Finding Selfness in Postcolonial Caribbean Short Fiction:

Intersectional Feminism and Diasporic Displacement in the Work of Jamaica Kincaid and Nalo Hopkinson

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Introduction

Literature can be an excellent medium for challenging dominant discourses that underlie societal structures and attitudes. The short story in particular can offer extensive value because its flexibility and oral roots can be powerful means of communication through which dominant discourses can be addressed. Although short stories may have different themes it is interesting to see how short fiction can function as powerful discourses of resistance. In this light, Jamaica Kincaid and Nalo Hopkinson make use of the short story to address notions of female identity, race and discrimination in the postcolonial context. These authors lend themselves to intersectional analyses of race and gender because they incorporate the complexities that come with identity-formation, especially in cases of demarginalization. Both authors are originally from the Caribbean and have moved to the West. It is essential to focus on the implications of their diasporic background in their work. The aftermath of colonialism and imperialistic values can have a paralyzing effect on the self, especially if one is perceived as the other. Bearing this in mind, the authors' personal and cultural history is addressed in their work, which offers a platform for the suppressed other to speak up. The suppressed other in these stories is the Caribbean woman. Kincaid and Hopkinson make the patriarchal and neo-colonial restrictions on the female black self palpable in their work, and their stories can therefore be seen as postcolonial projects in which fiction and history are actively intersected.

Forming a concept of self can be a complicated process, which is influenced by different power structures and discourses. In this context, concepts that come to mind are intersectional feminism, diaspora, hybrid identity and the concept of home and displacement. Self-perception can be influenced by these aforementioned concepts. Kincaid and Hopkinson, whether intentionally or not, have made use of these postcolonial theoretical concepts in their stories "Girl" and "A Habit of Waste," respectively. The strength of both

short stories lies in the reworking of postcolonial concepts that challenge the dominant discourses on female identity and being. The short story in general has an oral history in folk culture, which can raise issues of national memory and politics of identity. As Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell argue:

> In the postcolonial short story, orality could be seen as evidence of cultural survival, acting as one of the contrary means by which the onslaught of colonization and the eradication of indigenous cultures are challenged. […] The short story thrives in transnational societies, whose foundations are not yet established, so that the voices of submerged populations have an opportunity in which to be heard. (4-6)

Both "Girl" and "A Habit of Waste" can be seen as powerful analyses of the intersectional forces of class, gender and race that underlie oppressive social relations. It is interesting to see what the influence is of patriarchal and racist beliefs on the identities of the female protagonists in the short stories. "Girl" was published twenty-three years before "A Habit of Waste," and therefore the stories are different in their approach to these themes. The time gap between the stories has influenced their reworking of gender and race constraints on the concept of self. "Girl" tackles patriarchal conventions of female sexuality and agency in an Antiguan environment, whereas "A Habit of Waste" explores the effects of diasporic displacement on a Canadian woman with Caribbean heritage. It is important to keep in mind that the postcolonial concepts that will be discussed do not necessarily apply to all Caribbean women. Yet, it is interesting to analyze the power of the short story in battling oppressive structures and neo-colonial discourses.

It is crucial to emphasize that "Girl" and "A Habit of Waste" cannot be seen as representative for the whole of postcolonial Caribbean literature. Especially because Kincaid and Hopkinson are from two different countries and the two stories are set in different timeframes and places. Moreover, two short stories can never grasp the implications of

colonialism and patriarchal beliefs on Caribbean women in both the Caribbean and the West; fiction may not be a reliable medium for neo-colonial structures and its implications for colored women. Nevertheless, both stories challenge the dominant neo-colonial discourses that can negatively influence a Caribbean woman. The stories show the pervasive effect of these power structures on the sense of selfhood and individuality of two Caribbean protagonists, respectively in the Caribbean and in Canada. Therefore, "Girl" and "A Habit of Waste" can be seen as discourses of resistance because they shed light on the voice of the suppressed female other by intersecting the influences of racial and gendered constraints on the concept of self.

Focusing on discourses of marginalization the first chapter will offer an insight into the theory of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and into the concepts of diaspora, displacement and home, using the work of John McLeod and Avtar Brah. The second chapter will delve into Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," which will be analyzed focusing on female domestication and (post-)colonial[1] domination. Lastly, Nalo Hopkinson's "A Habit of Waste" works with diasporic notions of displacement and home to challenge dominant discourses and fixed notions of belonging. Both stories show how marginalizing discourses can have an influence on the concept of self, focusing on women of color who are still affected by the colonial past of their mother countries. With their work Kincaid and Hopkinson are trying to link reality to fiction to comment on not only the present but also the past. Their work conveys a clear image of irony and surrealism, which portrays a disintegration of culture and marks the importance of social change. Postcolonialism in itself is meant to challenge people to question their (fixed) notions of the world. These two stories, as postcolonial projects, aid this cause as they tell another story that challenges dominant discourses on race and gender.

[1] There is a difference between the words postcolonial and post-colonial. Whereas the first refers to the discourses that challenge neocolonial values and opinions, the latter refers to the literal time that came after colonial independence (McLeod 5-6).

Chapter 1. Discourses of Marginalization: Intersectional Feminism and Diasporic Displacement

In her work on black feminism and critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of intersectionality ("Demarginalizing" and "Mapping"). Crenshaw argues that women of color can be subjected to different intersecting constraints in society. She criticizes the failure of white feminism and anti-racist discourses to unite all these constraints in their struggle against patriarchal and racist elements. Finding selfness is especially difficult when this is simultaneously obstructed by race and gender constraints. Crenshaw points out that marginalization can be enforced through multiple forms human characteristics based on which one might be oppressed by others – such as class, physical abilities, race and gender ("Demarginalizing"). Specifically focusing on race and gender as marginalizing forces for women of color in the United States, Crenshaw states that dominant discourses wrongly uphold the idea that race and gender are "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" ("Demarginalizing" 139). This focus on a single-axis framework in discourses of resistance reinforces the trivialization of people who are afflicted by several marginalizing forces (Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing" 140). White feminist theory and antiracist theory alike failed to recognize the particular forms of injustice that women of color had to deal with. Rejecting this Manichean worldview of seeing feminist theory as opposite to antiracist discourses, Crenshaw argues for new discourses of resistance, which encompass all power structures and forms of discrimination against marginalized subgroups. This is where intersectional feminism can offer a solution to create an inclusive image of complex identity issues and the effects unfair treatment has on identity-formation. Intersectional feminism does not only focus on race and gender. Rather, it also takes into account all other possible forms of oppression, including class discrimination, ableism, and transsexual or queer discrimination.

