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## Understanding the Origin and Aftermath of Violence in Opal Palmer Adisa's It Begins With Tears

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**Understanding the Origin and Aftermath of Violence in  
Opal Palmer Adisa's *It Begins With Tears*.**

Mémoire présenté par Chloé DUPONT en vue de  
l'obtention du diplôme de Master en Langues et  
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“My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a [wo]man who questions!”  
(Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 181)

Chloé Dupont

# I. Introduction

Violence is prominent in Jamaica, with the Jamaica Force Constabulary's 2016 annual report showing Jamaica to be one of the most violent countries in the world with “an approximate annual rate of 43 murders per 100,000 population over the last five years” (9). However, since 2009, there has been a decline in all categories of serious crimes, with the exception of rape, which has increased by 20.5% and child abuse such as corporal punishment and sexual abuse, which are also on the rise (Harriott and Jones 1-2). In order to better understand the situation in Jamaica, it is relevant to take a look at Jamaican and Caribbean history. In May 1494, Christopher Columbus set foot in present-day Jamaica for the first time (“Jamaica: History”). This ‘discovery’, or more exactly colonisation, of Jamaica, was an extremely violent process. The Spaniards killed and enslaved the local population, the Arawaks, who eventually disappeared as a consequence of the Spanish invasion (“The History of Jamaica”; “Jamaica: History”). In 1655, the British Empire led an attack on the Spanish settlers in Jamaica, who were forced to abandon the territory to the British (“The History of Jamaica”). In search of slaves, the British went to West Africa where they and African slave traders kidnapped people from their villages to take them to the Caribbean where they were then sold to planters, this was the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade (Brathwaite et al. 22; “The History of Jamaica”). After the Abolition Bill was passed in 1808 rendering slavery illegal, the British, finding themselves without ‘workers’ then brought Chinese and Indians to the Caribbean to have them work on the plantations as indentured labourers (“Jamaica: History”). The colonisation of Jamaica, and the Caribbean in general, and slavery are undoubtedly the most violent periods in the history of the Caribbean. Episodes such as those described leave traces, even hundreds of years after their occurrence, not only on the descendants of the slaves and colonised but also on the descendants of the colonisers. Several theorists have examined the violence

inherited from slavery and colonisation, such as psychiatrist Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) who describes colonialism as “violence in its natural state” that “will only yield when confronted with greater violence” (61). Others, like sociologist Mimi Sheller, explore how the Caribbean has been exploited and consumed throughout history, in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (2003). Nonetheless, theorists are not the only ones to deal with the theme of violence; Caribbean literature is overflowed with novels and collections of stories that tackle violence. Examples include among others: Merle Collins’s *Angel* (1987), Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), Sistren and Honor Ford-Smith’s *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (1986) and obviously, Opal Palmer Adisa’s *It Begins With Tears* (1997).

Opal Palmer Adisa is a Jamaican prose writer, poet, and Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of West Indies (“Opal’s Bio”). Adisa has published sixteen titles, including the novel *It Begins With Tears* (1997) and short story collection *Until Judgement Comes* (2006). She was born in Kingston, Jamaica where she grew up “among the sugar estates” before moving to New York in 1970 (Adisa, *It Begins With Tears*). In an interview with David Katz, Adisa has talked about how what she witnessed as a child has influenced her writing: “I witnessed men who worked in the factory fighting with their women, and I heard the maids talking across yards and fences about issues with their men, but I also witnessed some formidable women who fought back with fist as well as tongue, so I wanted to write about this so we can look at it and decide to change, to heal, to grow more wholesome” (Katz).

Violence is a recurring theme in Adisa's first novel, *It Begins With Tears*. In this novel, Opal Palmer Adisa tells the story of daily life in a small, quiet village in Jamaica called Kristoff Village. The calm is soon shaken when Monica, a former resident of the village and former prostitute, returns to the village after thirty years of absence. No one is indifferent to her return;

some people are happy to have her back, such as Miss Cotton, while for others she evokes either jealousy or lust. In *It Begins With Tears*, Adisa alternates between standard English and Jamaican Patwah, she explains to Michaela A Calderaro that it allows her to exalt the real colours of Jamaica:

I use nation language when it is the only way and the best way to get my point across, to say what I mean from the center of my navel. But I also use it, to interrupt and disrupt standard English as a reminder to myself that I have another tongue, but also to jolt readers to listen and read more carefully, to glean from the language the Caribbean sensibilities that I am always pushing, sometimes subtly, other times more forcefully. Nation language allows me to infuse the poem with all of the smells and colors of home. (Calderaro 106)

This willingness to write partially in Patwah also comes from the fact that she believes that it is not conceivable that free people could really express their feelings in the language of the colonisers (Calderaro 104). However, language is not the only means by which Adisa transcribes the colours of Jamaica, she also incorporates many elements of Jamaican and African folklore (Gard 329), as well as legends such as that of Anansi. *It Begins With Tears* is a novel full of images and metaphors, which are often mentioned in the titles of the chapters and sections that divide the book. The novel consists of five chapters which are themselves separated by sub-titles, Leslie Devlin notes that these sub-titles “give the book a feel of continuity that links each person’s story to one another, and how each event is interconnected within the village and the realm of the folktale” (131).

Similar to what Devlin says about the interconnection of events in the novel, this master’s thesis aims to see how events in the character’s lives and their backgrounds lead them to act violently. In order to understand violence, this thesis will focus on four violent events/scenes that occur in the novel, namely the rape of Monica, the rape of Beryl, the abandonment of Angel by her adoptive mother, and the beating of Althea. The objective is to try to explain the origin and

aftermath of violence, by analysing for each violent event, what has preceded the abuse and what has followed it. With the help of various theories and books from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) to the more recent *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017) by journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge, I will try to propose some leads as to how violence is created and how to deal with the trauma. The aim here is not to impose a unique and limited answer to the question of the origin and aftermath of violence in *It Begins With Tears*, but to consider possible options. Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1997) lends itself particularly well to this exercise and her work is used throughout this thesis to better understand how trauma affects victims and how they can heal after the trauma.

Chapter One will focus on the rape of Monica. This chapter will look at the background of each perpetrator, Grace, Peggy, and Marva to examine why they resorted to violence and to sexual violence in particular against Monica. In this particular case, the abusers, for some, meet a fatal fate, following their attack on Monica while Monica, on the other hand, can count on the support of women in the community to help her heal from her trauma.

In Chapter Two, Jamaica's past and its relationship with the United States will be discussed to understand why the Caribbean is considered by tourists as a place where anything is permitted. We will see how Angel plays such an important role in resolving Beryl's trauma, which had left her leading an unhappy life.

Chapter Three will analyse how racism has impacted Angel's life and even transmitted certain racist prejudices to her. While her adoptive mother's abandonment and the discovery of her blackness destroyed her self-image, she finds a family and a sense of belonging in Kristoff Village.

Finally, Chapter Four will look at the reasons why Grace almost beat to death her daughter, Althea, and how the reaction of the women in the community has a critical influence on the resolution of Althea's trauma.



## II. Chapter One: Monica

Opal Palmer Adisa's *It Begins With Tears* depicts the life of a community in a little village called Kristoff in Jamaica. The day-to-day life of the inhabitants of the village is disrupted when Monica, an ex-villager, comes back to Kristoff after years of absence, wishing to make a new start in life. However, rumours and Monica's reputation soon catch up with her, causing panic among the villagers and especially among the women who catch fear that their husbands fall under the spell of the seductive Monica. While the men grow fond of Monica, their wives grow angry and plot their revenge against her. Circumstances lead them to commit the irreparable: raping Monica. This chapter is concerned with the study of the reasons that have driven these women to take action in this particular context, i.e. the rape of Monica. With the help of various violence theories and analysis of each perpetrator's background as well as Monica's background, we will try to find out what motivated these women to resort to rape. Before trying to understand the motives behind the rape, an analysis of the rape scene in itself is proposed and then, an examination of the consequences of the rape.

### ***Trauma story***

It is interesting to focus on the rape scene itself for a moment in order to find potential clues as to why the rape happened but also because it gives insights into the characters' emotions. First of all, the rape scene is talked about and narrated twice in the novel, first during the rape itself and then by Monica herself when she tells it to the other women of the community. Although they tell the same story, the accounts do not convey the same information. The narrator, point of view, and

information differ, which is why it is important to consider both accounts and compare them. The first account of the rape is given on page 132 and 133 by the narrator:

She did not hear them enter until she felt the scarf stuffed deep into her throat.

She started to laugh at their boldness, but caught sight of their eyes, and her breath stopped. They were angry. They hated her. Two marched around her, fingering her dress, jabbing her in the face and chest while the third stood behind and firmly pushed her down on the sofa by the shoulder. She knew them, they knew her; but this wasn't a game. The evening was suddenly cool and very quiet. She couldn't hear a mosquito buzzing or a cricket chirping as hard as she listened. She needed sound. They supplied it, threatening her and reviling her as they shoved her into the bedroom, pushed her on the bed. They pulled her closet open, grabbed out her clothes, went into her dresser drawers, turned out her underclothes, emptied her many bottles of perfume, sprinkled powder in her hair and laughed. The first sound was her tears.

Then they closed in on her and one of them smeared her face with pepper, pushed pepper up her nose. They flung her dress over her head and ripped off her panties. One of them shoved her peppered fingers as deep into her womb as they could reach until the cup of chopped peppers was empty and her fingers were on fire. They didn't say anything then. They didn't look at her or one another. They couldn't hear her scream in her head or see her tears sealing her eyes. As they left, they turned off the television and lights and pulled the door shut behind them, leaving her to go silently mad.

Bitch! Whore! Man-stealer!

No stars warmed the sky, no moon held court. They walked in single file, shadowing the banking. Their steps were light, their hearts heavy.

'Night.'

'Night.'

'Night,' they mumbled as the first reached home.

'Night.'

'Night,' they mumbled as the second arrived at her house.

The third pulled the gate closed behind her. Swollen fingers were immersed in lime water. (131-2)

In this account, the story seems to be narrated by someone who is not present in the scene, an omniscient narrator, what is more, it is narrated in standard English. However, the narrator chooses

not to reveal names in this excerpt unlike in the rest of the novel where the names are always mentioned, although they know the identity of the characters. One of the hypotheses for this is that the narrator voluntarily leaves out the names because they do not want the focus to be on the perpetrators but rather on their actions. The only piece of information that we have on the assailants' identity is that Monica knows them and they know her, and according to what the narrator says, they hate her. Throughout the excerpt, the pronoun 'them' or 'the first one', 'one of them' are used so that the emphasis is not placed on the identity of the aggressors. We do not know who they are and who is doing what. The anonymity of the aggressors also serves the purpose of putting more stress on the victim's feelings and the heavy atmosphere that reigns. It is said that the atmosphere became cool and quiet, with no sounds to be heard outside and that when the rapists left, there were no stars in the sky, suggesting darkness. The excerpt also mentions that Monica first laughed when she saw the assailants but then her breath stopped, and her cries were the first sound she heard. The only piece of information about the aggressors' feelings is that they left Monica's house with their hearts heavy. The motives behind the aggression are not explicit in this passage. Nonetheless, we have a potential lead near the end of the passage when the narrator writes "Bitch! Whore! Man-stealer!" (132), which leads to believe that jealousy would have led the attackers to rape Monica.

