CHAPTER II

QUEST FOR UNITY

BROWN GIRL, BROWNSTONES
Brown Girl, Brownstones presents the protagonist’s journey from alienation to unity. It is an agonizing redefinition of the self. The novel presents a clash of cultures for Selina Boyce, who is torn between her father’s love for Barbados and her mother’s desire to succeed to the American Dream. In fact, it is a novel about many things. As Kimberly W. Benston has noted, the novel is about “the private and general struggles for survival and clash of values (material versus spiritual, pragmatism versus dreaming, old versus young, white versus black); the physical and imaginative coming of age of a young Barbadian girl caught in the tangled web of Barbadian New York life.” It affirms the importance of women, not only by making them central characters but also by presenting them as centres of power. The community that Selina finds herself in is “a community powerful in its cohesion and demanding in its criteria for acceptance, a community pitted against a world which has prejudicially shaped its strategy for survival and improvement.”

The novel is divided into four books. The first book, entitled “A Long Day and a Long Night,” introduces the major characters and establishes the pattern of movements each one of them generates. As the title suggests, it also sets up the basic tension between Selina’s parents, Silla and Deighton. One of the key issues of the novel, Deighton’s inheritance of land in Barbados, is also introduced. His dream of building a large house and living there someday, contrary to the wish of his wife Silla, who wants to sell the land and buy the brownhouse,
begins here. Additionally in this section, Selina reflects upon and interacts with the other occupants of their brownstone. Also central to book one are the comments of Silla, quoted throughout chapter two, that are intended to present a view of these people as seen through her eyes - a view foisted on the young Selina.

In “Pastorale,” the second book, Selina stands poised on the brink of her own physical maturity. Whereas the debate about the land continues between Silla and Deighton, the focus is on Selina, who dreams about other families who have lived in her house and indulges in questioning of adolescent girls with her friend Beryl.

The third book, “The War,” deals with the historical event World War II, focusing the struggle over the land between Deighton and Silla. It comes to a climax when Silla manages to sell it, but Deighton in turn seduces her, gets the money, and spends it all on clothes and gifts. The war continues as Deighton finally leaves home for Father Peace’s Haven and later Silla has him deported. Before the ship docks, Deighton jumps or falls overboard and dies.

The fourth book, “Selina,” deals with Selina’s readiness to confront the world with a newly formed sense of self. To take revenge on her father’s death, she enters community college, and also joins Barbadian Home Owners’ Association with an intention to win their scholarship and use the money to “go far away” with her lover, Clive.
But realizing her values and interests, she plans to leave New York and go to the "source" in order to learn more about herself and her heritage.

The novel is not only about the relationship of members of one West-Indian-American family; it further attempts to portray the harsh realities of members of an oppressed minority who, in their attempts to get ahead, do so by acquiring the ruthless techniques and attitudes used against them. Silla sums up this unfortunate consequence as follows:

People got to make their own way. And nearly always to make your way in this Christ world you got to be hard and sometimes misuse others, even your own.... We would like to do different... But the way things arrange we can't, if not we lose out...
People got a right to claw their way to the top and those on top got a right to scuffle to stay there. Take this world. It wun always be white. No, Mahn. It gon be somebody else turn soon — may be even people looking near like us. But plenty gon have to suffer to bring it about. And when they get up top they might not be so nice either, 'cause power is a thing that don make you nice... you best be swift, if not somebody come and trample you quick enough. (185-186)

The novel, it can be said, consists of two major stories. The first one, as already mentioned, is the domestic conflict, between Silla Boyce and Deighton Boyce. It occupies the first three sections of the novel. Silla is driven to possess a brownstone house in their Brooklyn
neighbourhood, whereas Deighton wants to build a large white mansion on his newly gained “piece of ground home.” The centrality which these goals attain in the story enlarges the two goals – “land home” and “house” – into much larger metaphors. As Kimberly W. Benston says,

The question “where to live?” expands to encompass the question “how to live?” Deighton’s land becomes a symbol for the long lost irrecoverable “home” of Barbados —its simplicity in poverty, slow-paced living, natural beauty, and essential pre-Lapsarian purity and innocence.... The house Silla, like most of her Barbadian-immigrant friends who later form the “Association,” is driven to possess becomes an ominous emblem of the materialistic ambitions which the fast-moving, competitive, at best amoral “New World” proliferates and spurs.3

The second story is about the evolution of Selina’s character and independence, which comes to the fore in the last section. It is Selina’s presence that binds the two stories together. The story is concentric in structure with Selina standing at the centre. The world surrounding her can be modelled as a series of circles rippling outward from her, the innermost being her father, Deighton Boyce, mother, Silla, sister, Ina, and lover, Clive Springer. As G.O. Bele observes, “The book is primarily concerned with the evolution of the relationship in which Selina stands to these four.”4 Lying in the next circle is the Barbadian community which comprises not only Selina’s “othermothers” but also the members
of the Association. Forming up the outermost but equally significant circumference are the other complex elements which contribute to the making up of the brownstones and its environments:

Behind those grim facades, in those high rooms, life soared and ebbed. Bodies crouched in the postures of love at night, children burst from the womb's thick shell and death, when it was time, shuffled through the halls. First, there had been the Dutch–English and Scott–Irish who had built the houses. There had been tea in the afternoon then and skirts rushing across the parquet floors and mild voices. For a long time it had been only the whites, each generation unraveling in a quiet skein of years behind the green shades. (3-4)

It is these contexts of community, culture and environs that contribute to the physical and emotional maturation of Selina. It is indicated in the novel’s title also, that Selina’s growth must remain inseparable from these three contexts. Barbara Christian, in her unpublished essay clarifies this, saying,

By emphasizing brown and girl in the novel’s name, Marshall signalled to us her primary focus, that this work is about the racial/cultural and gender elements of her protagonist. And by placing brownstone directly next to browngirl, she reiterated the importance of content, of environment... In giving her first novel its title, Marshall reminds us that personal human development is inseparable from history, culture and environment.5
Therefore, Selina’s growth constitutes challenging confrontations with each new wave of external influences. Each circle forces her beyond its parameters to find answers for the dilemmas it poses. Thus she moves from one circle to the other till she makes the full discovery of her true self.

