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Fall October 15, 2018

# Notions of Home: Re-Locations and Forging Connections in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*

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**Notions of Home: Re-Locations and Forging Connections in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*****Ashma Shamail**Department of English Language & Literature  
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**Abstract**

Focusing on the African Caribbean Immigrants in the United States, this paper examines the work of novelist Paule Marshall, whose narratives document issues of migration, displacement, home, return, and community bonding. Paule Marshall's first novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), focuses on Selina Boyce, a second-generation Barbadian immigrant from the United States, whose search for her roots is informed by an inherent link to the Caribbean through an articulation of the dynamics of belonging. The notion of 'home' as a contradictory and contested trope is vital, for the writer's foremost concern is on the overarching effect it has on the diasporic subject. Marshall grants her protagonist the space to challenge familial struggles, and reclaim her voice by relocating to Barbados, her parental home. The protagonist's enigmatic journey through ambivalent interspaces enables her to reconstruct bridges to the West Indies. Marshall's examination of her young protagonist's 'return to the Caribbean' reflects wider issues of diasporic identity and belonging connected to 'home' spaces, ancestral lands, regions, and origins.

*Keywords:* Afro-Caribbean immigrants, Barbados, belonging, diasporic identity, home

**Cites as:** Shamail, A. (2018). Notions of Home: Re-Locations and Forging Connections in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 2 (4). 71- 88. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol2no4.5>

**Introduction**

It's here I belong [...] I love this island with every bone in my body [...] It's my home and home is where you feel a welcome.

- Caryl Phillips

[C]oming always closer to the island of my birth, but never actually going back to it, never making the final journey, the dream of our years of exile. Between language and borders, identities and colors, however, I have grieved for this. I am still grieving for it.

- Marie-Hélène Laforest

Contemporary American immigrant literature presents a dynamic convergence of multiple cultures fostering new heritages, distinct narratives, and diverse voices. Journeys undertaken by immigrants to the American soil document tales of trauma with deep-rooted histories that emerge as a space between their 'homeland' and host land. Recent scholarship on immigrant literatures, ethnic and cultural studies, sought to explore the diversity of cultures in the United States encouraging vital debates on the issues of migration, diasporic identity, assimilation, influence, and transnational practices by ethnic minorities in American society. Immigrants' struggle for identity construction and their cultures conflicting with other ethnic minorities and societies has captured the imagination of contemporary novelists, of whom women writers have created a ground of the immigrant experience in profound ways.

Both forced and voluntary migrations, recorded and invisible cases, displaced and dispersed, provide a viable platform for new models of national identity. African Caribbean immigrants in the United States have interrogated issues into understanding and narrating their rich culture. The African-Caribbean immigrant community in the United States created a unique ethnic enclave filled with ambition, wishing to uphold itself apart from the African Americans. Playing a significant role in matters concerning Pan-Africanism, black nationalism and transnationalism,<sup>1</sup> they organized a larger and wider Caribbean society/space. The African Caribbean society/community's search for their ancestral ties to their motherland has generated scholarly research from the second half of the twentieth century. Extensive research carried out on the geographical and cultural displacement of Africans, has largely examined issues of (im)migration, diaspora, identity, nationhood, in addition to a host of frameworks and traditions. Particularly, literary texts from the Caribbean world have captivated the attention of many scholars in the fields of humanities, visual arts, and social sciences.

Caribbean literature encompasses nation-states – islands and mainland, scattered thoroughly around the region. Critics such as Edouard Glissant (1989), Paul Gilroy (1993), Silvio Torres-Saillant (2006, 2013), and many others have opened new approaches to 'black Atlantic' and Caribbean studies. Specifically, African Caribbean literature navigates beyond the constructs of race, class, and gender oppressions permeating into spiritual, psychological, and cultural elements. Though located outside the geographical boundaries of the Caribbean, many African Caribbean writers, intellectuals, and theorists traversed the borders, established connections with

their island homes and the homeland of their African ancestors. In addition, travels, social networks, relocations, and transnational black diasporic cultural productions have led to the formation of Caribbean cultural world in Britain, the United States, and Canada. As the Jamaican-American writer Michelle Cliff (1993) says in her interview with Meryl F. Schwartz, “the Caribbean doesn’t exist as an entity; it exists all over the world. It started in diaspora and continues in diaspora” (p. 597). Currently a great deal of interest by researchers and professionals on African Caribbean genealogy and historical records has emerged as an important area of study. Varied historical patterns, re-engagements, re-locations, social and political forces configure a complex and nuanced understanding of cultural discourses. The narratives of African-Caribbean writers interrogate elements of diversity, heterogeneity, contestation and creativity, as James Clifford terms “a culturally defined place where peoples with different culturally expressed identities meet and deal with each other” (as cited in Muller, 1999, p. 16). African-Caribbean women writers such as Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, and Edwidge Danticat, have made astounding contributions in literary and cultural studies. A significant increase in publications of Caribbean women’s writing reflects the burgeoning of a literary tradition across the international diaspora. Critical works like *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (1990); *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (1990); *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (1997); *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English* (1999); *Stories from Blue Latitudes: Caribbean Women Writers at Home and Abroad* (2005); *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration and Survival* (2006); *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization: Fictions of Independence* (2006) *Transnational Negotiations in Caribbean Diasporic Literature: Remitting the text* (2011); *Pathologies of Paradise: Caribbean Detours* (2013); *Sexual Feelings: Reading Anglophone Caribbean Women’s Writing through Affect* (2014) provide necessary insights into expanding the contours of Caribbean identities.