The second account of the rape is on page 217 and is told by Monica herself in Patwah when she decides to name the aggressors and tell the community of women what happened to her:

'Marva was de ring-leader. She de one carry de bowl of peppa. Dey stuff a scarf in me mouth. Den Grace suggest them strap me to de bed, and she hold me hand while Marva and Peggy tie me up. Marva flung open me closet door and pull out me dress dem. She kiss her teeth, den rip dem up. Den Grace and Peggy follow suit, dragging dresses from de closet, pulling out de drawers, dashing me things dem pan de floor and trampling pan dem. Den Marva stumble ova by me dresser and

smell me perfume, den start to dash de powder and perfume everywhere. When dem did spend demself, and me tink dem did done, and was gwane leave me, Peggy come stand ova me tie up pan de bed; she seh, “Dat will teach you fi leave women men alone.” Me want to tell her, dat Trevor is one man she no have to worry bout wid me cause him too wukless, but de scarf was in me mouth. Me smell de peppa on Marva, when she stand right beside me. She look inna me face and laugh. Den she seh wid her hand raised wid de peppa on it, “Mek me blind you, bout you want thief me man.” Her hand was dis close to me face,’ Monica indicated, bringing her hands less than an inch from her face, ‘but same time Grace pull weh her hand, and Marva just smear me face saying, “Ah gwane show you how fi powda you face.” She smear de peppa all ova me face, then push her index finger in me nose. Ah could neva be able to describe de sting, but more was to come. Grace start to beg Marva fi leave me alone, saying, “Ah tink she did learn her lesson; ah tink she will leave Desmond alone now.” But Marva was just warming up. She turn to Grace, buffing and puffing. “Is why mek you so fool-fool, and fraid-fraid, you own shadow? She a sleep wid you lawful husband and you want fi have sympathy pan her.” Grace neva say nothing more, just stand dere and wring she hand. Ah could tell dat Marva was worked up and couldn’t stop. She start to rip me clothes off me, and afta a while Grace and Peggy join her, then she lotioned her hand in the bowl of peppa then push her hand inna me. Me throat lock and me blank out. When me come to dem did gwane and de house dark. Me decide to die, den me remember you, Miss Cotton. Ah figure if ah didn’t die, only you one could cool the fire inside me, so me try nuh fi tink bout de fire eating me up and call pan you. And here me is now.’ (217)

This second account is quite different from the first one. While the first one focused on the assailants’ actions and atmosphere, this second one is more concerned with the identity of the perpetrators, which is logical considering that the community of women encouraged Monica to name the people that assaulted her. The pronouns “they” are now replaced by names, we are aware not only of the identity of the perpetrators (Grace, Marva, and Peggy) but the passage also specifies who does what and the culpability of each in the aggression. Monica reveals that Marva is the one leading the assault thus has more responsibility in the attack, Marva also encourages Grace to keep going when the latter tells her that this is enough. Concerning the motive, the clue we had at the end of the first account is confirmed when Peggy tells Monica that it will teach her to leave

women's men alone, hypothesis once again confirmed by Marva who tells her that she is going to make her blind for trying to steal her husband, Ainsworth. Later when Grace tells Marva to stop assaulting Monica because she thinks Monica has understood her lesson and will leave her husband, Desmond, alone, Marva replies with 'Is why mek you so fool-fool, and fraid-fraid, you own shadow? She a sleep wid you lawful husband and you want fi have sympathy pan her.' (217), which again supports the theory that one of the motives behind the assault is that the women are scared Monica is having an affair with their husbands. The aggressors imply that Monica has brought this upon herself by sleeping or flirting with their husbands. Another new piece of information conveyed in this passage is Monica's thoughts, when Peggy tells her to leave her husband alone, Monica wants to tell her that she does not have anything to worry about but she is unable to defend herself because of the scarf they put in her mouth. We also know more about how Monica experienced the rape, she narrates that when Marva forced her peppered hands into her, she blacked out and when they had left, she decided that she wanted to die. The only thing that made her change her mind was the thought of Miss Cotton who could potentially save her. The fact that Monica thought about Miss Cotton right after the rape and when she was in pain is not that surprising considering what psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman says about rape victims in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992): "In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God" (52). Taken into account the fact that Monica's mother is dead, the only person closer to Monica who acts as a mother figure for her is Miss Cotton. Considering the fact that this account is the second one we have of the rape and the fact that we already know what happened and how Monica felt, we tend to focus more on the new piece of information, i.e. the perpetrators, rather than the victim, while the first account was more focused on Monica.

Beyond the differences between the two stories, there is also a lot of similarities. We learn, for example, that the aggressors first turned Monica's things upside down and then covered her face with hot peppers, tore her clothes and raped her with hot peppers. This form of rape is not 'common', it does not produce any sexual pleasure to the aggressors but causes a lot of suffering to the victim. In *Terror Warfare and the Medicine of Peace* (1998), anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom explains that:

One of the goals of terror warfare is to reproduce the hegemony of violence in the minutia of everyday life. The normal, the innocuous, and the inescapable are infused with associations of lethal harm and control. Perpetrators do this by using common everyday items to produce terror. Kitchen items, household goods, water sources, and tools become weapons of torture and murder. Public spaces are cast as strategic battlegrounds: the maimed and murdered are often left in communal areas. (108)

What is of interest in this excerpt is the use of everyday objects to terrorise and harm. In the case of Monica's rape, it was food, hot peppers, which are quite common in Jamaica, that were used to rape her. This has the effect of traumatising not only the victim, who when she sees hot peppers again will be reminded of the sexual assault, but also the witnesses or people who heard about the rape (Nordstrom 108). There have been instances of rape with hot peppers during the civil war in Bukavu, eastern Congo (Turshen 25, Mukwege and Nangini 2) and, also in Liberia (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia 35). There is no documented evidence of these forms of sexual assaults in Jamaica during colonisation or after but like so many other things, not everything is recorded. It could have happened in Jamaica as well, but I have not found any documentation to support this hypothesis.

Finally, in addition to the fact that Monica's rape is uncommon and particularly brutal because of the use of hot peppers, it is also unusual in that it is perpetrated by women on women. As psychiatrists Turchik, Hebenstreit, and Judson points out "historically, sexual violence has generally been viewed as a form of aggression perpetrated by men against women" (133). Because of this, same-gender sexual violence and women to men sexual violence are not well documented (Turchik et al 134). However, as Turchik, Hebenstreit, and Judson indicate in their examination of gender inclusiveness of theories of sexual violence, violence theories focusing on male perpetrators can often be adapted to accommodate same-gender sexual violence (141).

### ***Before the trauma***

Now that the identity of the aggressors and one potential motive for the rape are known, this section will analyse how people get to a point where violence seems to be the only solution to their problems, i.e. what happened before the rape. In this particular case, we have to look at each character's background and see what has personally driven them to act the way they did but also see if Monica has indeed brought this upon herself, as it is suggested by Marva and Peggy in the rape scene. In Monica's account of the rape, she claims that Marva was the leader, the one that took the initiative to rape her. It can then be assumed that Marva is the one that had more reasons to attack Monica or at least that she was the most violent of the group. If we look at Marva's background, her childhood, and other factors in her life we can potentially find clues as to why she was so violent. Some elements of response can indeed be found in Marva's life and childhood. In the chapter entitled "Su-su", the narrator describes Marva as an unhappy woman whose misfortune nobody knows the reason for:

No one was able to discern why Marva was so unhappy. Maybe because her family was so poor. But whose family wasn't poor? Marva was stamped by poverty. Her hair a dull red. That dirty red from lack of protein. Her parents had fifteen of them, she was the twelfth. Food was scarce. Patience was nonexistent. Love was all used up. (60)

This passage gives an insight into Marva's childhood and family, we are told that she comes from a very poor family and that could be the reason for her unhappiness. The passage also indicates that Marva's hair has turned red due to a protein deficiency which is a possible indicator that she suffers from Kwashiorkor, a pathology that causes discolouration of the hair but also "dry skin and skin rash, potbelly and edema, weakness, nervous irritability, anemia, digestive disturbances such as diarrhoea, and fatty infiltration of the liver" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). Another description of Marva as having blotchy, discoloured skin, and being big like a bullfrog (60) are other indicators supporting this hypothesis. It is also said that the family context in which she grew up was not the happiest. She comes from a big family where there was no longer room for patience or love, implying that the family home was filled with anything but happiness. Living in Kristoff Village adds to her unhappiness as we learn Marva does not like Kristoff and always wanted to live in Montego Bay (60). On top of that, Marva was mocked as a young girl because of her red hair:

She remembered the other morning when she was passing by Monica's yard and heard her singing at the top of her voice, 'Cordelia Brown wha mek you head so red?' Marva believed Monica was teasing her. The song made her remember her school days when the children had teased her about her hair, changing the name in the folk song to sing, 'Marva Hendricks, wha mek you head so red? You is-down inna de sun-shine wid nutten pan you head. Is dat mek you head so red?' Then they would laugh, and run away, leaving her crying. (128)

These mockeries as well as her appearance due to the disease and pregnancy lead Marva to feel uncomfortable in her own skin and even hate herself, as the narrator informs us on page 127.



Moreover, it can be observed that she represses the pain and sadness she experienced as a child on Monica, whom she is convinced she heard singing the song the children used to tease her with. The fact that her husband Ainsworth is disgusted by her and makes her feel small by showing her that their children read better than she does not improve things at all (128). Marva's unhappiness only gets worse when she is mocked again as an adult:

She was “country”, with little formal education. She didn't complete third class, but often attempted to copy Peggy standard speech. Except, as with most things, Marwa didn't have the flair or knack that it took to pass off imitating. Behind her back people laughed at what they termed her ‘speaky-spokey’ voice: she transposed the vowels and consonants, sounding ludicrous. (59-60)

It is quite obvious here that Marva has a complex about the fact that she was not fortunate enough to receive an education like Peggy's, for instance. Therefore, she uses techniques to make people believe that she received the same education as Peggy by imitating her way of speaking. Unfortunately, although Marva probably does this to avoid being made fun of, it has the opposite effect since she exaggerates her pronunciation and gets laughed at.

Although Marva's problems do not seem to have much to do with Monica, Marva is convinced that Monica is the reason for all her problems with Ainsworth. She claims that she keeps a list of the injuries Monica has allegedly inflicted on her (128), albeit we have no proof of this apart from the song and Monica and Ainsworth's friendship. Some theories about violence can help us understand why Marva redirected her discomfort and anger onto Monica and encouraged her to rape Monica. One such theory is Frantz Fanon's chapter entitled “Concerning Violence” in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon puts violence in the context of decolonisation and connects it to the colonial past. The process of decolonisation, he says, “is always a violent phenomenon” (35) for the colonisation process set the example for it.