The novel begins with a description of the brownstone houses:

In the somnolent July afternoon the unbroken life of brownstone houses down the long Brooklyn Street resembled an army massed at attention. They were all one uniform red-brown stone. All with high massive stone stoops and black iron-grille fences staving off the sun. All draped in ivy as though mourning. Their somber facades, indifferent to the summer’s heat and passion, faced a park while their backs reared dark against the sky. They were only three or four stories tall – squat – yet they gave the impression of formidable height.(3)

The above passage shows that in its solidarity, shared heritage, and colour, the community exudes wholeness, and in that wholeness strength: “They were only three or four stories tall–squat–yet they gave the impression of formidable height” (emphasis added). But when we read the next paragraph, we find that though “each house had something distinctively its own,” all houses “shared the same brown monotony. All seemed doomed by the confusion in their design” (3).
It is in one of such houses that we find Selina, "a ten-year-old girl with scuffed legs and a body as straggly as the clothes she wore" (4). Marshall introduces Selina with emphasis on her eyes, fore-shadowing her ripeness for the complex development which she is to experience and inferring that her starting point is not that of complete unawareness. For Selina's eyes "were not the eyes of a child. Something too old lurked in their centres. They were weighted, it seemed, with scenes of a long life... She seemed to know the world down there in the dark hall and beyond for what it was" (4). The brownstone houses were once inhabited by whites. When they left, the West Indians "slowly edged their way in" (4). In the silence that surrounds her, Selina imagines herself to be a member of the white family who were the original inhabitants of the house:

She rose, her arms lifted in welcome, and quickly the white family who had lived here before, whom the old woman upstairs always spoke of, glided with pale footfalls up the stairs. Their white hands trailed the bannister; their mild voices implored her to give them a little life. And as they crowded around, fusing with her, she was no longer a dark girl alone and dreaming at the top of an old house, but one of them, invested with their beauty and gentility. She threw her head back until it trembled proudly on the stalk of her neck and, holding up her imaginary gown, she swept downstairs to the parlor front. (5)
Through this state of mind, Paule Marshall digs into the weakness of the black female psyche hurt by the society that judges a person's worth by his/her physical appearance and not by his/her spiritual power. To internalize and then to incorporate such a white ideology into the fabric of ones consciousness is not only to reject one's community, ones own oppressions, ones own history, and ones own value system but ones self-worth and self-appreciation. As Mary Daly comments, "Internalization of identity as 'the other' is psychological paralysis."\(^6\) This also indicates self-hatred and self-negation and at times loss of self as well. Therefore, Djuna Barnes, comments that "To be totally innocent... would be to remain utterly unknown particularly to one's self."\(^7\)

Though Selina pretends to be other than herself, when once she stands before a mirror she is herself again. As Eugenia Collier has noted, "Children entering adolescence often fantasize themselves to be nearer to their heart's desire. But a black child's fantasy to be an accepted member of white society speaks eloquently of the alienation created by oppression. It symptomizes a divided self. It reveals a particularly damaging kind of alienation; it reveals alienation from the self".\(^8\)

That the novel is about Selina's search for self is suggested in the first few pages of the novel. We see her growing towards wholeness by
coming to terms with her black heritage. Though younger than her sister, Ina, Selina seems to take an active role in her relationship with life. The two girls are different in a number of ways. Ina is meek, defeatist, complacent and quiescent whereas Selina is self-assertive, iron-willed, and proud. Unlike Selina, "Ina was thin but soft, passing gracefully through adolescence, being spared its awkwardness" (7). The very first conversation between the two sisters shows us the difference in their attitudes. When Selina wakes up Ina, who could never really be fit for roughness of life, and tells her that she is an ugly baby, Ina says, "Look who's talking about somebody being ugly as a baby! You were ugly then, you're uglier now and you'll get worse" (7). Thus Selina fails in her attempt to disturb Ina's emotional composure. Her immaturity compounds her isolation from her family.

Ina's path is totally a foil to Selina's, for we last see her moving towards an old pattern of desire. She is to marry Edgar Innis, a "neat, cautious Barbadian, light shinned. So that the women at the wedding couldn't accuse her of not trying to lighten up the family" (246-247). Her ambition also "is to buy a house later on." She hastens to add, "Oh, not a brownstone, ... just a small place on Long Island" (246); but the quality of life will be the same, the vision of "buying house" having lost its grandeur while retaining its underlying misdirection.

42
The only person in her family that Selina likes is her father, maybe because he is a dreamer like herself. He is a pillar of reality and stability in her life. He is the source of comfort, understanding, and reassurance. He affirms her existence by sharing an intimate confidential relationship with her and by giving her individuality a nurturing attentiveness. This is very clear as “an anxious Selina runs upstairs to the sun parlor to bond with her father in their circle” (9). Selina is always “Deighton’s daughter” and not her mother’s. In spite of knowing him being away from the family, she consciously sides him, loves his beauty, passion and teasing laughter. Even in her family photograph taken before her birth, she sees he has remained the same, whereas her mother has changed beyond recognition. To Selina, he is “like God” (31) though “he does run bird speed to the concubine to lick out what’s left from his pay” (31). For her, he represents love and beauty and she wants to believe in his dreams and passions. But it should be noted that while Deighton wants to go back to Barbados, Selina wants to move away from her black roots and merge with whites. In fact, we have an interesting triangle involving the father, mother, and daughter. As already mentioned, for Deighton the island is his heart’s desire, and he always dreams of going back to Barbados, Selina wants to merge with whites, and Silla accepts reality and wants to settle in New York. For Silla island represents poverty, oppression, and a poetry and beauty that she misses and despises. While Deighton can neither understand nor
accept the status forced upon him by oppression, Silla is of the earth. Unlike Deighton, she has accepted its harshness and not met its challenges. In Silla's view Deighton is a man who "don know his own mind. He's always looking for something big and praying hard not to find it" (21).

Silla represents all the qualities related to darkness and winter. Selina always feels that Silla is not "my mother" but "the mother" and a person possessing a "dark strength and tenacious lift of her body" (133). She is the one who feels "old and barren, deprived, outside the circle of life" (42):

Silla Boyce brought the theme of winter into the park with her dark dress amid the summer green and the bright-figured house-dresses of the women lounging on the benches there. Not only that, every line of her strong-made body seemed to reprimand the women for their idleness and the park for its senseless summer display. Her lips, set in a permanent protest against life, implied that there was no time for gaiety. And the park, the women, the sun even gave way to her dark force; the flushed summer colors ran together and faded as she passed. (16)

If Deighton is a sun god, happy in the sun parlor, Silla is the "long night" which banishes the "long day." In a way, in the perceptional faculty of Selina, the brownstones and Silla form similar configurations. Silla is one of
... those watchful and wrathful women whose eyes seared and searched and laid bare, whose tongues lashed the world in unremitting distrust. Each morning they took the train to Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay to scrub floors. The lucky ones had their steady madams while the others wandered those neat blocks or waited on corners — each with her apron and working shoes in a bag under her arm until someone offered her a day’s work. Sometimes the white children on their way to school laughed at their blackness and shouted “nigger,” but the Barbadian women sucked their teeth, dismissing them. Their only thought was of the “few raw-mout’ Pennies” at the end of the day which would eventually “buy house.” (10-11)