### **Cultural Identity and the African-Caribbean Novelist – Paule Marshall**

Focusing on the African Caribbean immigrants in the United States, this paper investigates the work of Paule Marshall, who has enhanced the ‘*imaginative*’ representation of the Caribbean brilliantly. Addressing “an imagined political community,” Anderson (1991) states that “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). This space of homeland (imagined or lived) connects diasporan Africans with continental Africans focusing on kinship ties, sense of belonging, and continuity. Though geographically separated from their original homelands, Africans all over the globe were connected over many generations by their common history of colonial subjugation. Indeed, the very idea of unity, integrity, and solidarity are the key factors reconnecting diasporans to their imagined homelands binding them universally through common cultural and religious heritages and not confined to a fixed territorial place. As Cultural theorist Hall (1997) observes:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think instead, of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation [...] our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and

shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people,’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. (p. 110-111)

In line with Hall, Marshall concretizes a cultural identity construction specific to second-generation immigrants and the way identity is both socially and culturally imagined. Marshall acknowledges Hall’s views on notions of identity as belonging to the future as much as to the past. According to Hall (1997), the “partnership of past and present” is an “imaginary reunification,” as he states “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (p. 112). Indeed, Marshall’s narratives, loaded with historical and cultural materials, function as the source of defining one’s identity and a sense of self.

Immigrant women writer’s collective memory and commitment towards the retention of their rich cultures fosters a sense of distinctiveness. Articulating their voices from different geographical locations or dividers, racist and patriarchal forces, these African Caribbean women have cast a plethora of narratives that burst into those tough routes of coercive physical, cultural and spiritual dislocations emphasizing on each character’s personal odyssey, shared past and practices. Their narratives have guided readers towards a better understanding of pain and suffering – physical and psychological, encountered by their characters in daily lives. Filled with diverse icons and codes, their narratives demonstrate that cultural anchoring and diasporic connectedness is absolutely necessary for their protagonists to heal their psychic wounds, thereby underscoring the preservation of culture. Hence Marshall (1973) believes the black writer plays:

the greatest part in establishing the cultural base. And [her] task is twofold: On one hand to make use of the rich body of folk and historical material that is there, and on the other to interpret that past in heroic terms, in recognition of the fact that our history[...] is one of the greatest triumphs of the human spirit in modern times. (p. 108)

Marshall’s narratives document issues of migration, displacement, home, return, and community bonding. Such issues reaffirm the strength of her work placing her amongst the most prominent African-Caribbean women writers. Marshall is commended for synthesizing both “African Caribbean” and “African American” heritages, as she claims in an interview with Russell “I am embracing both these cultures and I hope that my work reflects what I see as a common bond” (1988, p. 15). The protagonists in Marshall’s narratives celebrate their rich cultural heritage, for acknowledging one’s culture facilitates collective consciousness and identity. In addition, they highlight the ongoing process of migration in connection with a shared cultural identity and kinship traditions. This reminds of Hall’s (1996) assertion that “we all speak for a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture” (p. 447). Marshall’s protagonists do carry those particular diasporic elements with them, whether consciously or unconsciously in all their travels. Through usage of collective past, African family traditions, community building, and responsibility, her characters undergo transformation by the recognition of their connection to a communal culture.

Marshall illustrates how black female immigrants, especially Caribbean immigrants in the United States, have documented a crucial role in the struggles and processes for survival, and identity formations. These modes of survival link directly to the struggles of continental Africans. Home is a vital concept in Caribbean women's writing challenging notions of place, family, identity, kinship ties, customs and traditions. These writers have crossed social, cultural, geographical, psychological, and linguistic borders to examine their experiences of 'home.' Through reflections and recollections (of home) and resisting a series of ruptures, ambiguities, and dislocations, Caribbean women have exercised a conspicuous part in sustaining their immigrant identity. By focusing on return to their ancestral homeland, both physically and literally, they have unleashed the submerged women's voices. In a way, Marshall's emphasis on the need to return to one's source helps to bridge the fragmented and fractured selves of black women. Here, healers assume the responsibility of nurturing and, by extension, heal and influence characters experiencing dislocations and disruptions. Healing is crucial in the lives of these black women and healers help to redress the wounds or scars on their bodies and in their minds, particularly for renewal and regeneration. They aid in reclaiming the forgotten cultural heritage amid the character's journey towards personal and cultural healing.