Delving into the concept of intersectionality, Crenshaw distinguishes between three different forms of intersectionality, and once more the focus lies on women of color in the United States. ("Mapping"). It is important to note that there is an overlap between the three forms of intersectionality as they all make use of the intersection of race and gender. Yet, each form discusses the effects of intersectional demarginalization on different sociopolitical and cultural power relations. The first is structural intersectionality, which refers to the ways in which women of color can be troubled by different marginalizing pressures that makes their intergroup experiences and construction of self inherently different from and often more complex than the experiences of white women in American society (Crenshaw, "Mapping" 1245-1251). For example, Crenshaw argues that women of color are less likely to find jobs because they are discriminated against not only for their gender but also for the color of their skin ("Mapping" 1246). The second form is political intersectionality, which in Crenshaw's words, refers to "the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas" ("Mapping" 1252). White feminist discourses have often silenced black women because white feminists feared that the particular struggles of black women would divert the attention from women's suffrage (Crenshaw, "Demarginizaling" 153). The third, and most important form of intersectionality for this particular analysis of literature is representational intersectionality. Crenshaw says: "[representational intersectionality entails how] controversies over the representation of women of color in popular culture can also elide the particular location of women of color, and thus become yet another source of intersectional disempowerment" ("Mapping" 1245). Representational intersectionality focuses on the power of framing and the influence this has on the black female self. Crenshaw states that media, music and literature can represent black women in ways that are damaging for their concept of self ("Mapping"

1285). In relation to the two short stories, representational intersectionality pinpoints the specific entanglement of racist and patriarchal societal relations that affect the black female protagonists.

Crenshaw's theory of intersectional feminism indicates that people can identify with more than one identity structure. This becomes even clearer when analyzing diasporic concepts of home and displacement. Diaspora in itself is an extremely complex term and has several meanings. For the present purpose, it is advantageous to use a comprehensive definition of diaspora, while simultaneously keeping in mind the pitfalls of oversimplification and overgeneralization. It is important to see diaspora as a concept separate from migration, although they are certainly interrelated. Diaspora as a postcolonial concept goes beyond the physical act of migration. Diaspora presupposes migration but then, as Mark Shackleton explains, it also involves "adaptation and construction – adaptation to changes, dislocations and transformations, and the construction of new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing the world" (qtd. in McLeod 237). Migration entails the physical movement by people from one place to another. Diaspora is about the complexities that surround migration, specifically in a postcolonial context. The implications of diaspora are vast and have a pervasive effect on, on the immigrant and the perceived indigene subject alike. For the current purpose, diaspora should be seen as a theoretical concept and not the physical act of (forced)
migration. Diaspora as a concept is about the ways in which migrants adapt to new places and the influence their move has on constructing a new identity. Identity-formation is a dynamic process and diaspora can heavily influence ways of seeing the world for both the migrants as the indigene subjects. Visions of the self can be heavily influenced by the diasporic concepts of home, politics of location and displacement. Diaspora can change the connotations of people's definition of home. Before moving on to the ways in which the concept of home can provoke displacement it is important to have an inclusive definition of home itself. Brah gives

a dual definition of the concept of home, claiming that: "[o]n the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality" (192). In this light, the concept of home encompasses more than the literal notion of a house; with it comes the connotation of belonging and inclusion. In Avtar Brah's terminology politics of location encompass "the same geographical and psychic space [that] comes to articulate different 'histories' and how 'home' can simultaneously be a space of safety and terror (180). In other words, a location can trigger conflicting feelings of belonging, or the lack thereof, which enhance a person's feeling of displacement. Displacement then, is when people feel out of place in a location they technically call home. Displacement is about the problematic relationship between the newcomer and the indigene subject that are prescribed by "nativist discourses" (Brah 180). Thus, these dominant nativist discourses can enforce subjectivity and fixed notions of identity, which heavily affect binary social relations and identity-shaping processes.

The concept of home and belonging is normally more complex when taking diasporic notions into account. Brah coins a novel term, namely "diaspora space", which encompasses, in Brah's words: "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. […] In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'" (181 emphasis in original). Ergo, diaspora goes hand in hand with politics of location and belonging, which will be further explored in the analyses of the short stories of Kincaid and Hopkinson. Interestingly, following Brah's argumentation, the concept of diaspora does not only have an impact on the self of the newcomer, but is also has implications for the indigene subject (181). In addition, Brah argues: "[t]he question of home […] is intrinsically linked with the way in which

processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'" (192). Home, then, is not a fixed place rather it encompasses all the complex structures that come with diaspora, such as for example, dislocation or location.

Although migrants may want to adopt the new culture and the new place as home, they can still feel displaced, which can complicate the identity-shaping process. Brah discusses this in relation to the "situatedness" of the self, which means:

> The manner in which a group comes to be "situated" in and through a wide variety of discourses, economic processes, state politics and international practices is critical to its future. This "situatedness" is central to how different groups come to be relationally positioned in a given context. (182-183)

In other words, if a migrant feels physically displaced, this has an unquestionable impact when trying to form an identity and achieve a state of psychological security. It becomes more difficult to achieve psychological security when people feel torn between their previous home country and the current country they live in. This wavering between two different places can cause disunity in the self, which may lead to a hybrid form of identity. As McLeod states, a hybrid identity "indicates the perilous intermediate position that both migrants and their children are deemed to occupy: living 'in-between' different nations, 'of, and not of' each place, feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either location, defined by others often in unflattering ways" (247). An immigrant, or a child of immigrants, may feel divided between two seemingly incompatible worlds. Immigrants try to manage the sensibilities that come from leaving the old country and trying to adapt to a new place or a place in which they will always be viewed as different.

Thus, intersecting forces can heavily influence visions of the self, especially in the postcolonial context. Crenshaw, McLeod and Brah all stress that more nuanced

representations of the self are needed, arguing against fixed conceptual binaries. Both intersectionality and diaspora are tools that can be used to analyze the complexities that surround identity-formation. Forming a sense of self is a process that is always in motion and is not a fixed concept. Both Hopkinson and Kincaid emphasize this in their work and challenge generalizing power structures. They challenge these Manichean worldviews by offering accounts of the effects of situatedness on the concept of self.