Thus the family is sharply divided. Ina and the mother, and Selina and the father are the two antagonistic teams. The irony is that Ina is soft and dreamy like the father, while Selina has the fierce strength of the mother. As Mary Helen Washington has observed, “Silla’s life is a paradigm of the Barbadian community. She is the touchstone, for she proclaims aloud the chaotic trouble deep in the core of the community. Her endurance, her rage, her devotion to the dollar and property, her determination to survive in ‘this man country’ is theirs. Her lights and shadows are theirs. Her tragedy is theirs. That is why Silla is never seen alone in this novel and why Selina can never think of her alone.”9
Like the brownstones whose "backs reared dark against the sky" and "gave the impression of formidable height" (3), Silla possesses a "formidable aspect" (46), a "dark strength," and a "tenacious lift" of the body (133). The brownstones, like Selina's mother, Silla, are "indifferent to the summer's heat and passion" (3). Both of them represent the principle of cohesiveness. The brownstones "join as one house reflected through a train of mirror, with no walls between" them (3), so does Silla too. One "could never think of the mother alone. It was always the mother and the others" (10). Describing Silla as strong, bitter, frustrated, disappointed, loving, and vindictive, Trudier Harris considers her one of the most complex black women characters in contemporary American literature. He writes,

Here is a woman who wants things for her family (a house, college education) but who is married to a man who wants different kind of things (a big car, flashy silk shirts, a reputation as a dapperman). Here is a mother who loves her two daughters, especially Selina, the one who causes her most trouble, but who is tongue-tied when it comes to expressing that love. Here is a woman who needs love and the comfort of supporting, tender arms, but who cannot forgive her husband for the death of their only male child. Here is a woman who wishes to blend into the mainstream of American society as quickly as possible, who is destructively desperate to achieve middle class status, but who spends her Saturdays making the black pudding, sauce and
coconut bread which tie her to her Bajan background.10

The conflict between Silla and Deighton, at the end of the Great Depression, is whether or not to own the brownstones which they live in. Though the brownstones are large and imposing, they are half-ruined houses. The white habitants constituting mostly the Dutch-English and Scottish-Irish have acquired means and are either selling the houses or leasing them out:

And as they left, the West Indians slowly edged their way in. Like a dark sea nudging its way unto a white beach and staining the sand, they came. The West Indians, especially the Barbadians who had never owned anything perhaps but a few poor acres in a poor land, loved the houses with the same fierce idolatry as they had the land on their obscure islands. (4)

For them, owning these brownstones is not simply possessing property but creating "a bulwark against poverty, racism and failure."11 Deighton and Silla, however, hold conflicting views toward these brownstone houses. Apart from developing controversy between two individuals, the brownstones issue also creates a clear demarcation between two value systems, between practicality and romanticism, between hollow humanism and life-oriented materialism.
It is the incompatibility between her father and mother, and the silent, peaceful atmosphere in a white family that make Selina love silence: “It came when the old white servant upstairs slept amid her soiled sheets, when her father read and napped in the sun parlor, her sister slept in their basement bedroom and the new tenant Suggie was out. Above all, it was a silence which came when the mother was at work” (5).

Miss Suggie Skeete, Miss Thompson, and Beryl form Selina’s circle of friends. But the only friend with whom Selina shares her sorrow and happiness is Beryl, a well brought up girl, one year older than Selina. The way Beryl responds always soothes her and destroys her anger. But Selina’s feeling of isolation never leaves her. She doesn’t like even to be compared to others. When Silla compares her to her dead brother, she shouts, “I keep telling you I’m not him. I’m me. Selina. And there’s nothing wrong with my heart” (47).

As mentioned earlier, of all the members of her family Selina loves her father most. She feels that she and her father form a circle. Her extreme closeness to her father impedes Selina from communion with her mother. The mother-daughter relationship between Silla and Selina proves right Sondra O’Neile’s conviction that in black women writers’ Bildungsroman, “Where fathers are present, strained relationships with mothers exist.”12 But in spite of her anger with her
mother, Selina does love her mother. She feels that if her mother dies, "The world would collapse then, for wasn't the mother, despite all, its only prop?" (46). Thus her mother's stifling influence not only rules Selina and the house, but characterizes the whole West Indian community.

As Selina grows up, her attitude to things changes. Even her mother begins to consider her a grown up girl. When, for instance, Selina asks her mother whether she can go out without Ina, Silla says, "What you need Ina for anymore? You's more woman now than she 'll ever be, Soul. G 'long" (53). But when Selina comes to know from Beryl about the physical changes that ought to take place in her, she feels that her mother deceived her when she said that she was more mature than Ina:

The mother had deceived her, saying that she was more of a woman than Ina yet never telling her the one important condition. She had deceived herself on the trolley and on the rise in the park. She was not free but still trapped within a hard flat body. She closed her eyes to hide the tears and was safe momentarily from Beryl and Ina and all the others joined against her in their cult of blood and breasts. (62)

The thought that she was ignorant of many things still leaves her isolated. She feels she is closed out of things. Adding to this, her absence in their family photograph makes her feel deserted by her parents too.
Hence she is overcome by a desire to make her presence known, and experiences an urge to yell, to break the silence of the house, and to awaken her sister. This spontaneous impulse is a symptom of her awareness of her existence as a unique individual, distinct from the dead baby brother whom she replaced. Above all, her body is a party to her alienation. Her feeling of alienation increases when she comes to know that officially they don't even exist. When Selina asks her father whether he will be drafted into the Army, he says, "...I's something to draft too?... As far as the record goes I ain even in this country since I did enter illegally. Y'know that's a funny thing when you think of it. I don even exist as far as these people here go" (66).

Soon after this incident another incident takes place which adds to Selina's sense of alienation. When on a Saturday Ina and Selina assist their mother in preparing Barbadian food to sell, two of their mother's friends – Iris Hurley and Florrie Trotman – visit them. They begin to talk about the piece of land inherited by Deighton in Barbados. Silla wants to sell it and buy the brownstone house they live in. She tells her friends that she is prepared to sell the land even without informing him. As Eugene Collier comments, "Suddenly it is dusk, and caught between the glorious lights of sunset and the shadows of impending night, Silla seems the embodiment of the universal contradiction of good and evil – a contradiction which all people embody." When, on Florie Trotman's advice, Selina offers her mother a
glass of water, Silla, still excited, dashes the glass from Selina’s hand, grasps her close, and threatens that she will kill Selina if she told anyone about her plan of buying the house.