A second-generation immigrant born in the United States., Marshall's homeland includes both Barbados and Brooklyn, and her oeuvre encompasses protagonists moving between these two 'home spaces/places.' Marshall's mother, the Caribbean women folk, including her personal visits to the Caribbean, have enhanced vivid reflections on the trope of return. In her essay, "The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen," Marshall (1983) acknowledges and illustrates the efforts of the Barbadian Immigrant women belonging to her mother's generation who taught her "first lessons in the narrative art," defining "the rich legacy of language and culture they so freely passed on [...] in the wordshop of the kitchen" (p. 12). Marshall (1983) eulogizes these women saying "they talked – endlessly, passionately, poetically and with impressive range. No subject was beyond them ... the talk that filled the kitchen those afternoons was highly functional" (p. 5-6). Marshall gives credit to all Barbadian women whose conversations and activities in the domestic space of their Brooklyn kitchen (during Saturdays) influenced and nurtured her rich ethnic heritage, with language fostering their sense of power, oneness and community-building. As Kenyan novelist and playwright Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (2000) says, "language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (p. 436). Marshall designates these Bajan women as "Poets in the Kitchen," whose contributions paved the way for her writing career.

The Caribbean for Marshall, reconstructed through memories of her parents, the kitchen poets and through her travels (both in childhood and adolescence) configures a space for continuities, cultural transmission, and re-constructing the self. Addressing and identifying the 'self,' Marshall (1986) emphasizes on the need to return, stating: "[A] spiritual return to Africa is absolutely necessary for the reintegration of that which was lost in our collective historical past and the many national pasts which comprise it" (p. 53). By enacting a return to the past, Marshall

posits characters voyaging to uncover or recover an identity rooted in one's history. In addition, she acknowledges "African words and sounds" retained by the "mother poets," explaining:

I was impressed, without being able to define it, by the seemingly effortless way they had mastered the form of storytelling [...] They were carrying on a tradition as ancient as Africa, [a] centuries old oral mode by which the culture and history, the wisdom of the race had been transmitted. (1973, p. 103)

The mode of storytelling, African words, cultural practices, dance rituals, and African customs are vital components that fully inform the trope of spiritual return. The motif of return is a site that enables characters to confront a complex African-Caribbean self and procure answers to questions about one's identity. Inherently, authors encounter a strong sense of connectedness to their islands of descent through their narratives, and experience familial bonding and catharsis from psychic wounds.

*Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) in particular, is based significantly upon Marshall's own life experiences. Lee (2009), in her article "Voyage of a Girl Moored in Brooklyn" published in New York Times, believes *Brown Girl*, as "influential for the wave of black female writers that emerged in the 1960s and '70s, it was ahead of its time in its focus on a female voice from an immigrant black community" (para. 16). This paper focuses on Selina Boyce, the protagonist of Marshall's debut novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, who journeys into the exploration of self, and identifies her inherent link to her Caribbean homeland. Marshall's examination of her young protagonist's 'return to the Caribbean' reflects wider issues of diasporic identity and cultural belonging connected to 'home' spaces, ancestral lands, regions, and origins. *Brown Girl* (1959), set in Brooklyn, New York, after the First World War portrays West Indians seeking refuge from their home/islands. Marshall presents the conflict between community identity and individual identity in a dominant American culture. Through this monumental Bildungsroman, she constructs Caribbean cultural spaces within Brooklyn that contrast with the American urban landscape, thereby inscribing diverse versions of celebrating 'Barbadianess.' Most importantly, Marshall "casts the streets, houses, and stores of Brooklyn as encounter zones in which immigrants and their descendants wrestle with memory and history, and conceptions of home along with the racial politics of New York" (Nadell, 2013, p. 25). The Caribbean 'home' is a site of individual/collective tales influencing notions of identification, belonging, and motif of return whether physical, psychological or literal.