Colonialism “is violence in its natural state” and for that precise reason, can only be overturned by greater violence (Fanon 61). It is through their experience of violence and their exposure to it in the colony that the natives turn violent and that idea is reinforced by Fanon who writes that aggressiveness has been “deposited in [the] bones” of the natives (by the colonisers) (Fanon 52). The natives resort to violence when they notice it is their only way of communicating with the colonisers. Fanon’s theory posits that people learn violence as a response to violence or as a way of defending themselves. Thus, if one treats someone with violence, you can only expect them to respond with violence:

The existence of an armed struggle shows that the people are decided to trust to violent methods only. He of whom they have never stopped saying that the only language he understands is that of force, decides to give utterance by force. In fact, as always, the settler has shown him the way he should take if he is to become free. The argument the native chooses has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force. (Fanon 83-4)

As Fanon puts it so well, if you treat someone violently because you think they only understand the use of force, you should not be surprised if the person meets your expectations and reacts violently. In short, Fanon's theory proposes that violence is not acquired from birth but learned through exposure to violence. If this hypothesis is followed, a peaceful person could become violent if the conditions were met, i.e., exposed to or treated with violence. Obviously, in this case, that is, within the framework of *It Begins With Tears*, we are in a postcolonial context although we do not know exactly when the story takes place as author Akilah Monifa remarks: “[t]here is no mention of dates in this work but some folks do have electricity, cars, indoor plumbing and telephones. But the concept of time does not have the same importance in Jamaica as it does in the

United States, so it is fitting that we do not know exactly what era we are dealing with". Even though the story does not take place during colonial times, the reasoning of Fanon's theory can still be applied to Marva. On closer inspection, the violent and unhappy episodes took turns in Marva's life, starting with her childhood of poverty and famine and an unhappy family environment. Mockery followed, first about her hair reddened by malnutrition, then as an adult about her lack of education and exaggerated way of speaking. Marva cannot stand herself physically and knows that she repulses her husband. She develops a form of inferiority complex in relation to her friend Peggy, a neighbour from a well-off family, whose way of speaking she imitates in order to appear more educated. Although she has several children with Ainsworth, their relationship is not a happy one. Ainsworth is the only one in the village to have gone to university and he likes to show Marva that their children already know how to read better than she does. The ultimate humiliation comes when Ainsworth befriends Monica and reads to her (128). Monica then becomes the perfect scapegoat for Marva's problems. If Fanon's theory is applied to Marva's case, all the conditions to 'breed' violence are met. It is undeniable that given the importance of violence in Marva's life, she was not affected by it, especially because the narrator does not say everything. It is known that Marva has been affected by extreme poverty, which is probably one of the cruellest forms of violence, and by mockery but we do not know exactly what family life was like for her as a child. We are told that there was no longer room for patience or love in her family growing up, but it is not known what exactly it means. What the narrator does not say is just as important as what they do say, and this missing piece of information can be interpreted in many different ways. A family context devoid of love and patience can imply family violence. Judith Lewis Herman has dedicated a chapter on child abuse in her book, and in this chapter, she states that "[l]ike abused adults, abused children are often rageful and sometimes aggressive. They often lack verbal and social skills for resolving conflicts, and they approach problems with the expectations of hostile attack" (104).

Considering that Marva was indeed a victim of violence as a child, whether in her family and/or at school, this would explain why Marva does indeed find it difficult to deal with her problems in a democratic way and is quick to resort to violence. The most striking example is of course Monica, when Marva has problems with Monica, instead of talking to her or to her husband, Ainsworth, and solving the problem, she brutally attacks Monica. However, Monica is not the only innocent person that Marva attacks, she also unleashes her anger on the helpers, as the following passage shows:

Were it not that his father still grew and supplied them with much of their food, he would not have been able to indulge Marva's determination to compete with Peggy. He wished Marva had worked as hard at keeping a helper. They had had three this year already, and the year was not even three-quarters over. Marva, although she had grown up very poor, or perhaps because of it, was brusque and insensitive to the young girls she employed to help with domestic chores. She was often rude, and was very critical of all their actions, sometimes even accusing them to their faces of stealing or planning to steal from her and threatening them with terrible reprisals. (164-165)

In this passage, the competition between Marva and Peggy is mentioned once more, Marva wanting at all costs to rise to the 'rank' of her friend. Moreover, we learn that Marva mistreats the young girls she hires for household chores and, interestingly, the narrator says that it is perhaps because she grew up in poverty that she is like this, implying that growing up in poverty has made her violent. Moreover, Herman comments that another common observation in abused children is the displacement of the feeling of anger on the wrong person (not the person responsible for the abuse) (104) and in adulthood, a tendency to be re-victimized or to redirect that violence against themselves "because of their deeply inculcated self-loathing" (Herman 113). Finally, Herman notes that a minority of survivors of child abuse do become violent even if the majority of them do not (113). Taking into consideration Herman's observations, it can be noted that Marva has many

symptoms that could be associated with child abuse. It is obvious that all of Marva's problems do not come from Monica, yet it is on Monica that she is redirecting all her anger. In fact, Monica is the only person Marva can hold her anger over since she is the only person she can physically attack. Marva has accumulated over the years unhappiness and anger that she has not been able to externalise or channel. As a child she did not have the strength to face her detractors, she suffered from starvation and lack of education without ever being able to direct this anger against anyone until Monica came along. By befriending Ainsworth who reads to her and singing Cordelia Brown's song, Monica brings out all of Marva's buried anger, except that this time Marva has a person to blame it all on. Marva is revictimised as an adult because of her way of speaking but also because of her reading difficulties that her husband points out to her. Moreover, as Herman also points out, many will tend to redirect their anger at themselves as Marva does by hating herself but also by consuming abnormally high amounts of hot peppers, as her husband Ainsworth comments at different moments in the novel (130).

As previously mentioned, for Marva, Monica was a scapegoat for the violence and anger she had accumulated over the course of her life. Her husband Ainsworth's friendship with Monica was the trigger for Marva to attack Monica but Marva did not act alone, Peggy and Grace were with her. Peggy is probably one of the three we have the least information about, and she is also the most complex. While it was relatively 'easy' to understand why Marva developed a violent behaviour, considering her unfortunate past, it is much harder to explain why Peggy is so resentful of Monica. We are told on page 59 and 60 that Peggy comes from a very wealthy family, that she and Trevor are the most prosperous in the village and have the only brick house in Kristoff. We also learn that Peggy is "tight and mean-spirited. Grudged bread out of a baby's mouth. Everyone always had more than she, and to hear her talk they didn't work for or deserve it." (59) and that she spends her time marking people passing by (59). Peggy does not seem to be missing anything, yet

she seems to be jealous of everyone. She criticises anyone who walks by her house, but also those who have more than she does. We are told that when she meets Angel with Beryl, she immediately wants to befriend her “especially since she was from America” (82) and always calls her “Miss American Lady” which Angel resents. When Monica returns to Kristoff village, Peggy is anxious and quick to tell everyone that Monica never came to her father's funeral five years ago and closely supervises Monica's arrival:

Even without her glasses, Peggy could see that Monica looked good. She touched her own body after Monica had walked off in the direction of Miss Cotton's shop, then she went into her bedroom, found the glasses at last on her dresser, put them on and looked at herself in the full-length mirror on the closet door. Monica was at least ten years Peggy's senior, if not more, but she looked good. Speak the truth and shame the devil.

Peggy was deeply disturbed. She had two boys, and had been thinking about a third child lately. Monica didn't have any children. Her body hadn't gone through any wear and tear. She was barren. All she did was fuck men, other women's men. Bitch. Whore. Curse her womb and her pussy [...] She had a bone to pick, but she would wait her time.” (62-63)

Peggy is very self-conscious towards Monica; she observes her attentively and then goes to her room to compare herself to Monica in front of the mirror. Jealous, she then proceeds to insult Monica saying she only has sex with other women's men, taking as an excuse for her beauty the fact that she has never had children, and cursing her reproductive organs. Interestingly, she says at the end of the passage that she has a score to settle with Monica, although we do not know what she is talking about. Peggy is very concerned about her appearance, she likes to put on gold jewellery whenever she goes out to show people that she is richer than them, which is just a front. It is obvious that Peggy has self-confidence problems and low self-esteem, which is why she constantly feels obliged to criticise others and compare herself to them, she is filled with nastiness

whose origin is unknown. However, the narrator mentions that there are rumours that Monica has slept with Trevor (Peggy's husband), but there is no evidence of this and Monica herself says when she tells the story of her rape that she wanted to tell Peggy that she did not have to worry about Trevor because nothing was going on between them. Another time, after Monica's rape, we find out that Peggy is concerned about Trevor having an affair:

Peggy had been heard complaining to Marva about Trevor, who was a notorious womaniser. 'Ah fed up of Trevor slackness. Him think me is fool,' Peggy shouted, ripping several of Trevor's shirts off the clothes-line and trampling them in the ground. 'Is why him always have fi go all the way Kingston to find parts for de vehicles. Him must tink me is damn fool. Ah know he has some woman somewhere, and if he doesn't watch himself...' At this point her ranting turned to sobs that racked her body. She covered her hands and cried, 'I go tell Daddy to cut him off. Him park me in this back-o-wall village while he runs around.' (192-193)

Although this scene is happening after Monica's rape, it could suggest that Peggy already had doubts that Trevor was seeing someone before they attacked Monica. Considering how little confidence Peggy actually has, although she will not admit it, she might have been scared that Trevor was having an affair with Monica. She goes on to tell Grace that she is stupid to send food to Monica and Desmond because if it was her husband, she would have poisoned the food so that they would have died (129). Other than jealousy and low self-esteem, Peggy has no real reason to attack Monica. Unlike Marva, she grew up in a well-off family, although it is not known whether she was happy there or not, nor is it known whether she was physically or verbally abused but nothing seems to indicate such thing.

Grace is the last person to have taken part in Monica's sexual assault and probably the one Monica was the most suspicious of since Grace knew about her affair with her husband, Desmond. Nonetheless, even though Grace is the one who has a grudge against Monica, she is the one who is

least keen on assaulting Monica. During the rape, she is the only one trying to stop the others, even if she ends up getting talked into it by the other two. The first description of Grace can help understand her better:

Grace was afraid of lizards, afraid of rolling- calf, afraid of not being liked, afraid that some woman was about to steal her husband, afraid of ageing. In general she was afraid of most things. Her mother had tried to help her to overcome her fears. One night, when Grace was a girl of about nine, her mother locked her outside and told her that a rolling-calf was probably roaming about since it was full moon and that the croaking lizards were also watching her, so she should act bold to scare them away. Grace screamed and clutched at her mother's clothes; but her mother closed the door on her. Fifteen minutes later, when her screams could no longer be heard, Grace's mother opened the door. She nearly bit her tongue off when she saw the child lying curled up on the ground, foaming at the mouth. Grace was never locked outside again, but her fears increased, often sending her off for days, immobilised and foaming. (61)

As is evident here, Grace is a very fearful person. When she was a child, her mother wanted to help her by exposing her to her fears so that she would be more courageous, but this had the opposite effect and only increased Grace's fears. We have already seen in the case of Marva, the effect that child abuse has on people, abused children grow up to be adults that tend to be more aggressive and lack means to resolve conflicts and therefore make use of violence (Herman 104). And even if the majority of abused children do not become violent, some of them do become perpetrators (Herman 113). When Grace learns that Monica is having an affair with her husband, Desmond, she initially does not react and send food over to Monica's house to show them that she knows (106). She does not try to talk to Monica or to Desmond and instead goes to Monica's house when she is alone to assault her, with the help of her friends. However, during the assault, Grace gets cold feet and asks Peggy and Marva to stop attacking Monica, but after getting talked into it, she keeps on assaulting and raping Monica. These changes in attitudes about violence are quite common among



adults who have been abused as children, as pointed out by Judith Lewis Herman “[s]urvivors oscillate between uncontrolled expressions of rage and intolerance of aggression in any form.” (56). Monica is not the only victim of Grace's anger outbursts, but the impact of Grace's trauma will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four. Furthermore, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon defends the fact that the natives become aggressive because the settlers have taught them violence (52) but he also postulates that:

The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up, and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing waves of crime in North Africa. (52)

What Fanon is saying here is that although the daily violence was instilled by the settlers, the 'natives' tend to redirect this anger not on those responsible for it but on their peers. This is similar to Marva who cannot express her anger about the poverty and famine in which she grew up against a physical person so redirects it on her helpers and Monica. Opal Palmer Adisa has already used such an example in one of her short stories entitled 'Brethren' from the short story collection *Until Judgement Comes* (2007), in which sugar cane-cutters argue with each other out of frustration:

But one day a fight began in the field between Nicey and another woman about who had cut the largest heap of cane. Soon they were tearing at each other's clothes. When the other woman saw that Nicey was getting the better of her, she ran for her machete, hoisted it and slashed away Nicey's arm at the shoulder. [...] It was then that Sampson quietly began organizing the cane-cutters, urging them to redirect their anger and channel their energies for their own benefit. [...] But why turn their anger on each other? [...] “Why we mus always cut-up one anoder over nutten?” (29-30)

Instead of getting angry at the owner of the sugar cane field who exploits them, the sugar cane workers compete against each other to see who can harvest the most sugar canes. When they disagree on who has harvested the most sugar canes, they fight each other and it ends with one worker cutting off the arm of another. One of their colleagues then asks why they always have to cut each other for no reason, especially since they are on the same side, the enemy being the sugar cane field owner. It is also true of *It Begins With Tears*, Marva, Grace, and Peggy rape Monica all because they suspect Monica's having an affair with their husbands and that she is the one responsible for their unhappiness and anger. Just like the sugar cane workers cannot get angry at the sugar cane field owner and thus redirect this anger against each other, Grace, Marva and Peggy redirect their anger on Monica.