Florrie Trotman places her hand on Selina’s shoulder and tries to comfort her. Inadvertently, Florrie’s hand drops from Selina’s shoulder, passes through the neck of her middy blouse, and brushes her breast. The touch upon Selina’s budding breast is the rite which unites her with womanhood as she knows it: “It was the rite which made her one with Florrie’s weighty bosom and Virgie Farnum’s perennially burgeoning stomach. It meant that she would always have vestiges of Iris Hurley’s malice and the mother’s gorgeous rage” (78). It also means that she is a party to the mother’s dreadful secret. She rejects this unity passionately but not in time:

Selina sprang away too late; her hand struck out at Florrie Trotman’s hand too late. All she could do was send up a cry of outrage that rived the air and drove the mothers back. Still howling, she stooped. Through her blinding tears she searched for the broken half of the glass which the mother had struck from her hand. Finding it, she rose and offered it to her again; and whirled, offering it to Florrie Trotman with a rancorous look. Then she raised it and, with one last shrill cry, smashed it to the floor, and fled. (77)
As Eugenia Collier says, “Water symbolizes life, and women are the bearers of life as the glass is the bearer of water. The broken glass symbolizes Selina’s negative vision of womanhood... In smashing the glass to the floor and fleeing, Selina rejects the community of Barbadian women absolutely and without question.”14 This incident haunts her: “... she was often seized by a frenzy of rejection and would rush to the bathroom and there, behind the locked door, rub her breasts until pain coursed through her body. But no matter how hard she rubbed, the imprint remained, for it was indelible” (78). Thus, though Selina rejects Barbadian womanhood and all that it signifies, she seems to realize that she cannot delink herself from her Barbadian ancestry, when she finds Florrie Trotman’s “imprint” “indelible.” As Eugenia Collier has observed, “Selina’s inability to understand or accept her community is part of her inability to understand or accept herself.”15

Selina begins to think that she cannot have peace of mind as long as she keeps the secret of her mother’s vow – “I gon fix he and fix he good” (76) – to herself. Her mind is preoccupied with the thought of her mother’s selling the land, and she cannot rest peacefully anywhere. She goes to Miss Thompson to console herself, and there she decides to go to her mother’s factory, and there, she watches her mother working at a lathe: “...Selina felt the familiar grudging affection seep under her amazement. Only the mother’s own formidable force could match that of the machines; only the mother could remain indifferent to the brutal
noise. How, then, could Selina hope to intimidate her with a few mild threats? Selina almost laughed at her own effrontery" (100). This feeling of hers clearly shows that in spite of the overwhelming love for her father she exhibits and in spite of her rejection of Barbadian womanhood, Selina seems to love Silla more as a mother than as a woman or as her father's wife. Maybe that is why Selina always refers to Silla as "the mother" and not as "my mother."

One day, to her surprise, Selina comes to know that her mother has sold off the house site fraudulently. Deighton is depressed when he comes to know it: "...his burnished skin became ashen. He staggered to the table and sank down; his head dropped to his arms and he didn't even notice that his sleeves were in the flour" (112). The description of Deighton's suffering is one of the most effective passages in the novel:

His vacant eyes followed the envelop's flight in her hand. "Silla..." his lips fumbled her name. "Silla..." he repeated as though struck with amnesia and this was all he could remember out of the obliterated past. "Silla..." "cry Silla," she said. "Yes, Silla has done it. She has lied and feigned and forged. She has damned her soul but she did it?" (114)

Deighton turns to Selina, reaching out with a helpless gesture, murmuring in a hollow voice, "Look, Selina, how yuh mother has sold the piece of ground behind my back..." (114), and
His head dropped and he might have been inspecting his polished shoes, the crease in his trousers or the linoleum’s gay pattern. But really he was watching the slow dissolution of his dream: the white house with Grecian columns, and stained-glass bathroom windows crumbling before it was even built, the flamboyant tree withering before it could take root. He moaned, breaking inside as the dream broke. (115)

The holding of the bank draft by Silla is symbolically likened to a knife. Marshall inserts a classical allusion to betrayal and treachery:

Deighton reached for her as though, like Brutus standing in the dead-strewn field with night closing in ground him and his defeat certain, he had given Silla a knife to hold, as Brutus had his retainer, so that he might run on it and die. Now that it was time the mother had lost heart and backed away, the unsheathed knife still pointed at him. And he pursued her, pleading like Brutus, for that agonized embrace, longing to rest his dead dark face on her breast. (114)

His anguish is so painful that the usually rigid Silla becomes uneasy and gentle, saying that they “can still buy land home” (115) but gets no response from the “hollow man with dead eyes. His ... heart has stopped and his breath lay trapped in his lungs” (116).
Selina, observing all this, feels that her father is nothing less than a tragic hero fallen to a disdainful enemy. However, she cannot stop admiring her mother's practicalities.

Deighton pretends to recover rapidly and appears on Monday morning elegantly dressed, exuding charm alluding to the pleasures of the previous night with Silla. He convinces her that he holds no grudge: "Woman, I been trying to tell yuh for the last two days and nights that it's your money. That I'ain quarelling with you no more." (119) He talks in such a way that Silla succumbs to the "Judas' Smile" and trickery in her weak moments and causes her own damnation.

He successfully gets hold of the cheque, with which he buys his family and himself all the things he could never afford earlier. When Silla comes to know this, her "eyes dilated, as did her nostrils. Like someone miraculously roused from death she stirred, and as her torpor lifted her lips formed the broken words, 'over nine ... hundred ... odd dollars cash..."" (129). Overcome with rage, she smashes the trumpet again and again. As Marshall describes it, "Her body heaved up, the trumpet rose with it, then crushed again to the floor. ... Repeatedly Silla's body rose and dropped in a threshing rhythm, the trumpet struck" (130-131). Selina, seeing her hurricane power, feels that, "She might have been a cane-cutter wielding a golden machete through the ripened cane or a piston rising and plunging in its cylinder" (131).
Deighton's vindictive act reveals that he is not only a pathologically passive father but even a stumbling stone that blocks all the ways leading his wife and children to comfort and security in a hostile society. His crime irritates Silla to such an extent that she vows she will get the brownstone:

“I'll get it.” Her words stung the air. “And as God is my witness I gon get you too!”, She added quietly, edging toward him. “And I wun make mistakes this time. I wun let a Judas smile and Judas words in the night and thing so turn me foolish. You could touch me and it would be like touching stone... Nothing, nothing gon stop me. I gon steel my heart and bide my time and see you dead-dead at my feet!”