*Brown Girl* is an appropriate example, where the female characters use different cultural tools to maintain their identity. Kitchen spaces in *Brown Girl*, are vital in establishing linkages in the creation of the Caribbean landscape, retaining their Bajanness, with language providing meditations rooted in personal experiences. Silla Boyce's shared kitchen space for the Bajan women's talk (both personal and political) empowered them to exercise freely their day-to-day battles with patriarchy, racism, prejudices, economic hardships, and capitalism. Establishing a significant link between language and society, sociologist Halbwachs (1992) states:

People living in society use words that they find intelligible: this is the precondition for collective thought. But each word (that is understood) is accompanied by recollections. [...] It is language, and the whole system of social conventions attached to it, that allows us at every moment to reconstruct our past. (p. 173)

Language aids in maintaining the values, systems, and norms of these Bajan women. It enabled them to maintain ethnic solidarity through collective memories of their Caribbean homeland. The richly passionate Barbadian language defined their true ‘Bajanness’ functioning as a channel for resistance, creativity, retreat, strength, and energy. Silla’s friend Florrie Trotman’s remark “‘Talk yuh talk, Silla! Be Jees, in this white-man world you got to take yuh mouth and make a gun’” (Marshall, 1959, p. 70) mirrors the Caribbean women’s will, undaunting courage facing obstacles through voice. Barbados for these Caribbean women is both the immigrant community’s site for aiding and reflecting on one’s identity through recovered pasts connected to present realities, as well as a site for articulating massive intersections built on the collective memory of oppression, poverty, struggle and economic depression.

Very much in contrast to their intimate personal spaces where culinary practices and language functioned for retaining their ‘Bajanness,’ Marshall includes a public space – the Association of Barbadian Home Owners and Businessmen. It is an institution set up to enhance the immigrants’ status in the United States. Barbadian immigrants, especially female immigrants in this novel identify homeownership as a possible mechanism to stand against the racial hostility of America and attempt to hold a ‘place’ for their community on the American soil. As Sollors (1986) states, “In the complicated American landscape of regional, religious, and ethnic affiliation, it could be very difficult to construct the self as autonomous individual and as fated group member” (p. 173). Essentially, Paule Marshall’s protagonist Selina Boyce battles with real-life situations both inside and outside her home, to ‘construct the self’ in her journey of complex negotiations of national, racial, and gender identifications. Home is a site where the migrant learns complex lessons to survive in an alien terrain, resist oppression and domination, confront and transcend, transform and heal, thereby, enabling him or her to oscillate between cultures, borders, and intersections. Nevertheless, the quest for home continues to be a major concern for the migrant, particularly in his/her journey to define the self or attain a sense of identity.

### Locating Home

The manner Marshall probes Selina’s journey and the trope of ‘return’ is in one way excavating both the novelist and the protagonist’s exploration of caribbean island/homeland, history, culture and African roots. The quest for home and the process of growing up for Marshall is clearly informed in her interview with Pettis (1992):

One of the things that was talked a lot about among the women was the nostalgic memory of home as they called it, home. It was very early on that I had a sense of a distinct difference between home, which had to do with the West Indies, and this country, which had to do with the United States [...] it was a little confusing because to me home was

Brooklyn and by extension America, and yet there was always this very strong sense [...] of this other place that was also home. I think it began then an interest in this place that was so important to these women and that I began to sense it was important in whomever I was going to discover myself to be. (p. 117-118)

The acts of discovering, recovering, remembering, relocating, and reconstructing one's origins facilitate an understanding of ancestral lineage. The notion of 'home' "is also the imagined location that can be more fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography" (George, 1999, p. 11). In addition, Carole Boyce Davies's illustration of 'home' is vital in unraveling the notion in terms of addressing it as a space of 'belonging' in *African Caribbean Women's Writing*. Davies (1994) states:

Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home, become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation. (p.113)

The concept of home, implications of dislocation and cultural tensions pervade all through the Caribbean diaspora. Much critical work has been employed in analyzing it as a contradictory and contested space. Ongoing research attempts to unearth literary representations of conflicting home spaces, for the foremost concern of the writer is to focus on the possible negotiations of these spaces and the effect it has on the diasporic subject.

### **Notions of Home in *Brown Girl, Brownstones***

The entire action of the novel is set in New York exclusively while references to the Caribbean home islands narrated by specific West Indian characters are mentioned in the narrative. Hence, the key focus of the paper examines the notion of home from Selina's point of view, reflecting the voice of second-generation immigrants. The paper exclusively deals with Silla and Deighton Boyce's conceptions of home as well, for Selina learns her first lessons about home/land from them. Selina Boyce, the daughter of Bajan immigrants (who came to the U.S. during the first wave of immigration), struggles between her mother Silla's ardent desire to 'buy house' and settle in the United States and her father Deighton's desire of going back to his home island in the Caribbean. Selina, the younger one resists Silla's influence and desire. She establishes her individuality through values connected with her ethnic group, embodied through Silla. Selina displays her potential and strength of character that emerges later in the novel through a series of episodes.