In order to better understand what drives one person to rape another, three theories that lend themselves to this case will be used, namely psychologists Hall and Hirschman's quadripartite model (1991), psychologists Knight and Prentky's taxonomic models of sexual offenders (1990) and sociologists Felson and Cohen's routine activity theory (1980). Hall and Hirschman in *Toward a Theory of Sexual Aggression: A Quadripartite Model*, diagnose four different factors/subtypes that are responsible for an increase in perpetrating violence, those factors are "inappropriate physiological sexual arousal, distorted cognition, affective dyscontrol, and problematic personality factors" (Turchik et al 139). The four factors do not necessarily need to be present together although the more factors present, the more likely it is that sexual assault will occur except if one factor in particular or more is more important than the others (Hall and Hirschman 667). In their quadripartite model, Hall and Hirschman partly base their problematic personality factors on the results found by Bard, Carter, Cerce, Knight, Rosenberg, and Schneider in their study on rapists and child molesters:

A majority of sex offenders (56%) were found to have been physically abused (nonsexually) as children and almost the same number (49%) were neglected (failure to provide for the child's basic needs) by their families. Almost one out of six offenders were victims of some sort of family sexual deviation (i.e., sodomy, incest, child pornography), and one-quarter of the sample came from families where either promiscuity or unusual sexual practices occurred.

Sex offenders tended to be raised by large families. The average number of siblings in these families (including the offender) exceeded five, substantially more than the general population. One-quarter (24%) of the sample were foster children, and only 5% were adopted children. (213)

In the results of the study, several elements can relate to Monica's abusers. For instance, the fact that sex offenders usually come from large families, which is the case for Marva who is the twelfth of fifteen children (60). It can also be considered that she has been neglected as a child since due to the size of the family, they could not provide for her; this is reflected in the fact that she suffers from an extreme lack of protein which has discoloured her hair. Another factor discovered through the study is having been non-sexually abused as a child. This criterion can apply not only to Grace who was traumatised by her mother as a child but also potentially to Marva, who as we saw earlier did not have a happy childhood and could have been abused as well. Hall and Hirschman's fourth subtype has as its main factor a "developmentally related personality problem or disorder" (Hall and Hirschman 666). The main characteristics in this subtype are "chronic problems [...] including intellectual impairment, family conflicts, childhood physical or sexual victimization, juvenile delinquency, emotional difficulties, poor social skills, and poor adult adjustment" (Hall and Hirschman 666). It is precisely this subtype that is of interest here because it applies to both Marva and Grace, both have a probable history of child abuse, both have problems in their families and more particularly with their husbands. It could also be said that Grace has emotional difficulties, she is incredibly afraid of everything and still has to deal today with the consequences of her childhood trauma. As Turchik, Judson Dracar and Hebenstreit note, Hall and Hirschman's

quadripartite model assumes that the perpetrator is male but “the described developmental experiences which are likely to lead to future offense can be found in both male and female adolescents, and, thus, could lead a person of either gender down the path of potential sexual offense” (140), as is evidenced by the experiences lived by Marva and Grace during their childhood.

Knight and Prentky in their classification of sexual offenders identify four main different types of sexual offenders, which can then be divided into subtypes: the Opportunistic, the Pervasively Angry, the Sexual, and the Vindictive (43). The categories that are relevant for this case are the Pervasively Angry, and the Vindictive. The Pervasively Angry type is described by Knight and Prentky as having as his first motivation “undifferentiated anger” (44):

their aggression is gratuitous and occurs in the absence of victim resistance, but it might also be exacerbated by such resistance. They often inflict serious physical injury on their victims, up to and including death. Although they sexually assault their female victims, the rage does not appear to be sexualized, and there is no evidence that their assaults are driven by preexisting fantasies. Moreover, their anger is also not limited to women. It is directed toward men with equal vehemence. An extreme problem controlling aggression is only one area in which this type of offender manifests impulsivity difficulties. From childhood and adolescence through adulthood these rapists' histories are marked with difficulties controlling their impulses in many domains of their adaptation. (44)

Once again, there are several elements here that can be related to Monica's rape. The motivation of the rapists (Grace, Peggy, and Marva) is not sexual in origin, it is not a fantasy or a desire, the rape is motivated by repressed anger. In terms of violence/aggressiveness, the rape is particularly brutal since the attackers use hot peppers to rape Monica, it cannot give them any sexual pleasure, it only gives them satisfaction because of the cruelty of the act. This amount of violence/cruelty is not necessary to immobilise Monica since she is already strapped to the bed and they are three against

one, the goal is simply to make her suffer all the more. In the passage above, it is explained that this type of violence is not limited to people of the opposite sex but also to people of the same sex, their goal is not the sexual pleasure they can get from the victim but the pain they can cause them. Moreover, this type of sexual abuser has had difficulties during adolescence and adulthood, difficulties controlling their impulses; this is the case for Marva who has outbursts of anger towards her helpers but also for Grace who beats her children (56). Marva, Grace, and Peggy can thus be categorised as sexual offenders whose primary motivation is anger, but they can also act out of vengeance, as does the fourth type described by Knight and Prentky, the Vindictive sexual abuser. This type of abuser is supposedly angry at all women and their behaviour is “physically harming and appear to be intended to degrade and humiliate their victims. The rage evident in these assaults run the gamut from verbal abuse to brutal murder. Yet, unlike the Pervasively Angry types, they show little or no evidence of undifferentiated anger (e.g., instigating fights with or assaulting men)” (Knight and Prentky 45). Although Monica's rapists do not seem to be angry at all women – even though it could be argued otherwise since Peggy is critical of all women and Marva and Grace are afraid of having their husbands stolen by any woman – they do have certain characteristics that are specific to the Vindictive type. One of their primary motivations, aside from anger, is to humiliate and degrade Monica. As explained above, they have no personal interest in Monica's rape, they do not do it out of sexual motivations but in order to castigate Monica for seeing with their husbands. In terms of undifferentiated anger, this could apply to Peggy who, although she is openly critical of everyone, does not really have outbursts of anger, unlike Marva and Grace.

The last violence theory that could be applied to Monica's rape is Felson and Cohen's routine activity theory (1980). In their theory, Felson and Cohen explain that in order for “*direct-contact predatory violations*” (389) to happen, the following conditions must be met “at a minimum

an *offender* with both criminal inclinations, and the ability to carry out those inclinations, a person or object providing a *suitable target* for the offender, and the *absence of capable guardians* capable of preventing the violation (392). A suitable target is defined by their value whether that is “prejudice, grievance, challenge, or sexual features”, vulnerability, (strong or not) and their visibility (Felson and Cohen 393). In the case of Monica’s rape, the last two conditions are met while the first one is partly met. Indeed, the second condition (a suitable target) is fulfilled since Grace, Marva, and Peggy each have a reason to attack Monica. These reasons are not necessarily rational but they make Monica a suitable target on which to express their anger: Grace knows that her husband Desmond is cheating on her with Monica while Marva and Peggy think that Monica is having an affair with their husbands or at least intends to have one. The third condition (the absence of capable guardians) is also met, Monica is alone at home sleeping when Marva, Peggy, and Grace break in to assault her. With regard to the first condition (an offender with criminal inclinations and the ability to carry them out), it can be argued that this is certainly the case since the rape was indeed committed. Furthermore, as already mentioned, both Marva and Grace have a predisposition to violence because of their own backgrounds. In the case of Monica's rape, all three conditions of Felson and Cohen’s routine activity theory were therefore met for the rape to take place.

Now that the motives of the rapist have been analysed, it will be examined whether Monica has put herself in danger. First of all, it is important to remember that this is purely theoretical and that the following analysis is not intended to blame any rape victim for her sexual assault. As it has been done with the other characters, we will first take a look at what we know about Monica. One of the first few things that we know is that Monica came back to Kristoff Village after thirty years of absence “tired of the city, the ready action and the lustful disturbance she caused no matter how casual or indifferent she behaved” (25) and wishing to settle for a more peaceful life. Monica left

when she was fourteen to go to Kingston, where she was spotted by a pimp who offered her to work for him:

It was this mixture of innocence and sexuality that caught the pimp's eye as he hopped off the bus. A notorious womaniser with seven or more children from five different women, the pimp had a sharp eye always alert for fresh prey. He particularly liked them young, like 'to bruk dem in', as he joked with his men friends. He spotted Monica right away. [...] He decided finally that she was a runaway, probably from the country. She would be easy. [...] He got straight to the point.

'Ah see you is a woman. Dat's why you run from home.'

'Is wha you want wid me?'

'Dat depends on how much of a woman you really is.'