(131)

Silla's decision to transform blues into actions marks the beginning of Deighton's regression, which leads to his destruction. Thus Silla expresses her anger at Deighton and, being a typical Barbadian, cannot approve of the behaviour of a charming dreamer. It is during the course of this incident that Selina's deep love for her mother surfaces: “... there was a part of her that always wanted the mother to win, that loved her dark strength and the tenacious lift of her body” (133). Marshall adds, “While she [Silla] wept without tears, without even a tremor, Selina gathered up the wreckage of the day” (133). In the process, Selina picks up some knowledge that would sustain her on the way to self-discovery. She even offers to pack the things bought so that they can be returned.
The point to be noted here is that Silla represents the whole Barbadian community and Deighton wants to lead a life free of social pressures. The Barbadian-American community considers Deighton irresponsible because almost every member of the community is determined to make his or her children's economic status secure in a holistic land. Selina can neither stop loving her father nor can she reject her mother as an individual. What she seems to dislike is her mother as a member of the community. But Silla's strength as a woman and her handling of the responsibilities of motherhood are an indication of her view on womanhood.

The first incident during which Selina finds herself absorbed into her community, though without her volition, is during a community dance at the wedding of Gatha Steed's daughter. The wedding accelerates Deighton's path to regression and pulls Selina upward to a slightly improved vision of the self and the community. Selina is absorbed into her community, like a drop of water into the vast sea: "Small Island, go back where you really come from," says the familiar song, and that is exactly what Selina does. The determination of the community is revealed through the fact that the girl has been forced to marry a Barbadian and not an African-American with whom she is in love. Selina hears people abusing her father and consoling her mother regarding the recent incident - the selling of the house site - and what followed it. As she listens to the wedding guests congratulating her
mother on the purchase of the house which she has managed by a visit to the loan sharks, Selina begins to feel that the wedding itself is not for Gatha Steed's daughter but for her mother who has married the house:

Slowly a thought formed as she watched her [the mother]. The wedding was really for the mother. In her honor. The flowers and candles, the decorations strung across the ceiling and walls, all the cakes were not there for the broken bride but for the mother. Suddenly she understood that exaggerated bow the mother had given everyone in the church. She too must have sensed that the wedding was really for her. (139)

In fact, everyone attending the ceremony knows the brownstone has replaced Deighton.

When everybody starts dancing, Selina also surrenders to the compelling calypso. Her immersion into the community, thus, occurs without her volition. Song and dance unite her not only with the Barbadian-Americans in Brooklyn, but also with all the sun-warmed people from years back and miles away. Even against her will, she is one with the group. The entire hall becomes a scene of revelry. But it is more than revelry; it is an affirmation:

The music persisted through the bride and groom's departure; it screeched and thudded late into the evening, binding the dancers together, setting them apart from all other people.... Selina swayed with
the thronged dancers, part of a giant amoeba which changed shape yet always remained of one piece. When she and Beryl danced in the center she felt like the source from which all the movement flowed. When pushed to the periphery, like someone clinging to a spinning wheel. (148)

Selina never thought of participating in the wedding calypso, but once she is drawn into the community, she moves away from her father much against her wishes:

Once, pushed to the outside, she glimpsed a man standing in the doorway. She saw only his legs, but their stillness in the midst of all the movement arrested her, and the stance reminded her vaguely of her father. But then the dancers quickly swept her back to the center and she lost sight of the still legs. When finally she pressed to the edge again she saw that it was her father and his presence drained her happiness. (148)

Once Selina tries to go to him but drops the idea when he signals to her to stay where she is. Thus he is left alone, banned by each and everyone in the party. His excommunication is complete when he finds his agony too great and staggers back.

Deighton is symbolically excommunicated from the circle of life as Marshall describes the community’s reaction:

The mother laughed, the song soared: “Small Island go back where you come from....” and both sounds fore his thin composure apart. His eyes wheeled over
the room in a desperate search for a single welcoming face. To the bar, but the men there had seen him, and as his eyes met theirs, as his hand lifted uncertainly, they turned away with old nods, and their backs formed a wall against him... they had seen him by now and they closed protectively around Silla and Ina; and someone pulled Selina back.... From all over the hall those dark contemptuous faces charged him. Those eyes condemned him and their voices rushed full tilt at him, scourging him and finally dividing him from their presence with their song, “Small Island, go back where you really come from.” (150)

The entire Barbadian community whirl him out as an undesirable part of their value system under the impression that he has no ties and links either with his culture or community. That night and many nights Selina’s sleep is marred by the image of her father groping as though blind or drunk from the hall. Each night the calypso song resounds in her sleep, hounding Deighton out into the mob waiting in the dark to claim him.

Selina’s alienation from her father gains momentum when, on her fifteenth birthday, his hand is mangled in an industrial accident. He doesn’t allow any member of the family to visit him in the hospital. Selina, though she insists on seeing him, fails to meet him. When he returns home, he is a transformed Deighton. The limpness in his arms seems to have spread throughout the body: “All of him might have been
sucked into the machine and crushed. And because he was so limp, he
seemed quiet inside. A kind of dead peace hovered about him" (158). In
need of peace, he joins a religious sect called the Peace Movement, led by
the charismatic Father Peace. Enmeshed in the movement, he cuts off
familial ties because it is a movement which is basically misogynist and
believes only in the phallic concept of God: "God is your father, your
mother, your sister, your brother, your wife, your child, and you will
never have another! The mother of creation is the mother of defilement.
The word mother is a filthy word. When a person reaches God he cannot
permit an earthly wife or so-called children to lead him away. God is
all!" (168-169). In keeping with this logic, Deighton moves farther and
farther from his familial responsibilities. He even tells Selina: "You
mustn't call me 'Daddy'... I'm Brother Boyce. Wunna must call me that!"
(171). Deeply involved in it, he moves totally from the house to the
Brooklyn "kingdom" of the Peace Movement. As Barbara Christian has
noted,

His [Deighton's] immersion in the religion of Father Peace is only a logical continuation of his need to be
part of some grand design without being able to create the design for himself... In renouncing not
just material possession but his role as a father, Deighton commits the unforgivable sin within his
community. By renouncing his blood-ties, he threatens the community's basic value: continuity.¹⁶
He moves away from every member of his family including Selina. Silla can no longer bear her husband. She reports him to the authorities as an illegal alien and he is about to be deported. But Deighton does not, want to, rather cannot, go to the place he was eager to go earlier. Within sight of Barbados he falls, or perhaps jumps, from the ship and drowns. Thus, white society is partly responsible for Deighton’s death, because in its materialism and racism it turns a blind eye to his dreams and ambitions.

