's heart,' stirs up conflict among the wives by setting one party against another" (Cui 837). The women characters in the film resort to vile acts against one another which ultimately self-destruct their feminism. Songlian, the newlywed newcomer to the house whom Yimou wants viewers to sympathize with, soon falls victim to her own acts of cruelty. Near the end of the film, Songlian becomes responsible for two other women's death in the mansion and this transition to a villainous

character is best captured when one of the female servants of the house states, “who would have known the 4<sup>th</sup> mistress [Songlian] would be so vicious?” (1:31:00)

Feminism would be nonexistent if there was not a sincere protest towards male domination. However, too many scholars seem to solely attribute women’s intragender hostility to patriarchal indoctrination. There is nothing novel about the situation in which women are the source of oppressive perpetuation on their own gender. Nevertheless, it is quite an understandable claim of gender bias or gender disparity if men speak on the notion of *infighting* and *splitting* within the female gender as they are the oppressors of women. Amal Awad, a female author and journalist, speaks with credibility as she sums up the many times in her life when women were the benefactors of her impediments:

It is women who hold a true position of power in how they shape female experiences. It is women who have most held me back, tried to oppress me, shun me, silence me or modify my womanhood. It is a woman who tried to shoot down my dreams of being a journalist, who apologised with the proviso that she “just wanted to make sure I knew what my boundaries were”. It is women who gather other women in circles to reinforce male-centric rules; it is women who have a role in shaming other women for their behaviours, liberally calling them sluts, trash and whores. It is women who have pulled me aside to ‘gently’ scold me for something I was wearing; for the nail polish. It is a woman who warned a room full of women of the sin of plucking eyebrows unless it is for the pleasure of a husband. It is women who abandoned me the moment I took off the headscarf because they were so confronted by anything outside of their personal experience.

It is women who shush others who wish to speak out against domestic violence and abuse in the name of unity against a racist population. (Awad)

Awad's exposition in her article which is entitled "It is Women who have Tried the Most to Oppress Me" is an affirmation to women's *infighting* and *splitting*. Besides the critical hindrances imposed on women from elderly women or women seeking their own prosperity, there are other situations in which women carry out the hostility amongst one another. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* are testaments that patriarchy is not the sole contributor to women's opposition. Ironically, it is also women who have been and are still advancing despotic regimes on women.



## Conclusion: The Call to Humanity

In conclusion, this essay's objective is not to dismiss the atrocities of colonialism and patriarchy and their lingering impacts they have indoctrinated which are still continuously felt in society. Colonized nations and women are credible in their assessment regarding the oppression they have experienced from external hegemonic forces. Postcolonial works center on the subject of interracial and intergender conflict and though this awareness is needed in order to foster healing and progress between different kinds of people, much attention should also be directed towards intra-racial and intragender hostility. It is safe to say that people are apt to overlook the harm they inflict on those within the same homogeneous groupings as them including those of the same race and gender as this thesis has presented. This thesis included an analysis of postcolonial films, literature, scholarships, and civil rights activists' lives which ultimately entails the notion of intra-racial and intragender antagonism. Therefore, postcolonial literature should also include an association of *infigting* and *splitting* amongst people which worsens their supplication for equality and justice.

Though the focus of the thesis seems to be a criticism towards the behaviors of those of African and Asian descent as well as with women, there is a universality that comes with *infigting* and *splitting*. It bears repeating Tee Ngugi's sentiment in which the author and scholar declared that other nations suffered from internal resistance between people of and from the same nation. This notion is supported through the many civil wars in various nations that have transpired throughout history. "Pre-colonial ethnic groups operated as independent mini-nations and were quite often hostile to one another" (Ngugi).

The decision to emphasize *infigting* and *splitting* within homogenous groups lies in the binary power of literature which serves as a therapeutic vehicle that can also promote awareness.

As mentioned in the introduction, I escaped a traumatic near-death experience due to what Haitians refer to as a *dechoukaj*, or a political upheaval. In Dr. Anna Maria Karczewska's article entitled "Against *dechoukaj*: the trauma of Haiti in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*," she suggests that "rewriting history, wresting it from the prison of 'the grand narrative' helps give a voice to traumatized individuals and populations. . . Literature of trauma may do important work in fostering awareness of and sympathy for different experiences of individuals around the globe" (12). The trauma which I experienced in my childhood allows me to speak on the inward strife which occurs in race. The traumatic experience of my childhood in Haiti sanctions me to address the violence those of African descent commit towards one another. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality which speaks on racial hierarchy and its oppression fails to exemplify how intersectionality also exists within race and gender.

Dr. Karczewska further solidifies my willingness to illustrate the concept of *infigting* and *splitting*. In her article, she suggests that those who have endured trauma may choose to share their experience as a coping mechanism as well as a way to promote awareness regarding the ordeal:

Literature often confronts official discourse critically and harshly, and rewrites that discourse and history to include the perspectives of the marginalized or excluded. . . New hybrid genres, which combine different stylistic categories open up debates and stimulate discussion. . . They [contemporary authors] communicate their traumatic experience in nightmare, hallucination and unwanted repetition, only then do they relieve and confess. (Karczewska 4-5, 8)

The sharing of my memoir combined with the literary analysis can be considered a hybrid genre with a specific mission of addressing the sociological and psychological concepts that are

personal to my life. *Infighting* and *splitting* are human nature issues which are not limited to race and gender as these notions can penetrate all parts of life causing division and turmoil within a group of people. *Infighting* and *splitting* are counterproductive towards a group's unified goal. Disenfranchised people can truly reach a level of progressivity and overcome domination only by understanding their own nature of victimizing one another which must come to a halt. Therefore, an awareness must be engaged in understanding the essence of people's hostility towards each other. As a man of African descent, it may be inexplicable that I chose to emphasize internal hostility rather than address the continuous repression those of African descent have had to endure for countless and ongoing years. Nevertheless, other African American men have also used their platform to speak about the destructive force of *infighting* and *splitting*.

Michael Jackson's famous song "Man in the Mirror" wishes for people to look at themselves instead of others regarding the betterment of a harmonious life. Kendrick Lamar, an African American hip hop artist, can claim to have created the anthem to the Black Lives Matter movement with the popular song "Alright" which was released in 2015. Another song of Lamar's, which is least popular but appears in the same album as the former, is entitled "The Blacker the Berry." In this song, Lamar reveals a hypocrisy in the African American community when he states, "so why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street? When gang banging make me kill a 'someone' blacker than me?" Lamar is hinting on the fact that Black Lives Matter seems applicable only when an African American is killed by a white person; whereas that is not the case when an African American is killed by another African American. The same passion and resolve used to protest oppression from outside forces should also coincide with grievances regarding *infighting* and *splitting*. Amal Awad, in her *TED* Talk stated that writers "write and

create to explore and interrogate our humanity” (9:58). Thus, the exploration and interrogation lie in promoting awareness of *infighting* and *splitting* and finding avenues to diffuse these hindrances.

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