'What you offering?' (104-105)

This scene is reminiscent of what Mimi Sheller notes in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*:

The allure of travel was often expressed through the sexualisation of Caribbean bodies, particularly those of children. While seemingly innocent, when placed alongside accounts of child prostitution in the Caribbean the image may be read in a more disturbing way, as is true of contemporary imagery of Caribbean children used in promoting tourism destinations. (161)

Monica is just a child when she is discovered by the pimp who understands that she is easy prey, he sets his sights on her and recruits her into prostitution. As Reni Eddo-Lodge points out in *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, "[e]very woman who has ever been a teenage girl could tell you a tale about an encounter with a predatory man, men who smell youth and vulnerability, and seek only to dominate" (98-99). Eddo-Lodge is here talking about the situation in the United Kingdom, but this is something rather universal that can be applied to any woman anywhere. This is exactly what happens with Monica, who is young and vulnerable and dreams of

a different life than the one she has in Kristoff Village where she is not allowed to do anything. Monica remains in prostitution until her return to Kristoff thirty years later. Christine Barrow explains that women in the Caribbean suffer from a double standard that allows men to run freely and have sex with as many women as they want while women are shamed for it and must conform to the ideals of “modesty, monogamy, marriage and motherhood” (42-54). Since she does not correspond nor comply with these requirements, Monica is criticised by the other women and considered a threat when she comes back to Kristoff; they insult her and judge her for not having children. Prostitution and sex-related activities confront the traditional ideas of a respectable woman (Robinson 9, Barrow 52). As Barrow explains “The model virgin girl is tainted and disrupted by her ‘bashment’ sister; the respectable mother by the ‘graveyard’ who has ‘killed’ her unborn child; the virtuous wife by the ‘outside’ woman, the ‘prostitute’ and the lesbian” (64). Monica is blamed by her mother and other women because she has a liberated sexuality and does as she pleases with her body; she makes her own rules (127). Monica’s mother also asks her if she thinks she is a man in order to behave like this (have sex with other women’s men) (126-127), this shows again the double standard that exists. Opal Palmer Adisa has said in an interview with Elisa Serna Martínez how she admires market women in the Caribbean:

Market women for me totally defied all of the normality of what a woman was, all of the sensibilities of what a woman was. They set their own paradigm of what a woman was, and it was the antithesis of anything that the society was saying we were. So for me they were feminists. Men in Jamaica, when I was growing up, and it still exists today, they always had an outside family. So it's a man who was married to a middle-class woman, like my father, but he had children outside, and it's called outside family, very common in the Caribbean. (Serna Martínez 218)



Those market women that Opal Palmer Adisa describes have a lot in common with her character in *It Begins With Tears*, Monica. Like these market women, Monica does not hesitate to live her life as she pleases, even if it means having sex with various men and even sleeping with someone else's husband. In this regard, she too defies the norms imposed on women. In addition to this, Adisa explains that market women are economically independent, which means that they do not have to depend on a man and can therefore freely go out with the men they want (Serna Martínez 218). It is an additional feature that Monica shares with these market women. It is also true that although some of the men in the novel, such as Desmond, sleep with women other than their wives, they are not blamed for it. Besides, they are not the ones being punished for their alleged affair with Monica, Monica is. Moreover, Herman has discussed in her book how behaviour sometimes puts a person at greater risk of being raped:

A woman is especially vulnerable to rape when acting as though she were free - that is, when she is not observing conventional restrictions on dress, physical mobility, and social initiative. Women who act as though they were free are often described as 'loose', meaning not only 'unbound' but also sexually provocative. (64)

Unfortunately, Monica meets all those conditions. As a former prostitute, but also as a free woman, who likes to show that she has a beautiful body, she puts herself in greater danger of being raped. Perhaps, these observations may be more applicable to a rape perpetrated by a man, but it may also be valid in the case of a rape perpetrated by a woman who could precisely be jealous of Monica, as is the case of Marva, Grace, and Peggy. It is also quite disturbing that several people in the novel had warned Monica before the rape happened, telling her to be careful as if they implied that it was her fault, such as Miss Cotton:

Miss Cotton summoned Monica and warned her about impropriety and flaunting what she had, but Monica merely laughed and asked what was the harm in enjoying life. [...] Sometimes seeing was too much of a burden. Sometimes feeling was too much pain. Miss Cotton sat and waited, hoping she wouldn't have to wade in the river, but sensing she couldn't avoid the tears that would be spilled. (102)

Monica's mother also appears to her as a ghost to warn her to stop chasing other women's men. Once more, while no one gets angry at or warns men about their behaviour, Monica is the one held responsible for her affair with Desmond and practically for her rape.

### *After the trauma*

Judith Lewis Herman writes that after a traumatic event has happened, "[t]he fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (3). In the case of Monica's rape, establishing safety goes through the small community of women of Kristoff Village coming together to help get her better. Miss Cotton and Beryl are the first ones to discover Monica after the rape, they then proceed to call the other women to come and help. Together, the women try to calm the fire inside Monica by bathing her, spoon-feeding her, and being there for her. All the women ache in solidarity: "[t]he crime was too violent for words. The lips of their vaginas throbbed in sympathy, their wombs ached, and their salty tears left stain marks on their faces" (136). Once safety has been established, comes the moment to reconstruct the trauma. In *It Begins With Tears*, in order to do that, the women all go to the river to heal Monica and Althea. There, Monica and the rest of the women are encouraged to undress and find their place in the river. Then, after the ceremony, women ask Monica to name those who raped her:

They formed a circle and Dahlia and Velma raised the song, ‘Dere is a meeting here today, come along now...’ Olive and Valerie pulled Monica to the centre of the circle and immediately all the women splashed water on her. [...] ‘Call dem out. Name dose who peppa you. Name dem; dem not you sistas.’ [...] With a forceful, downward sweep, [Velma and Dahlia] pulled off the burden Monica had been hauling around; they rinsed their hands before doing the same thing to Monica’s right shoulder. [...] ‘Ah gwane name dem. Mamma came to me afta Miss Madge funeral and say she forgive me. Ah gwane call dem out for Althea say she no hate me. Ah name dem for ah forgive myself.’ (215-216)

After this scene, Monica proceeds to tell the story of her rape, which we have seen already at the beginning of this chapter. What is particularly important in this scene is that Monica declares that she feels able to name her rapists because she forgives herself. Herman states that rape victims “often castigate themselves bitterly, either for placing themselves at risk or for resisting ineffectively” (68), she goes on to explain that “[t]he survivor cannot come to a fair assessment of her own conduct until she clearly understands that no action on her part in any way absolves the rapist of responsibility for his crime” (68). It is therefore of paramount importance for Monica's healing that she acknowledges that she is not responsible for her rape. Finally, the third stage of recovery according to Herman is the reconnection with the rest of the community. In *It Begins With Tears*, this stage has already started during the first stage of the recovery since Kristoff is such a small village and all the women close, or not that close, to Monica come to her house directly after the rape to look after her, watch over her and then all head to the river to heal Monica and hear what she has to say. Thus, the reconnection with the community has already started before the third stage but what concludes this final stage is the new bond that is created between Althea and Monica. Not only does Monica learn that Althea does not blame her for what has happened, but Althea also expresses her wish to live with Monica. Monica, for her part, promises Althea that she will look after her and help her raise her future child. Herman argues that:

The patient's own capacity to feel compassion for animals or children, even at a distance, may be the fragile beginning of compassion for herself. The reward of mourning is realized as the survivor sheds her evil, stigmatized identity and dares to hope for new relationships in which she no longer has anything to hide. (194)

Monica finds in Althea a daughter, she who had never wished to have children before, and she is not afraid to reveal to Althea that she used to be a prostitute, “‘Is true wa de rumour seh. Me was a whore. Plenty man pay fi sleep wid me.” (203), something she has never clearly told anyone else in the novel. It is particularly important for a victim of trauma to be well surrounded since recovery “cannot occur in isolation” (Herman 133). Solidarity and a strong group around the victim allow her to feel protected, surrounded and help her recover (Herman 214), Herman stresses the importance of relationships and community in the healing process: “[t]rauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity” (214). The closely-knit group around Monica, this community of women, plays a big role in Monica's healing. All of them feel concerned about what happened to Monica and together, they contribute to Monica's physical and psychological recovery.

However, despite all the women in the community coming together to support Monica, the rape leaves its mark not only on Monica but also on the community. We have already discussed the terror that causes the use of everyday items to injure people (Nordstrom 108) but not the effect that it has on the community. Nordstrom explains that once a common item has been used to create violence, these items become associated with violence: “When a kitchen knife is used to mutilate a family member, or a post office becomes the site of a massacre, kitchen knives and post offices become attached to the production of violence in ways that last far beyond the conclusion of the

war” (108). In Monica's case, it is a very common food in Jamaica, hot pepper, which is used in Monica's sexual assault. The mere smell or sight of a hot pepper becomes unbearable for the inhabitants of Kristoff Village. When Rupert eats a bag of shrimps with hot pepper, Angel feels sick and Beryl throws the bag of shrimp on the ground saying, “Ah don’t want to smell, see or taste nuh peppa for a long while!” (173). The whole community is impacted by what happened to Monica and some are taking advantage of it to make of Monica's rape a warning, a lesson to be learned:

Everywhere the smell of pepper permeated, wafting on the air. Women walked with their legs pressed closely together, distrustful, contrite, feeling wronged. Wickedness had taken hands and feet. [...] Wickedness was a woman, could be any woman wronged or believing she was wronged, any woman who separated herself from her clan, any woman who forgot that she wasn’t invincible, any woman who didn’t know that if you spit in the sky it was bound to fall on you. [...] The older women hoped that the young, hot ones, with new ideas and romantic notions, with possessive ways and individual agendas, would see Grace and learn forgiveness. They also prayed that the young women would mark Monica’s flamboyant actions and learn discretion. (160-161)

What is a little disturbing in this excerpt is that the old women hope that the young and pretty women will remember what happened to Monica and not make the same mistakes again. They also seem in part to be condoning what Grace did by saying that any woman that thought she had been wronged could turn violent. She-Devil is heard saying something similar to Monica when Monica comes to Eternal Valley “Wha dem do to you is worse dan crime but don’t give up. The fire will burn itself out. But ah done blame dem. Me have husband too, and some woman can be desperate” (144). Once more, She-Devil seems to imply that it is not Grace’s fault and that she does not blame the rapists anymore. Finally, Miss Cotton, too, suggests that Monica has brought this upon herself: “Ah did warn her. Ah say, ‘Monica, Grace might be foolish and fraid her own shadow, but she is woman too, and even de mildest woman can be prompted to sting or bite or kill.’” (158). What is

a bit of a shame in this story is that the villagers only half condemn Monica's rape. When the old ladies talk about the lessons learned, they talk about hoping that the young women will learn to forgive Grace and be more careful than Monica, but they do not wish for them to not repeat what Grace, Marva, and Peggy did, which is the most serious crime here.

Nevertheless, there are also consequences for Grace, Peggy, and Marva after the rape. Grace is the first one to suffer the consequences of the trauma she inflicted on Monica. While Desmond is at Monica's house with Miss Cotton to care for Monica, his son, Peter, comes to warn him that his wife, Grace, is killing their daughter, Althea:

Grace was on top of a bleeding Althea beating her alternately with a thorn stick and one of Desmond's leather belts and cursing her at the top of her voice. All Desmond could make out was, 'Is you father and him whore's fault.' [...] Only a firm blow to the side of [Grace's] face caused her to let go of [Desmond's] leg, but she took with her a piece of his flesh. She began to scream and tore at her hair, shrieking, 'Peppa! Peppa! Peppa!' (159)

In this scene, the displacement of anger can be observed once again. Grace is not really angry at Althea, but she takes her anger out on her because she is frustrated that Desmond is having an affair with Monica. Opal Palmer Adisa in her interview with Elisa Serna Martínez, says about her short story collection *Until Judgement Comes* something that could be applied to *It Begins With Tears* too:

It's looking at those mothers who I see in the Caribbean, and who I see everywhere, as it's not just in the Caribbean obviously. Mothers whose boyfriends or husbands have left them and so they take out their hatred and resentment on their children and they raise children in this kind of oppressive emotional and physical imbalance. [...] I think part of that is that silent hatred, because we haven't had a chance to heal from the trauma. Many mothers don't have an opportunity to heal from the

trauma of, “how do I deal with a man whom I love, whom I give my life and then he walks suddenly out on me and his children?” (213)

This can be applied to Grace, whose husband, Desmond, has decided to leave the family home in order to spend time with his mistress, Monica. As it is said in the novel, he only comes back home to change his clothes and then goes back to Monica’s (125). Desmond even plans on leaving Grace for good and asking for a divorce, but he does not have the courage to tell Grace and he does not want to be frowned upon for abandoning his children and his wife. As Adisa explains, these women, abandoned by their husbands overnight, do not have time to heal from the trauma this causes them. Furthermore, we know that Grace still has a childhood trauma that she is not completely healed from. Both of these unresolved traumas eventually drive her to madness, although Monica thinks that Grace has brought this madness on herself because she helped in the rape (202).