Selina’s father’s debacle started at the very time she thought of life, boys and sex. While she has been thinking about life, her father came dangerously near death and destruction. The conflict inside her mind is between living a creative life and embracing a destructive nothingness. Watching Deighton’s renunciation, Selina feels torn by love and hate. For Selina, “his, crushed pose somehow offended her,” and she “wanted to leave him – to deny him” (170). But she looks at him with a sad acceptance, not as the same person she saw early on but “his shadow,” someone “irretrievably lost” (170). But in spite of all this, she never leaves him, denies him, or allows him to be lost. Her allegiances are permanently to her father.

Having lost her father, Selina wanders in a valley of loneliness. She moves away from everyone, even from Beryl, for one whole year, carrying the burden of grief in her. With this aloofness she develops a
mild, calm nature. For instance, when Ina advises her not to go in black
to Beryl’s pre-evening party, she first yells at her but immediately feels
sorry for her rudeness, which she never used to do. Even at Beryl’s
house she acts very mildly. For some reason she wants only to be an
on-looker. Maybe the reason for her becoming so passive is that she
cannot remove the picture of her father from her mind. That is why
when Beryl starts talking about her father, Selina cannot control her
grief. When Beryl says that she didn’t mean to hurt her,

Selina would have turned then and told her that it
was all right but for the tears... But she would have
liked to turn and tell Beryl... what he had given her.
How one cold March afternoon long ago she had
found him stretched on the cot in the sun parlor in
his shirt sleeves, his head cradled in his arms and
humming. “Is it spring?” she had asked, her breath
coming in cold wisps. He had drawn her down
beside him, loosened her arms and said, “Yes”. And
suddenly she had sensed spring in the air, seen it
forming beyond the glass walls and had not been
cold any more. (197-198)

As book four opens, Selina is a young girl of eighteen years,
standing at the height of her adolescence. To use Rosalie Troester’s
term, “othermothers”17 provide guidance and insight into her special
dilemma which Selina cannot resolve. Finally, they raise Selina’s self-
awareness to where she may better appreciate the significance of her
gifts, and thus use them constructively. Troester writes, “Othermothers provide a safety valve and sounding board and release the teenaged girl from the confines of a single role model. They can be gentle and affectionate where the blood mother must be stern and demanding thus showing the diversity available to Black womanhood.”

The first of these othermothers Marshall presents is Suggie Skeete, a woman who represents the freedom in sensuality and unlimited self-expression. An occupant of the same brownstone where Boyce family lives, Suggie works as a live-in maid for a white family. As Keith E. Byerman calls her, she is “the female version of Deighton in her love of pleasure and her nostalgia for Barbados.” But unlike Deighton, she has no illusions about Barbados. She asks Selina, “Go back? Where? Home, you mean?... You think I looking to dead before my time? Do you know how bad those malicious brutes would lick their mouth on me if I went back the same way I left?” (208). She works hard at menial jobs and her life involves real commitment to life and her culture. She cooks Barbadian food and wears her “home” dress maintaining connection with her culture.

Selina, at the age of eighteen, gets her first view of sexuality from Suggie. She advises Selina to live life with vitality without getting devoid of sexual pleasure. Suggie tells Selina, “Mark my words, soul, a time gon come when the body is willing and the mind is weak and before
the cat lick it ear your legs gon be cock high” (207). While sexual awareness is a part of Selina’s growth and maturation, other aspects of her life come into focus during her relationship with the other two “othermothers.”

Miss Mary, an aging relic from the past, is the second “othermother” of Selina. Owner of the brownstone house, Mary lives with her unloved daughter. Instead of imparting wisdom or serving as a role model, she works as Selina’s first view of an outer world. Trosester states, “Miss Mary gives Selina her first connection with the world outside the Barbadian immigrant community. And Selina learns from her that whites are not all powerful and wealthy.”20 She tells Selina that class knows no race line. She educates her to look for more global contexts than she currently experiences.

At the time when Selina wants to reject her mother, her Barbadian–American community, her culture, her value system and her everything, Miss Thompson, the third and the last of Selina’s “othermothers,” moves in. Miss Thompson is the fictional incarnation of Miss Jackson, who shaped Marshall’s early life. As Marshall says, “She had taken it upon herself to put me in closer touch with the Afro-American culture that was also my birthright.”19 Likewise, Miss Thompson provides Selina “with a link to her half forgotten African past.”20 If Suggie Skeete represents female passion, Miss Thompson is “a
literal embodiment of female suffering."22 Her story of victimization at the hands of white men teaches Selina important lessons about the jeopardy of being black and female in white America. But she also provides Selina with an example of the ability of such women to endure suffering. Marshall describes her as "an African wood carving: mysterious, omniscient,... the eyes shrouded with a profound sadness" (41). Thus, Miss Thompson, the ancestor figure that frequently appears in Marshall's novels, "provides the warmth and nurturing essential to a young girl's development. She is projective, gentle, and understanding, giving Selina both love and wisdom born of bitter experience."23 She fills this role in motherhood which Silla cannot, because of her (Silla's) deep involvement in economic security.

All these three "othermothers" converge to provide answers as well as raise new questions for Selina's development. They contribute not only relief from the tension between her parents, but also vital insight which enhances Selina's understanding of her identity. They stand as figures of womanhood, which Selina can use as reference points to guide her own growth. Finally, Selina's heightened self-awareness can now start putting into place issues of sexuality, independence, inheritance, and community in preparation for the next set of challenges. The elements these "othermothers" contribute enrich Selina with a sense of worth and uniqueness.
Selina becomes more and more lonely as her old friends drop away one by one. Miss Mary dies; Miss. Thompson returns to the South; and Suggie is evicted by Silla in order to make room for new tenants to help her pay for the house. Almost all the Barbadians move from the brownstones except Selina’s family. Even her friendship with Beryl loses its early strength. But a point to be noted here is that Selina’s friendships do not free her from her isolation. Each friend is too immersed in her own situation to respond to Selina’s call for help.

The process of realization starts by the time Selina joins college. As she promised Miss Thompson, Selina one day attends her first ever meeting of Barbadian Home Owners and Businessmen’s Association. The banners depict “two black hands in a firm handclasp against a yellow background,” (219) with the Association’s full name at the top, and below on the banner is its motto:

“IT IS NOT THE DEPTHS FROM WHICH WE COME
BUT THE HEIGHTS TO WHICH WE ASCEND” (220)

The members of the Association nurse an ideology that “the heights” must be conquered at all costs and no matter if “you got to be hard and sometimes misuse others, even your own” (224). For young Selina, those four hundred members at the Association meeting “were no longer individuals... but a single puissant force, sure of all its goal and driving
hard toward it. Their surety of purpose frightened her" (222). Their quest for power, narrow-minded tribalism, and rejection of other blacks places Selina in the dark tunnel of nothingness.