The Barbadian Association in Brooklyn, an organization of property owners and businessmen, believes in acquiring a 'house' as the communal goal of the group leading to their accession of respectability in the New World. The text, in tracing the historical realities of the African Caribbean community, makes allusions to Silla and Deighton, who espouse strikingly different views of the concept of 'home' and a sense of belonging. Barbados, the place of Silla and Deighton's birth, is transfigured in memory, words and nostalgia. Silla's memory of the Caribbean

filled with imprints of a colonial past gives an account of hardship, demoralizing poverty and deprivation that has characteristically transplanted her as a woman of survival, will, strength and determination. Silla's struggle to create an existential space for her entire family showcases her strong personality. Belonging to the "Third Class," a poor class in Barbados, she explains to Selina "The Third class is a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise in this heaven till it sun set" and "working harder than a man at the age of ten," her plight painfully evokes the life of black women labourers during slavery (Marshall, 1959, p. 45-46). Despite leaving Barbados, Silla's identification and commitment in being a Bajan woman in America clearly testifies her link with her cultural roots. By cooking and selling traditional Barbadian delicacies, indulging in conversations and discussions every Saturday around her kitchen table, Silla clings to her Barbadian heritage and history. Through reclamation, she remembers, reconnects, and records her past in the present.

Her sole aim of 'buying house,' dedication, devotion and commitment to strive for better economic standing in America helps her gain the community's likeness and support. The Brownstones where the Boyce family resides, emerges as a significant space for Silla. Silla works extremely hard to attain the 'brownstone,' which in fact is 'home' for her in this foreign land. Like most of the members of the Association, Silla's efforts at property ownership is a site of power and celebration of identity, despite the persistence of racial violence in America. But Silla's drive towards materialism and the values embraced by the members of the Barbadian community allow individual assumptions to differ from a group norm. Selina wishes to conform loyalty to her community's expectations, but sets her own objectives in achieving her goals. Conditioned by her mother's and community's aims to be anchored on the American soil, Selina adopts a strategy quite different from Boelhower's perspective of immigrant novels – "With construction as the master topic, goals are still relatively uncomplicated, cultural motives are few, simple, public in character, and usually agreed upon by all. The ethnic project inspires consensus, and consensus inspires the building of an ethnic community" (as cited in Japtok, 1998, p. 308-309). However, Selina does not cling to this 'consensus,' but constructs a world of her own.

Unlike his wife Silla Boyce, Deighton Boyce's valorization of a past depicts his fancy for Barbados and the home island as a paradise in its totality. His boyhood days, fun-filled life, playing games, and enjoyment mirror his carefree youth. Separated from his island and exiled in New York, he longs to return home. Deighton, carries with him the imprint of his homeland, as George (1999) has asserted, the idea of home "acts as an ideological determinant of the subject" and "'home-country expresses a complex yoking of ideological apparatuses [...] of having a home, and a place of one's own" (p. 2). Emphasizing their historical and cultural connections to Africa and the Caribbean, many people of Caribbean descent born outside of the Caribbean articulate a Caribbean homeland within the city and cling to nostalgic evocations of their island stories, food, music, traditions, customs, language, and landscapes, thereby repositioning tropes of home and identity. In essence, their "return to ancestral homelands has symbolically occurred via re-creation of homeland in new home spaces, fusing past with present" (Gadsby, 2006, p. 12). By linking to historical places, the memories or reserves of the past are invoked and relived in the present establishing cultural familiarity and continuity. For memory, "is constructed from influences

operating in the present as well as from information stored about the past” (Schacter, 1996, p. 8). As such, the memory field filled with individual/collective experiences from the past, whether painful or traumatic, provides an insight into history and continues to exercise its influence in the present and subsequent notions of identity.

For Deighton, memories of the Caribbean ‘home’ are not merely associated with an ideological past, but linked to his own future projects of building a house on his two acres of land he has inherited. Cherishing to get back to his homeland, he dreams of living in his newly constructed house. Deighton’s Barbadian upbringings, wild fantasies, coupled with his island tales nourish young Selina’s imagination of her ancestral home. In fact, the shared recollections or memories guide an individual to pass on their linkages to future generations, for Halbwachs (1992) comments:

[I]n the most traditional societies of today, each family has its proper mentality, its memories which it alone commemorates, and its secrets that are revealed only to its members. But these memories, as in the religious traditions of the family of antiquity, consist not only of a series of individual images of the past. They are at the same time models, examples, and elements of teaching (p. 59).