While Grace suffers from psychological/mental health problems, Peggy and Marva are affected physically as a consequence of their actions. Marva suffers from insomnia and hates herself more as each day goes by: “She could hardly recognise her face, which looked like a bloated bulla-cake. Her hair had grown redder, and more dull. Her neck and face had blotches. Her fingers were like monkey banana. Her legs had varicose veins. She was disgusted at the person who looked back at her” (228). Marva continues to hate herself after Monica's rape, therefore showing that attacking Monica has not solved her problems. She also continues to consume an abnormally high amount of hot peppers. It is not known whether it is the number of hot peppers Marva eats every day or if it is related to Monica’s rape but the pregnant Marva starts bleeding from in-between her legs (232). She is taken to the hospital where it is said she dies because she has lost too much blood, the baby, for her part, is saved. Peggy, on the other side, wakes up with horrible abdominal pain. When Marva comes to Peggy’s house and sees her on the floor, she starts calling for help but no

one answers, the village being oddly quiet. Although they have not talked about Monica's rape, Peggy and Marva assume that it is forgotten since no one has accused them of raping Monica. However, even though, they will not suffer from criminal sanctions or direct and clear punishment from the community, they do suffer from a form of karma. Indeed, Peggy is eventually admitted to the hospital where the doctors suspect she has cancer in her uterus. The villagers, informed of this, condemn Marva and Peggy's behaviour:

But a brave person voiced what surely everyone else was thinking.

'If you expose you batty, fly with pitch pan it.'

Still another voice joined in condemnation, 'De higher monkey climb, de more him expose himself.'

'Spit in the sky it bound fi catch you.'

One by one the villagers spoke out, distancing themselves from Marva and Peggy, acknowledging that they deserved their lot. (233)

While nobody really accuses Marva, Grace, and Peggy of having raped Monica (which outrages Angel who does not understand why nobody is asking for justice), everyone seems to know that they are responsible for it. In a way, it seems that no real sanction is taken towards the aggressors by the community because they believe in the notion of karma. In fact, this is precisely what the villagers imply with their expressions, which could be assimilated to "what goes around comes around", if you do not behave well, you will face the consequences of your actions.



### **III. Chapter Two: Beryl**

Like Monica, Beryl also left Kristoff Village before returning years after. She had initially left Kristoff to go to teacher's college but when she returned two years later, she was a completely different person. Beryl did not speak for five years after she came back, she looked insensitive and beaten down. No one understood what had happened to her, but everyone knew something had happened to Beryl while she was away. Until one day, after her mother's death, Beryl finally decides to tell people that she has been raped at the age of eighteen by an American tourist at a hotel she used to work at.

#### ***Trauma story***

When the novel begins, Beryl's rape has already happened years ago, so we do not have the account of the rape scene itself. The only account of the rape there is is Beryl's version when she tells it to the others. Not much is said about the aggressor since the scene has happened outside the novel, we can thus almost only rely on Beryl's account of the rape. Since the rape scene told by Beryl runs over five pages, we will start with a summary of the scene and then analyse some specific passages. Beryl explains that the summer before going to teacher's college, she took up a job in a hotel cleaning rooms. One day as she is coming to clean the room, a white American man is standing there in his underwear. The next day, to allegedly apologise, he leaves an envelope full of cash for her. Over the next couple of days, he keeps on leaving her envelopes with money inside claiming that he wants to meet her and learn more about Jamaica. Beryl does not agree to meet him but she does answer his questions about Jamaica until one day, he tells her that he is done playing and he is decided to have sex with her. He throws Beryl on the bed, rips her clothes and rapes her. He tells her that he is in Jamaica for four more days and she has to come back to his room every

day otherwise he will tell the manager that she stole from him. Afraid to lose her job, Beryl comes back over the next four days, and he repeatedly rapes her. Ashamed and not wanting her parents to know about the rape, Beryl decides not to come back to Kristoff Village.

Some elements are particularly interesting to analyse in the narration of Beryl's rape. The first one being Beryl's surprise at the number of white people in the hotel and the fact that they look at them with insistence:

'One day a whole group of people come to de hotel, mostly men. Me see how dem eye ah roam ova we body. Me hang me head, and gwane like me no even notice dem. A girl who been working at de hotel fah four years, whispered one day at lunch dat we could mek more money. All a we lean and ask her how. She say, "Much foreign man like black woman. (223)

The number of white tourists in the hotel and their attraction to black women is actually not that surprising, although it does astonish Beryl. In fact, many white people seek contact with non-white people. As bell hooks observes in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), "Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). The reason these white men are interested in black women is that they believe that they are different from white women, that they are more experienced, more sexual, that they can give them more pleasure (hooks 23-24). By seeking contact with non-white women, these men believe that they will gain access to sexual pleasure that was previously unknown to them, as explains hooks: "It is precisely that longing for the pleasure that has led the white west to sustain a romantic fantasy of the 'primitive' and the concrete search for a real primitive paradise, whether that location be a country or a body, a dark continent or dark flesh, perceived as the perfect embodiment of that possibility" (27). However, this desire on the part of white men to have contact with black women is not innocent. Indeed, the white man as the initiator of the contact with the

“Other” is the one who has the power, who dominates in this relationship (hooks 28). It is not a relationship of equals, especially knowing the history of Jamaica, but this will be addressed in the next section. As bell hooks argues: “When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power over in intimate relations with the Other” (23). Given the power imbalance in the relationship, it is very hard to believe that the white tourists at the hotel do not use their power in order to dominate and take advantage of the black women. As Frantz Fanon points out in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), “When a soldier of the conquering army went to bed with a young Malagasy girl, there was undoubtedly no tendency on his part to respect her entity as another person” (32). The same thing happens here with the white tourists who seek contact with black women, it is more of a relationship of domination and full of prejudices about black women rather than a normal relationship. They do not seek in any way to know these women or to respect them because “a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man’s eyes” (Fanon, *BSWM* 29). In fact, in the eyes of white men, their bodies are no more than a means of satisfying their sexual impulses (hooks 24).

In another passage, the white man whose room Beryl cleans, tells her that he apparently knows black women: “Beryl, I’ve decided today is the day I’ll have some Jamaican meat. You’ve teased me long enough. I know about you black women; I’ve had plenty where I come from” (224). He is surprised when he realises while raping her that Beryl is a virgin: “Ah! a Jamaican virgin. A dying breed. I heard you girls all lose your virginity by the time you are twelve. Where have you been hiding?” (225). This scene is once again permeated with stereotypes about black women. The man implies that black women have more unbridled sexuality than non-black women, a prejudice that Mimi Sheller refers to in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*:

These appropriations of Caribbean culture have depended significantly on particular constructs of Black sexuality and gender relations as not only dangerous and dysfunctional, but also 'wild' and uncontrolled (although it is the tourists themselves who engage in wild sexual practices). Again it is the perception of 'excess' in Caribbean culture, a kind of 'natural' carnivalesque vibrancy, which justifies continuing relations of consumption - the apparent inexhaustibility of the Caribbean incites the tourist to further consumption. (166)

As Mimi Sheller points out, not only do they assume that black people have an unbridled and wild sexuality, but they do not realise that in reality it is they, white tourists, who indulge in wild sexual practices when they come to the Caribbean on sex vacations. In fact, the Caribbean has become a place of debauchery, "the nation we turn to when we find ourselves tired of life, the place we visit when we need a shot of pure relaxation" (Sheller 165). Besides, the white man tells Beryl that he has got four more days in Jamaica and that he intends to 'break her in' (225). This is also in line with Fanon's idea that the objective is not to respect the person but to consume their body, Fanon describes how when one thinks of black people, they associate them with sex (*BSWM* 123): "The Negro symbolizes the biological. First of all, he enters puberty at the age of nine and is a father at the age of ten; he is hot-blooded, and his blood is strong; he is tough" (*BSWM* 128). What Fanon implies in this is the sexualisation of black people who are considered adults when they are still children and therefore sexualised at an early age. We find this idea when the rapist says to Beryl that he has heard black women all lose their virginity before they are twelve. He then proceeds to tell Beryl that she is part of a dying breed (i.e. Jamaican virgins). As a matter of fact, by being a virgin at eighteen, Beryl deconstructs the stereotype that the white man has about black women. Another disturbing element in the expression 'dying breed' is that the word 'breed' is a term generally used to refer to animals, not human beings. Fanon explains that in addition to being

sexualised from a very young age, black women and men are also animalised,, “the Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean” (85). By referring to Jamaican virgins as a ‘dying breed’, the rapist animalises Jamaican women.

Furthermore, it is also shocking that the rapist seems attracted to Beryl's young age. Indeed, the first time he sees her, it is the first thing he notices and comments about: “‘Gosh, you’re young.’ It tek me a while before me understand what him seh, den me find meself blurting out, ‘Me not so young sir, me is almost nineteen’” (223). The white man sees in Beryl the perfect victim, he knows that young and vulnerable as she is, she will be easy to manipulate. Besides, Herman notes that adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to rape:

Similarly, the period of highest risk for rape is in late adolescence. Half of all victims are aged twenty or younger at the time they are raped; three-quarters are between the ages of thirteen and twenty-six. The period of greatest psychological vulnerability is also in reality the period of greatest traumatic exposure, for both young men and young women. Rape and combat might thus be considered complementary social rites of initiation into the coercive violence at the foundation of adult society. They are the paradigmatic forms of trauma for women and men respectively. (61)

Beryl, being eighteen years old, is therefore at the age where she is most vulnerable and most likely to be raped. Just like the pimp saw Monica’s vulnerability when he met her, the rapist sees Beryl’s young age as an opportunity for him to dominate: “Every woman who has ever been a teenage girl could tell you a tale about an encounter with a predatory man, men who smell youth and vulnerability, and seek only to dominate” (Eddo-Lodge 78-79). The rapist takes advantage of Beryl's youth and innocence to rape her. He also blames Beryl for the rape, telling her that she has teased him long enough. Hilkje Charlotte Hänel explains in *What Is Rape?: Social Theory and Conceptual Analysis* (2018) :

Rape myths do this either by implying that the act in question was not an act of rape, because it was implicitly wanted by the woman and therefore consensual (“she asked for it”) or by making it into something else (“it wasn't really rape”). This false assumption of consent is expressed in various ways: either because the woman acted in ways that show her implicit consent, or because external factors are such that any woman would automatically consent. (35-36)

In this case, the rapist implies that Beryl has asked for it, that she has played with him by showing up to his room every day, answering his questions, and taking his money.