She considers the Association "a band of small frightened people. Clannish. Narrow-minded. Selfish..." (227). It is on her way out that she meets Clive, with a "tall slack body, under a worn bulky coat, [which] gave the impression that it had once been full-fleshed and powerful – and this, along with his hooded eyes, made him somehow like an athlete who had been permanently injured in the heat of a rough game and now sat watching it without enthusiasm from the side lines" (228). An important similarity between the two – Selina and Clive – is their sense of isolation. Clive is alienated from his Barbadian parents, but he lacks the strength to take any positive action. Another similarity is that both don’t like the Barbadian Association. Selina finds in Clive a friend with whom she can share her feelings. Their friendship develops into love, and resembles Selina’s relationship with her father: “She and Clive were joined, just as she and her father had been, in an intimate circle, with the world driven off” (242). Until she meets Clive, we find Selina in hostile, strange, and confining environments, which range from her mother’s kitchen, the church, the school, the elevator to Father Divine's restaurant, and the Association Hall. All force Selina into an initially inner confrontation with her feelings of boundlessness and strength, until the series is disrupted when she leaves the Association’s meeting to
go to the park with Clive. Upto this point, she moves within and through spaces that do not belong to her.

At the same time Selina discovers in herself a love for dance when her programme adviser suggests that she should take a course in modern dance. It is in her relationship with Clive, in her pursuit of academic education, and in her joining the dance club that Selina's life becomes full and fulfilling: "... she was happy that for the first time she was living at a pitch and for a purpose. ... she visualized her mind as a faceted crystal... Each facet was a simple aspect of herself, each one suited to a different role" (274). Especially through dancing Selina finds a satisfying outlet for her creativity and for self-expression. She becomes so involved in her love with Clive that she joins the Association in order to win a scholarship so that she can use the money to run away with Clive.

The dance recital, for which she has been preparing strenuously, is a turning point in Selina's life. She performs the dance motions of the life cycle, symbolic of her own passage into maturity and development. A point to be noted is the difference between the recital and the dancing scene at the wedding six years ago. Selina wants to confirm that she is there by virtue of her talent and commitment to art rather than by her “Negro” birth. Her recital stands in contrast to the professional training given by careerist Barbadian–Americans:
And she danced well, expressing with deft movements the life cycle, capturing its beauty and exceeding sadness. The music bore her up at each exuberant leap, spun her at each turn so that a wind sang past her ear; it responded softly whenever the sadness underscored her gestures – until at the climax, she was dancing, she imaged, in the audience, through the rows of seats, and giving each one there something of herself... The brief cycle was ending and she was old. Death tapping at her skull and seeping chill through the blood. She ... slowly sank down, borne down by the piano's dying chords, prostrate finally in death. (281)

The symbolic cycle of life that Selina enacts has brought her, as she thinks, from marginality to center. She is not merely a black but a human being. It indicates that it is a celebration of Selina's selfhood. With this, she creates an identity for herself, free of inner turmoil and free of world's chaos.

At the wedding she was among her own people and was drawn into the community, singing the songs which had deep meaning for them all. But the present recital is attended by whites only and she becomes part of a Western dance ritual. Her triumph leads her to believe that she is, at last, part of a people. The core of her feeling of togetherness is the dance group, all white. In this triumphant moment she merges herself
with them: "...and suddenly she wanted to remain with them always in
the crowded wing, to shout and never get weary" (282). This also proves
her pre-enlightened state of her lack of recognition of racism.

But the very next moment, Selina experiences one of the most
important awakenings, her harsh confrontation with white racism. After
the recital, the group goes to Margaret's house to celebrate. Margaret's
mother's racist insinuations and enquiries force Selina to realize that in
spite of her personal accomplishments and individuality, whites will
always define her only as a black, as if the colour of her skin in itself
speaks for her identity, By comparing Selina to a coloured West Indian
girl, Miss Benton throws the same cruel cliché that robbed African
people of their innate humanity:

"Ah, ... We once had a girl who did our cleaning who
was from there..." Oh, she wasn't a girl, of course.
We just call them that. It's a terrible habit... Any
way, I always told my husband there was something
different about her – about Negroes from the West
Indies in general... I don't know what, but I can
always spot it. When you came in to night, for
instance...' You can't help your color... you don't
even act colored. I mean, you speak so well and have
such poise. And it's just wonderful how you've taken
your race's natural talent for dancing and music and
developed it. Your race needs more smart young
people like you. (287-288)
The remarks rob Selina of her substance and herself. She is shocked by the woman's blindness, by her failure to see her, Selina, as a person: "... when she looked up and saw her reflection in those pale eyes, she knew that the woman saw one thing above all else. Those eyes were a well-lighted mirror in which, for the first time, Selina truly saw – with a sharp and shattering clarity – the full meaning of her black skin" (289). She now realizes that she has been trying to evade her racial identity, and

She was seeing, clearly for the first time, the image which the woman – and the ones like the woman – saw when they looked at her. What Clive has said must be true. Her dark face must be confused in their minds with what they feared most: with the night, symbol of their ancient fears, which seethed with sin and harbored violence, which spawned the beast in its fen; with the heart of darkness within them and all its horror and fascination. The woman, confronted by her brash face, had sensed the arid place within herself and had sought absolution in cruelty. Like the night, she was to be feared, spurned, purified – and always reminded of her darkness .... (291)

Thus Selina sees the full racist meaning of her black skin reflected in the woman's eyes. She realizes that as a black woman she does not have a place in white society. In painful epiphany she learns
that the white girls with whom she felt such togetherness are all “sinister figures who could cage her in their arms until the woman came and she was utterly destroyed”(290). With this she realizes that in addition to her own struggles she must also battle racism, the white illusion of her blackness. As Geta T.Leseur has observed, “Selina has been jolted into consciousness of the shared bond between herself and her people, necessitated by the imperative of conquering racism in order to enable full development of human potential. And, in this sense, Selina begins to comprehend what lies behind her mother’s harsh outbursts and actions, and her people’s need for coalition.”24 Selina, thus, comes to terms with her mother and her people, both of whom are incorporated in herself, and rejects the ideology of the oppressor. She actively refutes it through knowledge of identity and rejection of white racism.