Indeed, Deighton is the “model, example, and element of teaching” for his young daughter. Like Deighton, the image of the island is reconstructed by Suggie Skeete, one of the Boyce’s tenants, who clings to her Barbadian culture. Both Suggie and Deighton seek to reconstruct a spatial home that helps them identify their sense of belonging and reconnect to their past “provid[ing] Selina with examples of following the course of life one has chosen for oneself” and thereby “give Selina the warmth, affection, and sense of enjoyment of life that is missing in a community focused solely on work and acquisition” (Japtok, 1998, p. 309). Deighton’s reveries, dreams, memories, desires, and fantasy of Barbados, propels Selina to discover or invent her unseen home. In Benston’s (1975) view: “Deighton’s land becomes a symbol for the long lost and irrecoverable ‘home’ of Barbados – its simplicity in poverty, slow-paced living, natural beauty, and essential Pre-Lapsarian purity and innocence” (p. 68). Sustaining his identity and subsequent return to his origins, Deighton’s link to the lost homeland (psychologically and spiritually) functions as a site of memory creating a conceptual space mirroring images of Caribbean existence within the racial and global universe. But Deighton’s ties with his homeland are severed, when Silla secretly sells his piece of land in Barbados, to use the money as down payment for the Brooklyn brownstones. Broken, and dispossessed, Deighton faces death on his deportation, which occurs on Silla’s reporting the police about her husband’s illegal immigrant status. Barbados, the former colonial ‘home,’ recalls a life of an idealized past and nostalgic return, as well as a life of suffering, poverty, and deprivation for the parents. The dichotomous image of home functions as a site of desire and loss, heaven and hell, freedom and bondage, all things embedded in one location. Both Silla’s and Deighton’s visions of ‘home’ delineate the strategies, and accompanying responses that typify the immigrant subject’s experience. Whether Selina adopts her parents’ strategies or sets forth a newer vision of ‘home’ in this narrative is yet to occur.

The Brownstone, which in reality should evolve as a nurturing ground for Selina's development, fails to prove as a stable and secure haven owing to the constant disputes in the family. Marshall vividly structures Selina's confrontation with a lack of space as the real-life situations of her family environment set her up on a journey to experience a harsher, hostile racist urban environment in the episodes that follow. As Selina matures, her confrontations with racism and her retreat from the Barbadian group at Gatha Steed's daughter's wedding feast mark a drastic shift in her character. The wedding feast makes Selina aware of the community's disinterest in the bride's choice, for she is forced to marry a West Indian rather than her love, a southern American black. Dance takes a symbolic and poignant meaning in this text for the ritual teaches Selina to closely observe the community's rejection of Deighton and the manner in which he is collectively ostracized from the group, as the dancers closed in "protectively around Silla and Ina; someone pulled Selina back. Then [...] the dancers turned in one body and danced with their backs to him" (Marshall, 1959, p. 150). In failing to keep up with the economic goals of the Bajan community, Deighton is explicitly condemned, while Selina watches the show. The gathering, a collective ritual and communal space intended to display the community's harmony and recognition of their presence makes Selina feel out of place and detach herself from her own West Indian community. The ritual of dance enhances the Barbadian community as a social structure culturally tied to the Caribbean. Rituals extend support for individuals in society, where they recognize, localize and construct bonds. However, Marshall clearly demonstrates the community's ejection of one of its members as Collier (1984) says:

In this scene Selina sees herself first as an integral part of the community, reveling in a new sense of wholeness, then imprisoned by that same community, helping it to persecute her most beloved person. She has experienced two poles of belonging: the community as completion of the individual self, the community as control. (p.302)

Selina fully recognizes the dangers of community membership and gradually turns and grows independent from them. In fact, rituals offer a space for communities, localities, or groups to carve a place for themselves retaining their rich culture and heritage in spite of being physically dislocated or forcibly uprooted from their native land. Dance as a celebratory ritual helps in perpetuating and preserving customs of a community passed down through generations. It aids in the restoration of communal health providing solace and wholeness to one's bodies and hearts. In other words, dance unites societies to recollect memorable experiences, and it functions as the place where

the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away. [T]he circle of the dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits .... [It reflects] the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. There are no limits--inside the circle. (Fanon, 1963, p. 57)

The retention of such communal practices reunifies immigrants with their ancestral identities. Remembering, storing, and transmitting these practices helps protect them from the loss of cultural and communicative memory. Cultural practices exercise a dominant force in communities and take

a significant role in the process of healing. In addition, the individual is able “to liberate itself” as indicated above for:

[R]itual is a bridge by which those of us who have almost forgotten and those of us who know can cross over into remembering who we were, who we are, and who we are intended to become. Ritual can assist us by naming and validating the essential worth of our experience. In our collective search for meaning, relatedness, worth, and assurance, we are anchored by ritual. (Hyman 1993, p. 174)

Through rituals, individuals link to their extended family members and help mend those ruptures caused due to abandoning them. Rituals weave the disconnected/ fragmented portions of one’s life thereby fostering “the need to stay globally connected and maintain relationships locally, but also uphold cross-generational ties strongly” (Shamail, 2015, p. 436). This perspective is deftly crafted in Marshall’s third novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). It enables the protagonist to survive through the identity crisis, recognize her strengths and promote the rituals.