There is also something profoundly racist in the rapist's behaviour and remarks, notably when he points out to Beryl that she is not like other black women, that she is clever (implying, unlike black women). Reni Eddo-Lodge in *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* argues that racism is “about so much more than personal prejudice” (11), it is a combination of both power and discrimination, it is about being able to negatively affect other people's lives (11). She also claims that in order to understand racism, it is essential to see race and more specifically see who benefits from their race, who has the power to destroy someone else's life (Eddo-Lodge 51). It is clear that between Beryl, a young black Jamaican woman, and the rapist, a white American man, it is the white man who benefits from his race and has the possibility of negatively affecting Beryl's life. He not only rapes her over the course of several days, but he also blackmails her by buying her silence. Indeed, he tells her that if she says anything or does not come back to his room every day, he will make sure she ends up in jail for stealing. Beryl recalls at that moment that a young woman working at the hotel had already been fired when she had accused a man of molesting her. As Judith Lewis Herman explains “Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim” (8). Beryl knows she has no choice, the rapist is in control, all because of his race. Beryl also remains silent

because she feels ashamed, she is afraid of disappointing her parents, that they will know she was raped. Herman observes that this is a common feeling among survivors of rape: “Women learn that in rape they are not only violated but dishonored” (67). As a consequence, Beryl waits for two years before she comes back to Kristoff. The rape and silence are a burden for Beryl, who tries to commit suicide the first time she is raped: “Ah close de door behind me feeling like ah was sleepwalking, and walk straight into the sea and try to drown meself. Carol and Mazie pull me out. Dem was waiting on me since ah stay so long, but ah couldn’t tell dem what happen, not until afta de white man leave de island” (225). What is unsettling about this scene is that Beryl says she went into the sea like a sleepwalker, implying that she was not in control of her body. This is analogous to the figure of the Haitian zombi described by Mimi Sheller: “If the figure of the cannibal represents European anxieties around the boundaries of consumption, then the Haitian ‘zombi’ — a ‘living-dead’ slave deprived of will and physically controlled by a sorcerer — is the ultimate representation of the psychic state of one whose body/spirit is consumed” (145). The figure of the zombi fits Beryl quite well, indeed, just like it, her body is consumed, sexually here, by the white man, which has the effect of rendering Beryl lifeless, under the control of the rapist. By raping her, by asking her to come back every day and keep silent, the rapist takes control of Beryl. She is left drained, no longer in possession of her own body or spirit as rape has many psychological consequences that will be explored in the next sections.

### ***Before the trauma***

Since Beryl’s rapist is not known to us, we do not have a lot of information about him, let alone about his background. Thus, considering that it is not possible to find clues in the rapist’s background, this section will take a closer look at the information that we do know about the rape

and violence theories. There are three theories that could be helpful in this case to try to understand what drove the man to rape Beryl: Felson and Cohen's routine activity theory (1980), social activist and author Angela Davis's chapter "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist" in *Women, Race & Class* (1983) and Mimi Sheller's *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (2003).

As we have seen already in Monica's case, Felson and Cohen's routine activity theory states that for rape to occur, three conditions must be met: "at a minimum an *offender* with both criminal inclinations and the ability to carry out those inclinations, a person or object providing a *suitable target* for the offender, and the *absence of capable guardians* capable of preventing the violation (392). Among other characteristics, Felson and Cohen define a suitable target as prejudiced, consistent with the sexual preferences of the rapist and vulnerable (393). In the case of Beryl's rape, all three conditions are met. Beryl does fit the criteria of the suitable target since, as mentioned before, she is young and vulnerable: "And adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to the trauma of rape. The experience of terror and disempowerment during adolescence effectively compromises the three normal adaptive tasks of this stage of life: the formation of identity, the gradual separation from the family of origin, and the exploration of a wider social world" (Herman 61). She is all the more vulnerable and prejudiced because she is in a position of power inferior to that of the rapist as she is black Jamaican, and he is white American. Beryl also matches the sexual preferences of the rapist since it is said that many white men in the hotel like black women, and he assures Beryl that he knows black women since he has had sex with (or raped?) many of them in the United States. Moreover, Beryl is also vulnerable due to the fact that she is far away from her family, and she is on her own in the room. Indeed, the hotel room provides an ideal context for the rape to happen since it is a private and isolated place. Beryl is therefore completely alone with the rapist, with no one to intervene and stop the rape from happening. The last condition is to have "an



*offender* with both criminal inclinations and the ability to carry out those inclinations” (Felson and Cohen 392), as stated previously, not a lot is known about the rapist but since he has indeed raped Beryl, it can be concluded that he did have criminal inclinations, and he did carry them out.

Angela Davis’s chapter “Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist” rather focuses on the double discrimination of racism and sexism suffered by black women and the remnants of slavery in the United States. Davis explains how the rape of black women was “a routine arm of repression” (183) during slavery:

Slavery relied as much on routine sexual abuse as it relied on the whip and the lash. Excessive sex urges, whether they existed among individual white men or not, had nothing to do with this virtual institutionalization of rape. Sexual coercion was, rather, an essential dimension of the social relations between slavemaster and slave. In other words, the right claimed by slaveowners and their agents over the bodies of female slaves was a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people as a whole. (175)

During slavery in the United States, rape was used as a way to gain power over people, to show the slaves that they belonged to their masters, that the masters owned them and could do as they pleased with them. Davis demonstrates that rape was a way of keeping black people under control (183) and that it became “an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror. In this way the brutal exploitation of Black labor was guaranteed, and after the betrayal of Reconstruction, the political domination of the Black people as a whole was assured” (185). The effects of slavery on the oppression of black people in the United States, and elsewhere, lasted long after slavery was over. People continued to act as if slavery was still in effect, that black people were still slaves and white people were still their masters. Angela Davis and bell hooks converge on the idea that a white man's desire to have sex with a black woman is never innocent (hooks 28): “There has been a daily

drama of racism enacted in the countless anonymous encounters between Black women and their white abusers—men convinced that their acts were only natural” (Davis 176). In a sense, some white men behave like slave masters thinking that they have the right to do what they want with black women, that their bodies belong to them. Beyond that, they are reinforced in the idea that they have the right to rape black women by the fact that they are not convicted:

Working-class men, whatever their color, can be motivated to rape by the belief that their maleness accords them the privilege to dominate women. Yet since they do not possess the social or economic authority—unless it is a white man raping a woman of color—guaranteeing them immunity from prosecution, the incentive is not nearly as powerful as it is for the men of the capitalist class. (Davis 200)

The phrase “a white man raping a woman of color—guaranteeing them immunity from prosecution” (Davis 200) summarises well the state of affairs. Davis’s observations can be applied to Beryl's case. It is striking that the white men at the hotel where Beryl works look insistently at the bodies of the young black women working there. In addition, a woman working at the hotel tells Beryl that many white men like black women and that there are ways to make more money, implying that it is not uncommon for men to pay these women to have sex with them. Also, the rapist tells Beryl that he has already ‘had’ many black women in the United States, possibly by raping them, and that if she talks, he will make sure she goes to jail for stealing from him. The rapist is confident that if Beryl talks, no one will believe her. Beryl is convinced of that too, given the story of the hotel employee who was fired after she said she was raped by a hotel guest. This story also shows that Beryl's rape is not uncommon and that this kind of incident happens regularly in this hotel. If white men think they have the right to rape black women without fear of consequences, it is also because of the stereotypes they associate with black women, as Gerda

Lener describes: “The myth of the black rapist of white women is the twin of the myth of the bad black women—both designed to apologize for and facilitate the continued exploitation of black men and women” (193). Indeed, as already discussed, black women are seen as having unbridled sexuality: “If Black men have their eyes on white women as sexual objects, then Black women must certainly welcome the sexual attentions of white men. Viewed as “loose women” and whores, Black women's cries of rape would necessarily lack legitimacy” (Davis 182). Because of the stereotypes attached to black women’s sexuality, white men are convinced that they can rape them and get away with it. Beryl’s rapist tells her how allegedly Jamaican women all lose their virginity early. He knows that he is in a position of power, that as a white American man he will never be held accountable for the rape of a black Jamaican woman.

Mimi Sheller describes how slavery in the Caribbean has shaped tourism and current consumption in the Caribbean. She explains how, like in the United States, slaves were abused by slave masters:

slaves were touched by ‘owners’ and ‘overseers’ in two main ways: either by whipping, branding, and other forms of torture that left scars on the body, or by sexual relations that left their mark in physical violence, psychic scarring, and offspring. These forms of touching were also forms of consuming the enslaved body, which required getting close to the slave, and hence also put the slave-exploiter’s body at risk. (Sheller 152)

Mimi Sheller explains that if the bodies of slaves were consumed sexually during slavery, it has later developed into new ways of consumption. The West indeed continued to consume black Caribbean bodies at first, in the nineteenth century, through tours of the islands and then, currently, in “forms ranging from package holidays to sex tourism” (Sheller 156). Jacqueline Sánchez Taylor shows how tourism and sex tourism in the Caribbean are an opportunity for tourists to buy and live

their colonial fantasy (42), she argues that “A key component of sex tourism is the objectification of a sexualized, racialized ‘Other’” (42). She goes on to explain that tourists believe that they have a right to consume the ‘Other’ while on their holiday, that it comes with the package (Sánchez Taylor 41). Moreover, this belief is reinforced by “the informal sex industry that has developed in many Caribbean resorts” (Sánchez Taylor 42), which has the consequence of giving the impression to both tourists and sex workers that this is not “straightforward prostitution” (Sánchez Taylor 42). However, prostitution is not the main reason why some tourists travel to the Caribbean:

So far as white male sex tourists are concerned, it is not just cheap sex they pursue. They also like travelling to ‘Third World’ countries, where they feel that somehow the proper order between genders and ‘races’ has been restored. Women and girls are at their command. Blacks, Hispanics and Asians are serving them, shining their shoes, cleaning their rooms and so on. All is as it should be. (Sánchez Taylor 42-43)

White male tourists feel like they are kings, or should we say ‘slave masters’, when they go to the Caribbean. They believe that they can do whatever they want with whomever they want, the Caribbean is a place outside of civilisation, where anything is allowed; some resorts even encourage this idea of debauchery and transgression (Sheller 166). With this mind, Beryl's rape no longer is an isolated event, but something potentially much more common in the Caribbean. Indeed, the strong presence of single white male tourists in Beryl's hotel suggests that it is not a coincidence if they all gather in this particular hotel. Moreover, as has already been mentioned, Beryl's colleague implies that employees can make more money from prostituting themselves to white tourists, which is in line with what Jacqueline Sánchez Taylor calls “the informal sex industry” (42). By holidaying in this hotel in the Caribbean, white tourists expect to be treated in a certain way and have certain rights/privileges, such as having sex with the hotel's employees. The

Caribbean represents to them a place where they can leave their ‘good manners’ at home and transgress “racial and moral boundaries” (Sheller 166). When their expectations are not met, such as when Beryl refuses to have sex with the white tourist, they do not hesitate to resort to violence, i.e. rape, and threaten to have the employee fired. Rape in this case, is just a way for these men to get what they think they are entitled to.

Even more worrying is the age of these young women tourists are taking advantage of. Some of them are sometimes barely adults such as Beryl who is only eighteen when she is raped. Mimi Sheller observes that sex tourism in the Caribbean is not limited to adult women:

The allure of travel was often expressed through the sexualisation of Caribbean bodies, particularly those of children. While seemingly innocent, when placed alongside accounts of child prostitution in the Caribbean the image may be read in a more disturbing way, as is true of contemporary imagery of Caribbean children used in promoting tourism destinations. (161)

In *It Begins With Tears*, we already have a clear example of child prostitution, involving Monica who is recruited at the age of sixteen by a pimp to work as a prostitute in Kingston. It would not be surprising if the tourists who stay at the hotel where Beryl works also come to Jamaica to ‘consume’ young bodies. Indeed, Caribbean children are highly sexualised, as evidenced by the rapist's words: “Ah! A Jamaican virgin. A dying breed. I heard you girls all lose your virginity by the time you are twelve.” (225). Mimi Sheller argues that “The sexualisation of young ‘exotic’ bodies, male and female, has become a standard tool of Caribbean tourist promotion, from hotel brochures to magazine advertising and guidebooks” (164). Once again, the first thing the rapist comments on is Beryl’s young age and when he discovers that she is a virgin, he asks her where she has been hiding. Beryl's rape is different from Monica's in that it is also profoundly racist. In fact, in this case, the rapist does not see what is problematic in his behavior since he thinks he is

entitled to demand sexual relations with the young employees of the hotel as long as he ‘pays’ them, even if the young women have not given their consent. The man is apparently a regular at this hotel since he returns there some months later. He believes that during his sex holiday and because he is American and white, he has the right to do whatever he wants, and especially if he has ‘paid’ for it.