Chapter 2. Domestication and Domination in Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"

One of the many female Caribbean authors who have addressed the importance of colonial history and gender structures in analyses of the self is Jamaica Kincaid. Her work can be seen as a dissection of the diverse, complex identity-problems that stem from colonialism and prescribed gender constructs. Born in 1949 as Elaine Potter Richardson in Saint John's, Antigua and Barbuda[2], Jamaica Kincaid has experienced firsthand the pervasive effect of colonialism in the cultural consciousness of the post-independence Caribbean (Edwards 2). Kincaid's mother was Dominican and Kincaid's father was Antiguan. Kincaid's father left his wife and children when Kincaid was very young (Edwards 2). It would be wrong to regard her fiction as purely autobiographical, yet her rather strict upbringing in a previously colonized country has set the tone for all of her work. In this light, Kincaid writes self-reflexive narratives that can offer insight into the intersecting social structures than may affect Caribbean women in their path to finding selfness. Justin D. Edwards states that Kincaid sees Antigua as a prison: "[a] frequent theme of Kincaid's fiction is the way that this ten-by-twelve-mile island [Antigua] traps its citizens and discourages them from reflecting upon their experiences, analyzing their situations, or controlling their destinies" (4). Kincaid was indignant of the austere gender relations and social norms in Antigua, which prompted her to move to the United States when she was sixteen. She started out as an au pair in Scarsdale, New York while simultaneously continuing her studies (Edwards 2). Later on she found a job at the *New Yorker*, which would eventually be the start of her long and flourishing career as a writer. Kincaid's first book, *At the Bottom of the River,* was published in 1983 and is a collection of short stories dealing with themes surrounding identity, gender relations and colonial history and its aftermath. Kincaid's first short story "Girl" is included in this book, but first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1977 (Edwards 6). This story can be seen as a

[2] Further referred to as Antigua.

powerful analysis of the intersectional forces of class, gender and race that underlie oppressive social relations in the Caribbean, and in Antigua in particular.

"Girl" is a one-sentence story of a list of commands that a mother gives to her daughter. It is an enumeration of instructions on social behavior and domestic work. The shortness of the story is emphasized by this one-sentence structure and adds to the strength of the story. Despite its shortness the story succeeds to address complex gender issues and challenges the fear of female sexuality. The speaker in this story is the mother, but the reader perceives the list of commands through the eyes of the daughter. Edwards says: "["Girl"] is about mother-daughter relations, the possibilities and limitations of childhood, the codes of behavior that constitute social control, the regulation of desire, and the restriction of gender roles" (17). The mother gives her daughter a list of instructions, such as how to do laundry or how to cook. In addition, the mother also teaches the girl rules of social conduct in post-colonial Antiguan society and warns the girl not to become a slut: "on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming" (Kincaid 3). Kincaid uses this form of slut-shaming to address the constraints that Antiguan women, and women from other countries for that matter, can stumble upon when constructing their own identity as a female-identified individual that falls victim to patriarchal power structures. Although it is not explicitly mentioned where exactly the short story is set, it may be assumed that it is set in Antigua for the many cultural references in the story. For example, the mother teaches the girl how to cook okra and salt fish, both of which are part of the regular Caribbean diet. Moreover, the mother accuses the girl of singing "benna" in Sunday school (Kincaid 3). *Benna* is a form of Antiguan gossip music, which is, as becomes clear in the story, unacceptable for a respectable girl in Caribbean society to use (Treisman). The mother's wishes adhere to a patriarchal social structure in which female sexuality is feared and female agency is discouraged.

The narrative focuses on the complex issues that come with finding selfness as a woman in a country that has colonial and patriarchal structures interwoven in everyday life. Antigua has a long colonial history and still suffers from an economical and cultural oppressive British colonial system. The imperial ideology was not only responsible for the extortion of the colonized country; it also encouraged the internalization of the binary ideologies that are quintessential in colonial thinking. As Edwards argues:

> At an early age, Kincaid recognized that daughters were treated differently from sons and that Antigua had been severely scarred by its history of British imperial rule. She thus began to criticize gender hierarchies, as well as those colonized subjects who had internalized the views and ideologies of the colonial power. As a result, she began to question her education: an education that was tainted by gender divisions and narratives passed down by the British – narratives that ignored the Antiguan history of slavery and subjugation. (3)

Kincaid challenges misogynistic and chauvinistic social relations with “Girl” as it becomes clear that the mother internalized these patriarchal notions. The idealized notion of domesticated women does not only stem from patriarchal beliefs, it has its origin in colonial times. In the Victorian era, British women were respected if they took up passive, nurturing roles (Anatol 6). As Giselle Anatol states, in the peak of colonialism women were encouraged to reproduce more children, both in England as in the West Indies, to strengthen the power of the British Empire (6). Slavery was abolished in the 1830s, which left the British colonizers and plantain owners in need of more subjects to rebuild the profitable labor market. Women played a significant role in this because they were the nurturers of society. This had an influence on Caribbean women as well. As Anatal says, “European pressures on women to be chaste and sexually submissive would also have readily seeped into the moral codes of the Caribbean colonial – and later, postcolonial [sic] – middle class” (6). Linking this back to

Kincaid's "Girl," the mother wants to make sure that girl's behavior is within the specific guidelines of gendered social constructs in post-colonial Antigua. The mother tells the girl how to wash clothes, how to dress and to cook; every piece of advice is aimed at pleasing men and is not directed at the girl's own wellbeing. The girl is told how to iron her father's clothes and how the behave around men (Kincaid 4). It might seem at first that the girl does not speak up and her voice is not heard. However, she is not as silent as she might seem as she does defend herself twice in the story. However, the girl only speaks up to defend herself against the worst crimes that she could commit as a respectable young girl. Namely, the two things that involve public shaming: the girl's denial of singing benna and the doubt that she has whether the baker will let her feel the bread. These two perceivable shameful acts do not only bring shame upon herself but upon her mother as well because they indicate the mother's failure to raise a well-behaved young woman. Nonetheless, the girl's voice is heard and the reader becomes aware of her discontent and protest against the mother's wishes. It is not clear whether the girl has actually sung benna in Sunday school, but the possibility alone sets the mother off in anger. The girl's hesitant denials add to her sense of displacement, which is enforced by the strict parameters in which she is allowed to act. When linking this to Brah's discussion of politics of location, it becomes clear that the girl is trapped in a home that is both a safe haven as a prison. On the one hand, the girl's home is safe because the mother teaches the girl how to survive in a patriarchal society and how to take care of herself. On the other hand, home is a prison because the girl has no agency of her own. With its strong messages the story conveys a sense of uncertainty and insecurity, which parallels the girl's feelings of lost identity.