Desperately, Selina moves into the old street, pushed by the woman’s face, voice, touch, and fragrance. She is exhausted and stops in the doorway of a deserted store. She beholds a distorted reflection of her face in the lamplight and realizes that the white world sees not her, but their twisted idea of her:

It would intrude in every corner of her life, tainting her small triumphs - as it had tonight - and exulting at her defeats. She cried because, like all her kinsmen, she must somehow prevent it from destroying her inside and find a way for her real face to emerge. Rubbing her face against the ravaged...
image in the glass, she cried in outrage: that along with the fierce struggle of her humanity she must also battle illusions! (291-292)

At this moment of supreme alienation, Selina begins to discover herself. She realizes that she is one with all the black people in her world:

And she was one with them: the mother and the Bajan women, who had lived each day what she had come to know. How had the mother endured, she who had not chosen death by water? She remembered the mother striding home through Fulton Park each late afternoon, bearing the throw-offs under her arm as she must have borne the day's humiliations inside. How had the mother contained her swift rage? — and then she remembered those sudden, uncalled-for outbursts that would so stun them and split the serenity of the house. (292-293)

Thus, filled with the pain of her own cycle of death/rebirth, Selina runs to Clive, who empathies but is too encumbered by his own conflicts to meet her emotional needs. Clive, like Deighton, fails to achieve the quest and is destroyed for obvious racial and economic reasons. He, like Deighton, is unable to deal with the societal and sexual definitions that mold their women's ambitions and claims.

The Selina–Clive relationship reveals the dubious role black men historically have been playing when it comes to support black women in their cause of survival and family nourishment. In a way, it matches
with the Silla-Deighton relationship: Selina exiles the emotional world, in the same manner as her mother exiled Deighton, when Clive rejects to leave his mother and confront the world squarely. As Selina still remembers her mother's pathos-stricken eyes on that occasion asking Deighton, "what had gone wrong, what it was that had ruined them for each other," (182) she alerts herself and saves herself from further catastrophe. We cannot agree with Mary Helen Washington's view that "She [Silla] teaches her (daughter) almost nothing of the female art,"25 because it is Silla who teaches Selina that quest for power and feminine autonomy must be transformed into a creative drive leading ultimately to harmonious relationships between black men and women "in this man country."

At this moment of supreme alienation, Selina begins to discover herself. She realizes that she must face her problems alone, relying on the inner resilience and formidable strength she has inherited from her mother, which makes her a mother's child, and on the "mysterious source of endurance" (302) of her people for which she now feels admiration and love: "They no longer puzzled or offended her. Instead, their purposefulness – charging the air like a strong current – suddenly charged her strength and underpinned her purpose. The tightness in her chest eased and her heart calmed" (303).
A week later, the Barbadian Association presents its first scholarship award and Selina wins it. In desperate self revelation she refuses it. Selina makes a public admission of her mistakes, and purges her soul of the sins she committed against her mother and her community: "My trouble may be was that I wanted everything to be simple – the good clearly separated from the bad – the way a child sees things. But its not simple or separate and children can't understand it. Now that I'm less of a child I'm beginning to understand..." (303). This is a clear testimony to her journey from innocence to experience, from shadows to self, from a fractured psyche to wholeness. Ebele Eko says that "Selina, a loner through much of the novel, comes to understand, through her experience, the bane of racism, and identity with the pains of her mother, her community and all oppressed people everywhere in their search for security and freedom."26

In her speech, she explains to the Association that her perceptions were based on simple, unrealistic extremes of good and evil. It has been observed that the protagonists of black women writers' Bildungsroman "discover direct, and recreate the self in the midst of hostile racial, sexual and other societal expression."27 Selina discovers and confronts truth and directs herself toward rectifying her past mistakes, determining her own future, and reconstructing her concepts and values in the light of her new-found consciousness. She no longer embraces white standards of beauty and is able to value the Barbadian community

76
and herself. Thus she travels the harsh road from alienation to oneness with the people, from blindness to the vision, from the shattered self to wholeness.

It is during their last confrontation that the mother and daughter face each other honestly, for Silla now recognizes Selina as a woman. As Silla and Selina argue their way through their visions of the world, Silla does not hamper Selina's beginning exercise of personal power and search for autonomy. Although Silla has sacrificed much of her right of choice to provide an economic base for herself and her family, she does not show the same kind of commitment for her daughter. Selina tells her mother that she must go away, alone, though Silla tries to persuade her to stay back. Hearing her, Silla makes the choice to limit herself. Selina's last words to her mother are the confession of her love and appreciation:

"Mother," she said gently, "I have to disappoint you. Maybe it's as you once said: that in making your way you always hurt someone. I don't know ..."

"Everybody used to call me Deighton's Selina but they were wrong. Because you see I'm truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of eighteen and was your own woman? I used to love hearing that. And that's what I want, I want it!"

(307)
Silla, who always had great love for her daughter, expresses respect for Selina's new independence and her decision. She dismisses her with words that emphasize the fluid yet decisive solidarity between mothers and daughters: "You was always too much woman for me anyway, soul. And my own mother did say two head-bulls can't reign in a flock. G 'long!" (307)

Silla's ability to release her daughter marks her own confidence in her child and in womanhood: "Her hand sketched a sign that was both a dismissal and a benediction" (307). Recognizing that Selina must have her own identity, Silla gives her wilful child an acknowledgment of the right to separate from her with her blessing: "If I din dead yet, you and your foolishness can't kill muh now!" (307). The benediction is not only the end of one phase but a release to begin another. Thus Selina positively affirms her desire for individuality and independence that parallels her mother's. Coming to a deep realization of her personal and collective self, she moves out in quest for meaning and fulfilment of her life.

As Selina walks along the streets, remembering the faces of all those whose lives have touched hers, she realizes that she must go to the islands, probably to Barbados, from where issued the primal forces of her life. She performs a symbolic act revealing that one part of hers still belongs to the fellow black Americans whom she is leaving behind:
She wanted, suddenly, to leave something with them. But she had nothing.... Then she remembered the two silver bangles she had always worn. She pushed up her coat sleeve and stretched one until it passed over her wrist, and, without turning, hurled it high over her shoulder. The bangle rose behind her, a bit of silver against the moon, then curved swiftly downward and struck a stone. A frail sound in that utter silence. (310)

The act of tossing the bangle and heading towards Barbados is immensely significant in many ways and brings into focus many facets of Selina's self-discovery. With this she reestablishes the link with her native people, offering them the bangle as a gift, a reminder of their basic heroic struggles and of their race and culture. Thus through Selina's physical journey, Marshall asserts the need for blacks to make the spiritual and psychological journey back into their past.

In conclusion, we can say that "Selina has come to a deep realization of her personal and collective self, which she will incorporate in shaping her quest for meaning and fulfillment and ... the protagonist of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* has progressed from a fragmented individual self, through a turbulent awakening to a realigned whole."²⁸
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