In this novel, the religious ritual the “laying on of hands” that combines the sensual with the process of spiritual rebirth brings the protagonist closer to claiming her identity as a Black Woman. The ritual generally performed by women, and their effort to heal the body, reflects a cultural tradition preserved by black women through ages. The protagonist’s participation in the rituals on the Carriacou Island connects black West Indians and their African ancestors socially, spiritually, culturally and psychologically, thereby signifying the unity of African rituals from different geographical borders. The Carriacouan people keep the traditions alive by narrating, retelling and performing them every year.

### ***Race, Knowledge, and Experiences outside Home***

As Selina moves beyond the protective enclosure of the Barbadian community, issues of racism and gender teach and awaken her to the realities of the outside world. At a post-performance dance recital, in a fellow dancer’s house, Selina confronts for the first time the racism of the white world. Selina’s perception of the outside world is shattered, as Marshall ascribes her protagonist to face the white society’s contempt. She makes her realize that she:

was one with Miss Thompson [...] One with the whores, the flashy men, and the blues rising sacredly above the plain of neon lights and ruined houses [...] 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 remembered the mother striding 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. (Marshall, 1959, p. 292-93)

Selina arrives at a point where she re-locates her mother’s position in this white world. Inherently, she reflects on her mother Silla’s unflinching courage, and inexhaustible energy that comes from

within, fighting against racism and the settings embedded in the New World. For Selina, like other second-generation immigrants, the option of stepping outside the space of their West Indian ethnic enclave is often threatened by racism. In the aftermath of the incident, Selina perceives the necessity to maintain ethnic solidarity. Racism, also opens wide the windows of the Barbadian immigrant community's objectives of homeownership. By all means, Paule Marshall doesn't celebrate homeownership as a solution to problems in a hostile environment. She constructs and develops familial dramas as ways to conceptualize and "demonstrate that strategies are not solutions to systems of inequality since they do not radically alter them." In fact, such dramas "subvert the expected happy ending of the immigrant novel" (Francis, 2000, p. 25). Selina's newly gained insight into the realities of her mother's life aid in her transformation, propelling her towards recognizing her connection to a communal culture, as well as her place among the Bajan women "who had lived each day what she had come to know" (Marshall, 1959, p. 293).

Through her struggles, Selina deeply understands her parents and arrives at a point where she could define herself, intending to bridge the gap between them and her. The experiences outside her home make her reflect on her relationship with the Barbadian Immigrant Community of Brooklyn and her mother. Through her realization of multiple worldviews and value systems, Selina fully acknowledges the community's necessity of upholding unity to fight against oppression. Selina views the values of the home community and her mother with admiration, but she emerges as an individual poised for the most significant journey to preserve her space of belonging. Kubitschek (1987) says "Selina separates from her parents without rejecting them, [and] acknowledges her community while denying its right to determine her personality" (p. 59). Marshall grants her protagonist the space to challenge familial struggles, while developing her integrity to reclaim her voice and redefine herself, only by distinguishing herself from her parents and the Bajan community. Selina, embraces her identity nurtured in her ethnic home environment, but asserts her will to uphold it by visiting the Caribbean region. Selina's lived experiences as well as the past nourished in her imagination about the home island helps her forge connections with her roots. In order to ascertain the vision of the home island inscribed in her memory, Selina's emerging selfhood directs her towards re-locating Barbados first, the island of her ancestors, and most importantly the 'home' her immigrant parents left behind.

### ***Understanding and Re-Locating Home/Island***

Navigating uncharted spaces and pathways, Selina embraces her Barbadian culture traversing across diverse geographic borders to explore her roots and better understand her Barbadian brothers and sisters. Driven by her quest for knowledge of her Caribbean homeland, Selina resolves to set out on a journey of self-discovery, beginning with Barbados. In so doing, she projects the same kind of self-assuredness, determination and dream Silla carried years ago to reach the immigrants' myth of the Promised Land. In one way or other, Selina's departure from Brooklyn corresponds to Silla's departure from Barbados, with Selina tracing a reverse migration in search of freedom and self-reclamation. Selina's journey to Barbados does not signal a break between mother and daughter, but validates commitment, courage, and strength of her mother as stated in her final words:

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! (Marshall, 1959, p. 307)

Though Silla and Selina share the same power within, yet their idea of finding a space of belonging, in other words, home differs. At the end, Silla realizes that in her pursuit for homeownership, she lost her family members. Selina's journey and search for her roots marks a new beginning of life filled with materials of ethnic solidarity and African Caribbean culture and heritage transplanted into the Brooklyn setting by the immigrant community.