In Crenshaw's theory on intersectionality it becomes clear that Kincaid constantly shifts her attention from race to gender and vice versa. It is important to note however, that the racial undertone of the story is not as salient as the anti-misogynistic themes that come to

the fore. The fear of female sexuality that is explored in the story reflects the distinct sensibilities that come with patriarchal tendencies. For example, the girl is taught how to love a man and how to make a man fall in love with her (Kincaid 5). In addition, the girl learns what it means to be a woman in the Caribbean in particular. Kincaid's use of certain food types such as "dasheen" and "doukona" place the story in Antigua. However, Kincaid does not directly address racial binaries in the Antiguan society of the story, but she touches upon different factors that shed light on middle-class women in post-colonial Antigua. As Danticat has said it is difficult to separate the story from its local backdrop, as the locality is such an important aspect of the story (qtd. in Treisman). However, the indictment of British colonial legacy and racist notions is not as pervasive in "Girl" as in other stories by Kincaid, or as will become clear in "A Habit of Waste". Having said that, Kincaid incorporates details of the lives of middle-class Antiguan women in a post-colonial society in which domesticity is celebrated in a woman's character.

Interestingly, "Girl" was published before Crenshaw published her essays on intersectionality. Yet, Kincaid, too, recognizes the necessity of interlinking neocolonial and chauvinist thinking with misogynistic societal structures to challenge these issues. Edward argues: "Kincaid is […] a writer who cannot be clearly delineated as either a black writer or a feminist writer. She is both, and her literary sensibility does not allow one of these identities to take precedence over the other. Kincaid, then, […] is not limited by the large theme of racism, but her texts express an understanding that racial inequities must be comprehended alongside other aspects of subjectivity such as gender and class" (Edwards 13). Kincaid does not only address issues of racism or the pervasive aftermath of colonialism. Rather, she simultaneously highlights the issues that Caribbean women in particular are dealing with in light of bigotry and class differences. As Edwards says: "what shines through in most of her [Kincaid's] writing is a depiction of the small attitudes and oppressive atmospheres that

encompassed her childhood on Antigua" (3). These oppressive atmospheres are specifically palpable in "Girl," in which the nameless girl receives a long list of demands and criteria she has to adhere to as a female. The fact that the girl has no name and that the title of the story is "Girl" emphasizes the idea that the mother's guidelines are directed at women specifically, and are not applicable to men. Arguably, the mother's phrasing and the generality of the story bring to mind the idea that many girls in this fictional Antiguan society have to listen to the same remarks by their own mothers. Danticat argues that the mother in this story has probably learned the same things from her mother and is passing them on to her daughter (qtd. in Treisman). The girl in this story is taught how to behave around men and how to adapt her lifestyle so that it suits men: "this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming" (Kincaid 4). However, the mother's advice is paradoxical: "this is how to make a good medicine to throw away the child before it even becomes a child" (Kincaid 5). Thus, the mother does not want her daughter to live promiscuously, yet she gives her an abortion recipe in case the daughter does not listen to her. Edwards argues: "[a] contradiction thus arises through the juxtaposition of the mother's instructions and the simultaneous recognition that the daughter will never live up to the social codes of behavior that the mother is trying to reach" (19). However, it can also be argued that the mother (subconsciously) recognizes the patriarchal codes of social conduct and fears that her daughter might be raped if she does not adhere to the social rules. This becomes noticeable when the mother warns the girl not to speak to "wharf-rat boys, not even to give direction" (Kincaid 3). The mother probably refers to boys who have dishonest purposes and can do the girl harm if she is naïve or does not adhere to the rules the mother and society bestow upon her. The mother's fears align with the fictional society's fear of women's progression and its ability to control it. As Crenshaw states: "the sexual value of women, unlike that of men, is a depletable commodity;

boys become men by expanding theirs, while girls become whores" ("Mapping"3 1285). If the girl acts outside of the domestic space, she will become a slut and harm will come to her, which goes hand in hand with the lack of agency in female selfhood that Kincaid tries to oppose in her work.

The girl grew up in a society that does not celebrate change or rebellion, especially if this means that one should act in a conflicting manner to fixed gender relations. As Edwidge Danticat points out: "if you come from a small and poor place where your way of surviving to succeed in society is to be a certain way, your internal way is not prioritized. The mother is giving her the rules for survival in society; this is how you become a lady. It is not a place where a girl is celebrated for being different" (qtd. in Treisman). Kincaid touches upon the sensitive topics of female mobility and sexuality and the manner in which they can be viewed in Antiguan society. The mother in "Girl" buttresses the conviction that women are untrustworthy and should therefore be warned for their inherent sinfulness. This brings back to mind the Victorian belief that excessive female sexuality would corrupt men and British society on a whole (Anatol 6). The girl is condemned for being sensual and promiscuous in the mother's eyes, and perhaps even in society's eyes as well. It is never explicitly stated in the story that the girl is sexually active, yet the mother believes that the girl is inherently sexual because she sang benna in Sunday school. By singing benna the girl would interact with boys in a manner that is not suitable for a chaste young girl, which leads the mother to believe that the girl has been acting out sexually (Treisman). The constant slut-shaming is prevalent in the story and comes to a culmination when the girl speaks up for the second time: "but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?" (Kincaid 5). The mother answers her as follows: "you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?" (Kincaid 5). This makes implicit the idea that even after all the mother's warnings and advice the girl might still turn out to be the kind of promiscuous

woman that is not allowed to touch the bread. Danticat explains and argues: “the baker probably doesn’t know where her [the girl’s] hands have been so he doesn’t let her squeeze the bread. Only [respectable] ladies are allowed to squeeze the bread” (qtd. in Treisman). In other words, the baker will value the girl more if she is chaste. The girl is not allowed to touch the bread if she has touched many men. Thus, the girl does not own her own body; all her decisions and actions have an impact on her life as she is forced to behave within fixed societal parameters. This emphasizes the double disadvantage that women of color have as also Crenshaw argues.

Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality can be applied to the girl in Kincaid’s story as the girl is also suffering from “double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 149). This multilayered domination of Caribbean women comes to the fore in “Girl” for the mother praises domesticity and reproduction. Antiguan womanhood in this story is represented in other terms than American womanhood would be for example. Kincaid adds local color to the story because the story would be incomplete if it would convey the message that the girl was merely suppressed by patriarchy. The girl is not rich but a middle-class or poor girl who is confined to her home. The only way that she can earn reverence from her mother or society is by completing her chores and staying within the confinements of her passive role. Domesticity has always been an important factor in women’s lives, especially in the context of anti-colonial struggles. Women were included in these struggles, but they often had passive roles as they were used for cooking, cleaning and nursing (McLeod 137). In colonial struggles for independence women’s needs were often put secondary to those of national liberation (McLeod 137). Following independence, women were more often than not marginalized in society despite the improvements made in name of national liberation and collective consciousness. National independence does not mean

independence for all layers of society, as patriarchal discourses are not always addressed in these top-down approaches to racism. For example, top-down anti-colonial discourses often failed to address the specific struggles of the female colonized, as general male-orientated discourses were used to fight off the colonizer (McLeod 137). In this light, Crenshaw argues that "[t]he goal of this activity [the bottom-up approach of intersectionality] should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: 'When they enter, we all enter'" ("Demarginalizing" 167). In other words, until black female agency is celebrated and not looked down upon, stories like "Girl" have served a purpose as discourses of resistance.

Crenshaw's use of representational intersectionality exhibits how the framing of stereotypes and sexist norms can be powerful enough to influence one's self-concept. This can happen to such an extent that someone like the girl in Kincaid's story can make neocolonial values her own and shape her identity on racist and patriarchal premises. Kincaid is indignant of these neocolonial power structures. In the case of this story, the mother lectures her daughter on chastity and traditional household duties that is perceived as a social mandate for women. The Antiguan girl then, is both domesticated by patriarchal values as well as dominated by neocolonial discriminating class structures. The latter may not be as clearly addressed to in the story as misogynistic beliefs. Yet, Kincaid added an Antiguan background to the story, which reworks the negative effects of patriarchy and colonialism into "Girl". The story is a successful adaptation of representational intersectionality as it reworks patriarchal notions while simultaneously criticizing them. Hearing the mother's remarks through the girl's persona inspires a refusal of the beliefs of the mother. As has been shown by the example of Victorian celebration of chaste women, colonialism and patriarchy in Caribbean society are closely interlinked in the story. The strict hierarchal gender structures in the story are coupled with class hierarchy, which both place the girl in an oppressed position.

In conclusion, Kincaid reworks the negative effects of patriarchy and colonialism into "Girl" and it becomes clear how these constraints suppress the girl; the fear of punishment for being different is salient throughout the story. The protagonist in "Girl" has to rebel against these limitations and will only then find herself. Edwards says: "in order for the girl to develop and grow as an individual she must escape from the oppressive world of her mother. Escape is the only way to empower herself. Otherwise, she will not develop or mature, and she will never be able to find her own voice" (20). This precondition for finding selfness brings back to mind Kincaid's own life. After Kincaid moved to the United States, she legally changed her name to Jamaica Kincaid when she was twenty-four as an act of self-empowerment. As Edwards says: "[c]hanging her name was, as Kincaid says, a liberation that gave her freedom to write whatever she wanted. She also states that she chose this name because it reflected her complex identity as a Caribbean woman who was marked by a British colonial education system" (2). Thus, it is important to recognize the colonial and patriarchal histories that are (indirectly) referred to in the story. Only then can new inclusive discourses and more nuanced forms of representation arise and change binary worldviews. This conforms to the postcolonial idea that colonization is never truly over. It may be over in the physical sense, but decolonization of the mind is still very much needed.

Chapter 3. A Sense of Belonging and Selfhood in Nalo Hopkinson's "A Habit of Waste"

Another diasporic writer who addresses sexist and neocolonial conventions is Nalo Hopkinson. Hopkinson uses magic realism in her fiction to address concepts of home and displacement and tackles fixed and gendered social relations with her work. Her use of magic realism not only touches upon topics that are relatively difficult or taboo, it also reverses and denounces dominant discourses on home and belonging. Hopkinson's own diasporic background has implications for her work, especially since she is, like Jamaica Kincaid, writing back from the West against neo-colonial structures of power and discourses. The complexities that surround female diasporic identities are intelligently explored in Hopkinson's work, especially in the short story "A Habit of Waste." Nalo Hopkinson herself has struggled with the complexities that come with diaspora as she was born in Jamaica in 1960 but moved to Canada with her parents when she was sixteen. She has lived in Guyana and Trinidad before moving to Toronto.

A perfect example of the distinct sensibilities that come with diasporic identity-formation is Hopkinson's short story "A Habit of Waste", which Rutledge describes as a story that "ventures into the psychological depths of Whiteness as an objectified desire" (15). Hopkinson uses magic realism to emphasize the displacement of a second generation, Caribbean young woman in Canada. "A Habit of Waste" was published in the short story collection *Skin Folk* in 2001 and tells the story of Cynthia, whose parents are from Trinidad, but who herself was born in Canada. Cynthia can never come to terms with her plump, black body and decides to take on a new white body that she has ordered from MediPerfiction. MediPerfiction is a fictional medical organization that takes a person's soul and puts it in a new body of choice. Cynthia believes that she will only truly belong in Canada if she literally gets rid of her black body and adopts the Canadian way of life, not only mentally but also physically. She has internalized racist perceptions of beauty and believes

that she can only fit in if she is white. It is not explicitly mentioned whether she has been discriminated against. Yet, it is strongly suggested that she takes up a white gaze and perceives white skin as superior to colored skin. This is exemplified when Cynthia is confronted with a woman wearing her old black body in a streetcar. It becomes immediately clear that Cynthia still resents her black body although it is not physically hers anymore. Despite her seemingly unfazed attitude towards her Caribbean background, she cannot ignore her past and is confronted with her old black body that she despises: "same full, tarty-looking lips; same fat thighs, rubbing together with every step; same outsize ass; same narrow torso that seemed grafted onto a lower body a good three sizes bigger, as though God had glued leftover parts together" (Hopkinson 2). However, despite her resentment Cynthia is slightly jealous of her old body and can no longer deny that her choice to give up her blackness triggers sadness and regret within her:

> Strange, though; on her, the little peek of black shorts looked stylish and sexy all at once. Far from looking graceless, her high, round bottom twitched confidently with each step, giving her a proud sexiness that I had never had. […] Had my old skin always had that glow to it? Such firm, strong arms… (Hopkinson 5)

Thus, despite the fact that Cynthia just wanted to be the proud owner of a white body, she has to face the fact that the consequences of her decision are not necessarily good for her own happiness. Her new, white body should give her a sense of home and belonging, yet she still has not achieved this goal. Unlike Cynthia's expectations, her disability to form a satisfying notion of self is not solved by the complete whitewashing of her life.

