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## **Interracial/inter-gender versus Intra-racial/intra-gender Antagonism in Postcolonial Literature**

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### **Abstract**

*Though postcolonial literature affirms what the oppressed have endured, not much scholarship, past or present, have addressed the infighting 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 paper will be a dual examination of the conflict theory with a primary focus on intra-racial and intragender hostility. This paper 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 eccentricity of this paper includes an observation and analysis of the award-winning filmmaker Spike Lee and postcolonial author Mariama Ba who have failed in emphasizing the detriments that occur as a result of 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. Feminist author Mariama Ba credits patriarchy to women's disadvantages. Nevertheless, Spike Lee and the aforementioned postcolonial novelist should also include internal strife in their discourse as well. This paper 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.*

**Keywords:** intra-racial/intrigender, Spike Lee, film study, post-colonialism, intersectionality

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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 train, exited off our property.

This visitation 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, only allowing some to know our whereabouts, some who 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 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 the 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 dark 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 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 places my family and I used to eat, sleep, weep, laugh and tell stories during blackouts or holidays. Our home was being expropriated similar to Nazi's invasion on Jewish properties. They then torched our home, setting it ablaze. I am sure we would have been incinerated inside our home 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 say. Other minority groups in nations all over the world are also holding demonstration 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. 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, racial-driven violence which has befallen on African Americans which is usually followed by an acquittal of the perpetrator. 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 position 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 grouping 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).

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 grouping 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 pitted against each other. My family's experience in Haiti was the result of intra-racial hostility.

The objective of this paper is to analyze postcolonial literature and highlight the *infighting* and *splitting* in the background of the selected works. Postcolonial literature and anticolonial activists have intellectualized decolonization, but have placed little to no emphasis on intra-hostility. This



paper 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 to reveal the presence of interracial hostility; furthermore, Mariama Bâ's semiautobiographical novel *So Long a Letter* will reveal women pitting against other women which is another example of *infighting* and *splitting*.

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

## Protest Films & Gender Oppositions

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 usually include an ensemble that is familiar to viewers as he usually 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 he reveals the plight of Black America. 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 into a cop car afterward and what ensues

next is pure rage: the multiracial, marginalized community demonstrates their 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 a protest for white America to be just, but what’s not highlighted in Lee’s other works is the intra-racial hostility. 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 of 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 selection 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 sector, 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 population which is 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 the 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 refer 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 pledgees 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*, whereas 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 on 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 sector, but it is ironic when African Americans protests 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 man 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" as the film's name derives from 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 of 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 statistic numbers 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 deaths by murders in Chicago from 2001-2015 (03:45). In 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 war-stricken places.

*Clockers*, released in 1995, illustrates to viewers the livelihood of an African American drug dealer 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 support 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 several 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.

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Women seem to solely attribute the oppression they have endured on the account of outer 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 span over many periods in history and will persists until there is true equality between the genders. Though women from all over the world are just 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 counterpart.

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 *Song Long a Letter*, a semiautobiographical epistolary novel, is connotative with feminism, but women are conduits of other women's suffering. The perpetrator of the intraracial conflict in Ba's novel lies specifically with the elderly women characters. This group of women who are wise from their own experiences and who should be using these experiences and wisdom to fight gender inequality rather pursue their selfish desire 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 polygamy 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 pursuer 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* is similar to the cases with other women in authoritative roles who enable 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 inflict feminists' movement. Rather to unifying to overthrow male dominance, women have also become hostile towards one another. "They have internalized patriarchal theologies and worldviews and, instead of resisting them, actively promote them" (Macule and Nadar 361).

Feminism would be nonexistent if there was not a sincere protest towards male domination. However, too many scholarships seem to solely attest women's intragender hostility as a result of patriarchal doing and 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 *Song Long a Letter* is a testament that patriarchy is not the sole culprit to women's opposition. Ironically, it is also women who has been and are still advancing despotic regimes on women.

## Conclusion: The Charge to Humanity

*Infighting* and *splitting* are counterproductive towards a groups unified goal. Disenfranchised people can truly reach a level of progressivity and overcome tyrannical forces 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, 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*, specifically intra-racial and intragender antagonism. 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 for humanity lie in promoting awareness of *infighting* and *splitting* and finding avenues to diffuse these hindrances.

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