By establishing a link with the past and the African heritage, Marshall posits the characters in acknowledging a submerged culture of slavery, and colonialism, rooted in spirit. Filled with hope, desire, and memory, Marshall's second-generation protagonist looks forward to re-establish and re-locate her ancestral connections and eventually identify with her parental home or homeland. The final scene of the novel shows Selina tossing into the air one of the silver bangles "which had come from 'home' and which every Barbadian-American girl wore from birth" (Marshall, 1959, p. 5). Selina retains the other bangle signifying her truthful association with her Barbadian cultural heritage Paule Marshall concludes the novel with her protagonist's search for her individual identity, leaving behind the world of brownstones, and the Barbadian American world. As Selina passes down a street, she observes the brownstones have "been blasted to make way for a city project" (Marshall, 1959, 309). Marshall portrays her heroine emerge as the "sole survivor amid the wreckage" ready to chart a new life (1959, 309). Imbued with the lessons she learnt in Brooklyn, Selina symbolically embraces the option of going back before moving forward – precisely to her roots, her home, her native land first, before moving on to seek and re-locate her African lineage.

African Caribbean subjects like Selina are paradigms for second generation immigrants whose journey mediates developmental pathways to claim their linkages and locate generationally. Selina's decision to start with Barbados and proceed, in one way renders the opportunity for immigrants to re-establish their spaces with which they can identify, in simpler words, meet home. Selina's enigmatic journey through ambivalent interspaces symbolically moves toward acquiring wholeness of spirit by proving to be an agent of innovation and reconstruct bridges to the West Indies.

Silla's drive and determination to set up a home base on a foreign terrain contrasts with her daughter's drive to locate her 'home' in her native terrain. In so doing, Marshall reminds us through her protagonist the journeys immigrants navigate and likewise initiate new ones to ensure the survival of future generations. Loaded with lessons she learnt in New York and remembrances of 'home' as a place, reconstructed in her imagination by members of the first generation, this Caribbean American woman acts as a representative for all those second generation women who wish to forge their connections, and reclaim a space for themselves, but due to a range of factors were unable to move out of the United States. Selina rejects being dislocated from her ancestral

homeland, and desires to search for a more positive future. The novel closes, but discloses awareness of belonging to a land Selina never visited, but understands the need to connect to those dispersed networks of diasporic people. Selina's story opens new possibilities for formulating the meaning of home and identity formation.

### Conclusion

The relation between the protagonist to home is consciously identified in this narrative. Home, relocations, movements capture the various migratory patterns and circuits. Home identifications occur in one's spiritual/psychological or imagined space, as characters wrestle with diverse understandings of what home is, by deliberately moving away from fixed categories of defining 'home,' self, and identity. Home is neither a fixed geographical, sentimental, or imaginative location that characterizes identities on the move,

but always an emotional space, home is among the most emotionally complex and resonant concepts in our psychic vocabularies, given its associations with the most influential, and often most ambivalent, elements of our earliest physical environment and psychological experiences as well as their ripple effect throughout our lives. (Rubenstein, 2001, p. 1-2)

The promise of home, forging connections with homeland, crosses geographical dividers or dividing lines, for it is not rigidly defined, because home can be located in more than one space/region/country. In crossing borders and boundaries, characters bond with their ancestors and families, engaging in spaces and worlds between the Caribbean, Africa and the United States.

Finding an ideal home place within the migratory spaces is unending. The journeys that writers themselves have undertaken vividly mirror in a range of experiences through their narratives. Significantly, the aspect of redefining a Caribbean diaspora identity is never complete, just as one cannot offer a final thought on continuing migrations and the writing of home.

African-Caribbean women writers have explored multicultural, multivalent experiences from their vantage point. Their emphasis on the shared descent and cultural frontiers of black people with a common colonial legacy links ancient Africa to black America as well as the Caribbean. Their protagonists weave through dual heritages, and politics of location crisscrossing geographical and cultural boundaries establishing new connections, new possibilities, and opportunities. Physical, geographical and psychological distances have generated a gap caused by the past embedded in imagination and present (experiences) embedded in the new world. Selina's metaphorical journey envisions the possibility to overcome the gap and enlist bridges across the old world and new world. The journeys undertaken by every migrant across the sea of diasporic history to reach the waters of home(is)land entails rebirth. Paule Marshall, in many ways has helped unite generations, and bridge African descendants throughout the diaspora. Marshall's allegiance to African roots, and varied forms of resistance has established her as a major writer in African Caribbean women's literature. Marshall's characters do not merely function as victims or psychologically wounded, powerless or speechless beings, but are multi-faceted, self-defined,

powerful, courageous and reflective individuals who set out to define new parameters in African Caribbean Women's writing.

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<sup>i</sup> Pan-Africanism is an intellectual movement that is directed towards emancipation of Africa. It focuses on solidarity among people of African descent, whose central motif is the formation of a universal Black identity, derived from a consciousness that all Black people emerged historically from Africa. Similarly Black Nationalism advocated that black people are a nation who seeks to develop and maintain a black identity. Transnationalism refers to individuals, groups, institutions and states interacting with each other in a new global space linking their societies of origin and settlement across national borders.