It is not until the end of the story that Cynthia is slowly becoming freer as she, ironically, comes to terms with her Caribbean background. Old Man Morris, a Trinidadian man who frequently visits the food bank where Cynthia works, aids Cynthia in her path to finding selfness. In the weekend of Thanksgiving, Cynthia's colleague asks her to drop off

food at Mr. Morris's home, which Cynthia reluctantly agrees to. Cynthia dislikes Mr. Morris for being black and poor; she automatically assumes that he is inferior. Mr. Morris confronts Cynthia with her own blackness, which can arguably be linked to her own self-hate. However, when Cynthia has dinner with Mr. Morris she finds out that he is not whom she thought he was. Mr. Morris tells Cynthia that he had to find a new way of taking care of himself after his wife died. Cynthia learns that he hunts for his food in Canada as well when he says: "[t]he squirrels-them always looking fat and happy; they mus' be eatin' something. And the Indian people-them-self too; they must be did eat something else besides corn before the white people come and take over the place!" (Hopkinson 32-33). This brings back to mind the title of the story, which does not only refer to wasting food and money, it also refers to Cynthia's own wastefulness as she has tossed her old body away while there was nothing wrong with it. Mr. Morris's reference to white people is also striking as he brings to mind British colonialism in America. Mr. Morris rejects wastefulness and alludes the excessive focus on making profit in colonial times. This is emphasized by the fact that Mr. Morris has a striking Trinidadian accent, which he hid from Cynthia at the food bank when he though she was white. However, when he finds out that she is actually from Trinidad as well, he feels more comfortable to use Trinidadian vernacular.

Interestingly, not only Mr. Morris makes Cynthia feel uncomfortable, the other food bank customers do so too (Hopkinson 7). Lee Skallerup Bessette says that Cynthia, then, has internalized "the stigma of being poor" (179). As Brah argues: "colour or 'looks' often serve as the racialised signifier in and through which economic inequalities and state policies articulate" (203). Cynthia believes that being black inherently means that one is black as well. Subsequently, Cynthia hoped that having a white body would automatically improve her chances of being wealthy. However, the opposite is true as she still works at the food bank and has not made any financial progress. Mr. Morris (and the other food bank customers)

remind Cynthia of her failure to climb up in society, which makes her resent her previous blackness even more. This classified way of thinking leads to fragmentation; this idea of marginalization if often explored in Hopkinson's work and comes to the fore in "A Habit of Waste." As Skallerup Bessette says: [Cynthia is] unable to assimilate into the dominant culture through economic mobility, and thus [is] left with a fragmented identity of being from neither here nor from 'back home'" (179). Cynthia had to work hard to afford her new white body, yet she remains on the margins of society due to class and gender relations. Cynthia complains about her financial status on numerous occasions. She hates her low paid job at the food bank and she wishes she had more money to pay for more MediPerfiction operations (Hopkinson). Cynthia complains about her car as well. Furthermore, gender constraints on Cynthia's life come to the fore when a man in Mr. Morris's neighborhood attacks her: "I was just about to open the door [of the car] when I felt a hand sliding down the back of my thigh. 'Yesss, stay just like that. Ain't that pretty? We'll get to that later. Where's your money, sweetheart?'" (Hopkinson 34). The attacker is after Cynthia's money, but it becomes clear that he wants to rape her as well. The attacker makes condescending remarks about her body and uses sexual power to keep Cynthia fearful and obedient. Mr. Morris saves Cynthia before any physical harm is done to her, but the lack of female agency is emphasized in this part of the story. These intersecting forces of marginalization are quintessential in both Crenshaw's feminist theory and Brah's diaspora theory. Crenshaw's feminist theory applies here because Cynthia hates the black, plumb body she used to have. She does not just detest her old skin color, but also it large form. Consequently, Cynthia is obsessed with dieting and staying skinny, as she does not want to fall back into her old habits. Her idea of female beauty is based on the notion that women should be both white and thin, which is coupled with the notion that women's main worth lies in their physical appearance (Crenshaw, "Mapping" 1285). In the light of Brah's argumentation, the concept of home and displacement is also

palpable in “A Habit of Waste”. Brah argues: “[n]ot all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’” (193). This becomes clear as Cynthia has the obsessive desire to belong in Canada, rather than longing for the place of origin of her parents:

> I bet my parents could tell me where in the Caribbean he [Mr. Morris] was from. Give them any inkling that someone’s from “*back home”*, and they’d be on him like a dirty shirt, badgering him with questions: Which island you from? How long you been here in Canada? You have family here? When last you go back home? (Hopkinson 8, emphasis added)

It is striking that Cynthia’s parents distinguish between the different Caribbean islands. This can be related to the concepts of home and belonging as the parents allude to a place they used to call home. Their excited tone makes their memories of home and belonging tangible for the reader. Their excitements emphasizes the fact that Cynthia’s parents are not ashamed of their Caribbean background as they immediately feel a connection with anything or anyone that reminds them of their Antiguan home. Cynthia’s parents’ relation with Antigua and their strong accent bother her: “I really wish they’d drop the *Banana Boat* accents. They’d come to Canada five years before I was even born, for Christ’s sake, and I was now twenty-eight” (Hopkinson 11, emphasis added). Cynthia’s indignant tone makes it clear that there is a strong disconnection between her and her Trinidadian background. This is further explored when Mr. Morris’s asks Cynthia to stay over for dinner: “[y]ou want to have a early Thanksgiving with a ol’ man from back home?” (Hopkinson 20). Cynthia is annoyed with this and resentfully says to herself: “I’m not from ‘back home’” (Hopkinson 20). She cannot accept that Mr. Morris sees her as Trinidadian, for she has completely whitewashed herself, both in mind and body – although not successfully for she is still reminded of her blackness constantly. Seeing her old black body in the beginning of the story triggered Cynthia to think

about her Trinidadian background. As the story evolves it becomes clearer that Cynthia struggles with intersecting constraints on her life that affect her concept of self. She thinks that she is not rich enough, not white enough, and not skinny enough. Despite her efforts she will always remain black, especially to her parents and Mr. Morris, who do not understand her decision to whitewash herself. Hopkinson shows that bodies, black bodies in this case, can embody discourses. As she says in her preface to her book:

> Throughout the Caribbean, under different names, you'll find stories about people who aren't what they seem. Skin gives these skin folk their human shape. When the skin comes off, their true selves emerge. […] And always, whatever the burden their skins bear, once they remove them – once they get under their own skins – they can fly. (Hopkinson 1)

In this light, Hopkinson ties in postcolonial concepts of hybridity and diaspora in her story to challenge the dominant discourses that perceive the white and normative as superior to colored identities. As Skallerup Bessette says: "Hopkinson is very aware of the role the physical body plays in the history of colonialism and the oppression still physically being carried around by its victims" (168). In discourses of nationalism the female body has often been used as a metaphor for the nation, which, for example, is exemplified in the term mother country (McLeod 135). This image had far-reaching consequences for colonized women as they did not only suffer from colonial mistreatments, but they also had to go through an internal conflict because they are at loss between societal pressures and their personal identity-formation. In Cynthia's case it is insinuated that her process of whitewashing will help her to ignore racist notions that regard blackness as inferior as they simply do not apply to her anymore. However, the opposite turned out to be true as she experiences a visceral loss of self through the internalized racist power structures. Her new white body cannot remove the harmful effects of neocolonial discourses on her being. Thus, Hopkinson's use of surreal

narrative structures buttress the crippling self-loathing that can come from such racist dichotomies in society. Hopkinson offers a discourse of resistance and calls these marginalizing discourses into question. Similarly, Brah states: "[t]he point is that the issue is not simply one of acquiring knowledge but of deconstructing 'whiteness' as a social relation, as well as an experiential modality of subjectivity and identity" (Brah 207). This decolonization of the mind and racial justice is exactly what Hopkinson strives to achieve with her science fiction. As she says herself: "in fantastical fiction, I can directly manipulate the metaphorical structure of the story. […] one of the things I can do is to intervene in the readers' assumptions by creating a world in which standards are different" (Hopkinson qtd. in Skallerup Bessette 169). Similarly, "A Habit of Waste" challenges harmful representations of the black body as inferior to white bodies as Cynthia slowly comes to terms with her own hybrid identity and accepts her blackness more with help of Mr. Morris and the recollection of her childhood memories, which are strongly characterized by Trinidadian culture and food.

In the case of "A Habit of Waste" Cynthia is born in Canada, so she has no physical recollection of Trinidad, and its colonial history, except for the stories of her parents and perhaps the possible visits she made as a child with her parents. She obsessively wants to belong in Canada, or rather be accepted as Canadian. This becomes so important to her that she completely renounces her Trinidadian background and takes on a new white and skinny body. As Rutledge says: "Hopkinson uses the liberation of speculative fiction to explore the personal and familial impact of self-hatred taken to an extreme and to a place where the desire to escape from one's non-White self can be gratified, quite literally, by an out-of-body experience" (15). Cynthia feels at home in Canada to a certain extent, but she believes that she will never be truly at home if she does not look like a typical white Canadian woman. Despite the fact that she is born in Canada she still sees herself, or rather her old black body – as an outsider, someone who does not belong. It is not explicitly said in the story

that Cynthia has grown up in a society that perceives people of color as inferior to white people. However, Cynthia sees people of color as second-rate citizens and despises her own black body, which prompts her to switch bodies. Correspondingly, Brah says: “[i]t is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home” (193). This is also the case for Cynthia as she cannot call Canada home until she is literally white. Drawing on the politics of location, Canada is for Cynthia what Trinidad is for the nameless girl in Kincaid’s story: a place of both safety and terror. With this Hopkinson draws attention to the evasive effects of displacement and torn identities. “A Habit of Waste” emphasizes that these diasporic concepts can perpetuate interpellation in the black self to such an extent that Cynthia even changes her appearance. Colonialism and Western imperialism has brought forward certain bigoted notions that can still be very much noticeable for people of color in the West. The self, and representations of the black self in particular, are strongly influenced by these (often) Western notions. As the postcolonial Martiniquan writer, Frantz Fanon, said: “I am being dissected under white eyes, the only white eyes, the only *real eyes*. I am *fixed*” (116, emphasis added). Arguably, Cynthia feels the burden of this white gaze to such an extent that her self-hate paralyzes her in her process of finding herself and finding happiness. Cynthia cannot adapt until she literally changes into a white person, but then she finds she still does not fully belong and will never truly fit in. To find selfness Cynthia has to come at peace with her past and her Caribbean background, which she eventually does with the help of Mr. Morris.

Bringing back to mind Kincaid’s story and Crenshaw’s theories, Hopkinson’s short story shows that fixed gender-relations can be visible in the West as well and are not necessarily typical for the Caribbean. Cynthia’s self-concept in this story is formed by racist and patriarchal values that exist in her surroundings. Her interpellation of racist beliefs pressured her into acquiring a white body. Her self-loathing is taken to such an extreme that

she does anything in her power to alter her appearance to fit these norms. Furthermore, her obsession with white, female beauty puts pressure on her and hinders her identity-shaping process. Ironically, her new body is exactly what puts her in danger, as the robber has intentions to rape her. Thus, Cynthia has no ownership of her own body and is subjugated to the male gaze of the robber. The marginalizing intersecting forces that have repercussions for Cynthia's sense of self are both racially and patriarchally loaded. They are racist because Cynthia sees being black and voluptuous as ugly, which can be perceived as a reflection on the way Canadian society sees her. In addition, the intersecting oppressive forces are patriarchal insofar that Cynthia only values female beauty if it adheres to her norm of being white and skinny. This is not necessarily a true representation of Canadian society, yet it focuses on how colonialism can still have a negative effect on one's self-perception. Moreover, and related to Crenshaw's feminist theory, the question remains whether Cynthia would have gone through her whitewashing process if she had been a man**.** Women (of color) can feel the pressure to keep up with the norm of beauty as is exemplified in "Girl" in which white and skinny female beauty is celebrated in Cynthia's opinion. In other short stories by Nalo Hopkinson men of color feel the same inhibitions when confronted with their skin color. [3] However, women (of color) can feel more societal pressures than men to keep up with the norm of beauty as is exemplified in "Girl" in which the perception that female beauty and sexuality is judged by men comes to the fore. As Skallerup Bessette argues: "society […] often punishes black and female bodies more severely" (169). Hopkinson rejects this classification of bodies and shows that Cynthia is still not happy with herself in a world that allows her to literally become white.

[3] For example, in "The Glass Bottle Trick" Samuel is so dissatisfied with his dark skin color that his biggest fear is having a child as dark as himself. His self-hate is so prominent that he has killed his previous pregnant wives, who had lighter complexions of color than Samuel. Samuel kills his wives because their babies would have the same dark skin color as his, and the babies would always remind him of his inferiority as a black man.

In conclusion, "A Habit of Waste" eloquently showcases that women should take ownership of their own body and reclaim their blackness. Cynthia's unhappiness as a white woman is palpable through the story and Cynthia even has doubts about her decision to cast off her old body. However, she makes a start at reclaiming her Trinidadian heritage when she eats Mr. Morris's Caribbean food. She ignores her inhibitions and her obsession with her weight. Her tone changes from an unhappy and heavy tone to a more lighter one. In this light, Hopkinson's story is a weapon of activism for it celebrates the black female body by showing how the internalization of whitewashing can be taken to an extreme. As Cynthia comes to terms with her Caribbean background thanks to Mr. Morris and his food she slowly comes to realize that there is nothing wrong with having a colored skin and being voluptuous and that she has to take pride in her body. The answer to racism and sexism does not lie in forgetting the past. Rather, it is crucial to call into question the negative connotations that can come with being perceived as the sexual or racial other.

Conclusion

The proliferation of discriminating and patriarchal discourses in society sustains ideologies that can place women of color at the margins of society. Jamaica Kincaid and Nalo Hopkinson have made use of their short fiction to address complicated notions that can influence the identity-shaping process. Focusing on women with a Caribbean background, the stories foreground the implications of colonialism and established gender relations on the two female protagonists. By linking “Girl” and “A Habit of Waste” to intersectional feminist theory and diasporic theory, it becomes clear that both stories emphasize the entanglement of societal pressures and individuality. Both female protagonists are suppressed by intersecting constraints of racism and sexism, which have an influence on their identity. By rejecting these racist and patriarchal notions these women can find home within themselves and in the respective societies they live in. Both stories can be seen as projects of representational intersectionality following Crenshaw’s theory. Crenshaw states that feminism can only be successful when including intersecting constraints of race and gender are included in popular discourses (“Mapping” 1241). Kincaid and Hopkinson address and target several racist and patriarchal discourses in their stories. The stories intersect these discourses and challenge power relations that affect the lives of the protagonists. Thus, the stories adhere to Crenshaw’s notion that different factors can influence a person’s identity and place in society. This is closely related to the diaspora space that Brah discusses in her book, which is especially explored in “A Habit of Waste”. “Girl” is published before “A Habit of Waste” and the stories are set in different timeframes and locations. “Girl” is set in Antigua and the main character has not experienced diaspora as Cynthia has in “A Habit of Waste”. The girl in Kincaid’s story is set in a place still reeling from the effects of its colonial past. The narrative is set in a country that, at the time Kincaid set the story in, was still heavily affected by its colonial history. Cynthia, on the other hand, lives in Canada and has other experiences with

displacement as a consequence of diaspora. Thus, the effects of dislocation on identity are specifically noticeable in Cynthia's life. Nevertheless, both the nameless girl as Cynthia are trapped in a space in which home can come to mean a safe place as well as a place of terror. The protagonists can free themselves from this imprisonment by rejecting power relations that obstruct their path to finding selfness.

In "Girl" the daughter learns what her mother, and more importantly, what society expects from her. She is not an autonomous person in charge of her own life and identity. Rather, her identity is shaped and influenced by an idealized notion of women that exists in Antiguan society. The girl barely talks balk to her mother and at first sight the story may seem to perpetuate the patriarchal norms of society. Yet, the opposite is true as Kincaid challenges the valued gender roles of post-colonial Antigua by emphasizing how absurd these contradicting pressures are for young girls. It is noteworthy that diaspora is not a pervasive presence in the story as it is set in Antigua. However, Kincaid is a diasporic writer, which has implications for her work for the distance to her country of origin enabled her to critique this oppressive atmosphere better.

Moving from a Caribbean setting to a Western society, Hopkinson sheds light on the life of a woman with Trinidadian roots and what the consequences of this are on her identity. Cynthia has given up so much of her identity and past to accommodate to the perceived norm of beauty that idolizes white skin and a thin body. As another discourse of resistance, "A Habit of Waste" emphasizes the crippling effects of neocolonial discourses on the notion of self. Cynthia's whitewashing process paralyzes her every sense of being and gives her a distorted view of the world. It is not until she learns to accept her Trinidadian background with help of Mr. Morris that she can finally find home, both in Canada as within herself. Self-acceptance is a pervasive theme in both stories, but comes explicitly to the fore

in “A Habit of Waste”, as Cynthia finally feels at home within herself when she finds a way to unify her Trinidadian and Canadian identity.

Both stories are different in several ways, but they both buttress the negative implications of colonialism on finding selfness. Both Kincaid and Hopkinson shed light on the complex identity processes and the double disadvantage of women of color in post-colonial societies. The female protagonists in the stories question their own identity and sexuality and everything else that defines them as a human being. They occupy a victim-status that does not necessarily exist in dominant discourses: societal structures can acknowledge that they are either mistreated as black people or as women, but not as black women facing marginalization by intersectional forces simultaneously. Kincaid and Hopkinson challenge this status quo with their literature. They lament the misogyny and racial discrimination faced by women of color in the Caribbean and Western societies of the stories. This is how these stories can help to challenge fixed notions of belonging and identity and offer new ways to see the world. They grasp the essence of being and what people can accomplish as human beings, despite their different backgrounds or the color of their skin. The work of Jamaica Kincaid and Nalo Hopkinson are the stories of people who are often not heard, and these stories offer a platform for exactly those people to speak up.

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