### *After the trauma*

The rape has many consequences on Beryl, both physical and psychological. One of the most obvious physical consequences is her pregnancy. Indeed, after the departure of the white man, Beryl starts to feel sick and realises that she is pregnant. With the help of a woman and some special herbs, Beryl tries to abort the foetus. Just like when Beryl tried to drown herself after the rape, Beryl’s abortion attempt can be understood as a way of regaining control over her body as Sheller demonstrates:

Nevertheless, it is also important to recognise that enslaved men and women in the past and ‘service workers’ today, were and are able to exercise embodied resistance by staking a claim in their own bodies. In the case of slaves, this ranged from suicide and abortion to running away, self-mutilation, and working slowly, and more positively to forms of liberating sexuality, dance, dress and spirituality. (154)

By trying to abort the baby conceived during the rape, Beryl tries to reclaim her own body, when this fails, she decides to give up the baby. Beryl says that when the baby was born, she was very white, and she could not feel any love for her as she was constantly reminded of how the baby was conceived. Beryl’s friend, Mazie has heard how “some American people came to Jamaica and buy babies fah plenty money” (226). Mazie decides to tell the man that he has ruined Beryl’s life and

that if he does not take the baby, she will curse him and make him lose his manhood. The rapist and his wife ‘adopt’ the baby, give money to Beryl, and take the baby back to the United States. Although Beryl says that at the time, she did not want the baby, she is then very regretful for abandoning her daughter, she even says that the worst in all of this was losing her daughter. The child’s voice never leaves her, she hears her calling all the time: “The child was more persistent than ever. Sometimes so demanding, calling Beryl in her sleep, waking her, drenching her body in sweat. Beryl could almost make her out. She was taking form. Beryl didn’t want to remember what had taken form in her body. She would not remember anything but the shame” (36). Judith Lewis Herman explains that it is common for traumatised people to keep on reliving the trauma in the present; victims of rape, in particular, show more signs of insomnia, nightmares (37, 31), and “awaken more frequently during the night than ordinary people” (36). Another element in this scene that is reminiscent of post-traumatic stress disorder is the fact that Beryl says that she does not remember what was in her body, that she did not remember anything except the shame that she was feeling. This is not the only instance where Beryl says she does not remember the trauma: “In the past, she often thought about an island being confined, trapped by water. Run, swim or drown. She could not forget what she could not remember. Pain always there, denial, the face she couldn’t see, the child calling her” (37-8). Herman states that traumatised people do not always remember the trauma:

Traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail. When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over. Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. Moreover, traumatic events may sever these normally integrated functions from one another. The traumatized person may experience

intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion. She may find herself in a constant state of vigilance and irritability without knowing why. Traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and take on a life of their own. (34)

We find exactly this phenomenon in Beryl who does not remember, or rather her unconscious chooses not to remember the trauma, but she still experiences the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. She still hears the voice of the child calling her, she has difficulty sleeping and has been depressed since the trauma:

Men and women, the old and the young — all left [Beryl] alone. She didn't go to church or visit the obeah man. She didn't go on sprees in Mobay or go to dances at the junction every two weeks. No man was known to creep into her cottage at night, and she was never seen in the company of any woman except her mother. Nothing seemed to matter to her, except her garden. Not life, nor death. Not sorrow, nor happiness. She was alive but dead. (35)

Herman has discussed how reliving the trauma is so painful that a lot of survivors try to avoid it by restricting their lives (46) resulting in an “a withdrawal from engagement with others, and an impoverished life” (42). Rape is one of the traumas that causes the most “persistent post-traumatic stress disorder” (Herman 57), trauma breaks the bond between victim and community and destroys the identity the victim had formed before the trauma (Herman 55-56). Beryl is not the same person she was before she left Kristoff, nobody recognises her when she comes back. Herman explains that survivors often feel that a part of them has died in the trauma (49) and that they are under the impression that they are already dead because their “capacity for love has been destroyed” (194). Beryl does not really live anymore; she stays at home and takes care of her mother, but she does not actually interact with anyone else.



Not remembering or talking about the rape, prevents Beryl from reconstructing her life but it also has an impact on the resolution of the trauma. However, telling people about the rape is not simple. As already mentioned before, the rapist threatens Beryl to have her fired if she says anything about the rape. Beryl comments at various times that she is afraid of what her parents would think, that she is ashamed: “Me couldn’t bear fah mamma and pappa fi see me now dat me did dirty, so me neva come home” (226). Shame prevents Beryl from coming back home and telling people about her rape. Herman argues that “To speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief. Women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic life” (28). Beryl feels guilty and dirty, she feels that she is no longer deemed ‘respectable’, that no Jamaican man will ever want to marry her now that she has been ‘ruined’ by a white man (227). Furthermore, Beryl is also ashamed for having ‘abandoned’ her only daughter: “Living but not participating. Shame blocked the path. Shame rose up when one was alone with oneself, with darkness, with night. Shame when one could not forgive oneself” (33). Beryl is tormented because she gave her daughter to the rapist, she cannot forgive herself, which is why she hears her calling her. Curiously, the child’s voice is at first louder then fades away when Beryl befriends Angel, Rupert’s wife. As has already been seen with Monica, there are three main stages in the resolution of trauma: securing the victim’s safety, reconstructing the traumatic event, and reconnecting with the community (Herman 3). For Beryl, securing her safety is quite difficult since the trauma probably happened years ago. Nevertheless, the community of women, provides a reassuring circle in which Beryl feels safe enough to talk about what happened to her. On the same day that Monica recounts her rape, Beryl is invited to do the same. Herman specifies that the community’s reaction is very important to the victim and the resolution of the trauma (70), she expects the community to denounce the crime “so that the burdens of shame are lifted from their shoulders and placed on the

offenders, where they rightfully belong” (265). In fact, it is precisely the reaction of her interlocutors that encourages Beryl to tell them the truth: “Beryl raised her head, drying her tears with her palms. She looked at all the women, her sisters, and knew they didn’t fault her. She would tell the entire story” (225). After listening to Beryl, Angel puts a name to Beryl's trauma: “He raped you, Beryl, he raped you” (225). Herman explains that it is of paramount importance for the resolution of the trauma to call rape by its true name (67). Finally, the last stage consists of reconnecting with the community. During this stage, the survivor learns to rebuild her sense of identity, she is now ready for a new life in which she can pursue her aspirations (Herman 195-196). It is also during this period that the survivor creates new relationships, for example, she may show a desire for a child or a romantic relationship (Herman 206-207). Beryl finally manages to calm the accusing voice of the child who calls her and to forgive herself for having abandoned her:

She knew her mother was happy, and she heard her telling her, ‘Is your time now me one daughter. Is your time now. Don’t waste any more time. Don’t let one mistake scare you fah life.’ Beryl hugged herself, her arms making an X that covered her breasts. She rocked from side to side, and her tears that trickled down her face were sweet and fresh. [...] She was willing to unload, to forgive herself, to begin again. [...] She heard the child calling her. [...] Beryl dove again, and when she came up, she cradled a gasping Angel in her arms” (215)

Beryl decides to forgive herself and to still the voice of the child, “Angel would be the daughter she had lost” (221). After telling her story, Beryl lives again, not only does she get Angel as her daughter, but she also starts hanging out again with Ainsworth, her childhood friend, and crush. Herman says that the signs of the resolution of trauma are the victim's ability to enjoy her life and her loved ones again and to think about the future rather than the past (Herman 211). As Marva dies in the hospital, Beryl decides to adopt the girl she just gave birth to:

Beryl carried the baby in her arms, showing her off to all around. Her face was aglow, and just as it could be said that Ainsworth had aged overnight, it could be said that Beryl had shed skin and was young again. [...] Beryl looked tenderly at the baby that was now her daughter; her daughter, all six pounds, eight ounces of her, the colour of coffee with just a smidgen of milk, and with a full head of hair. Beryl was certain no voice would any longer call out to her at nights; not when she snuggled up with her daughter, whom she decided to name Joy. (235)

After years of blaming herself for giving away her daughter, Beryl finally lives again. This child allows Beryl to regain a taste for life, and she gives her the meaningful name of 'Joy'.

## IV. Chapter Three: Angel

Angel moves from the United States to Kristoff Village, Jamaica when she and Rupert decide to go live in his old house. At first, Angel finds it hard to get used to life in Kristoff Village because she is very fearful. We learn in the course of the novel that she was abandoned by her adoptive mother when she was younger because she was black and that she never got over it. Just like Beryl's rape, Angel's trauma takes place before the period covered by the novel, we learn her story from the information given by the narrator.

### *Trauma story*

Compared to Beryl and Monica's traumas, we do not know much about Angel's. Indeed, she never directly tells her story to anyone, we only know about it through what the narrator says when Angel recalls her trauma. Likewise, we do not have a lot of information about her past. The little information we possess is about the 'current' Angel, post-trauma. However, what is known about Angel is that she was adopted by white American parents, John and Cindy Fairbanks. Until the age of eleven, Angel was persuaded that she was white, like her parents. Her adoptive father then died and after his death, her adoptive mother started dating other men. One of these men said to his mother in front of Angel "That's your child! She's coloured! She's a nigger!" (93). After that incident and the discovery that she was mixed-race, Angel could not believe that she was not white and wanted to die. Little by little, her mother began to behave differently; Angel was no longer welcome when guests came over, her mother did not take her with her anymore and finally, Angel was sent to a boarding school because his mother's fiancé could not stand black people. The narrator tells us after Monica's rape that nothing had ever affected Angel so deeply, except for her adoptive mother who had abandoned her when she was twelve.

## ***Before the trauma***

What is known about Angel's life before her trauma is that she was several times a victim of racism from other children but also from adults. Reni Eddo-Lodge explains in *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* that when white parents adopt a child of colour they have a “responsibility to be race aware” (64) and to do their best to fight racism (62). *The Guardian's* deputy Opinion editor, Joseph Harker wrote in an article:

My own Nigerian father abandoned my Irish mother before I was born. Three years later she married an English local, who later adopted me, and I took his name. I was never short of love, support and encouragement. But when race regularly collided with my life I was ill-prepared. I found it difficult to cope with the playground and classroom taunts and, as I grew older, the disconnect with my African heritage became more of an issue. I've spoken to many black people of similar upbringing and they often talk of the same experiences.

Harker talks about how as a black child who grew up in a white family, he had not been prepared by his parents for the racism that he would face in his life. Likewise, Angel also suffers from not knowing her story, she discovers at school that she is mixed-race when the teacher asks her:

Then a new teacher at her preparatory school during social science asked her, ‘Can you tell the class what it's like to be mixed?’ [...] Then the teacher said, ‘Well, Angel, can you tell us?’ All eyes were on her now. ‘Mixed? With what?’ She felt the tears swelling up and she swallowed, hoping to drink them down, but still they came. She felt all eyes turned on her so she pushed back her chair and ran sobbing from the room.’ I am not mixed. I'm not different. I'm just like you.’ (94)

It is said in this excerpt that Angel started crying when the teacher asked her what it felt to be mixed. This is not the first time that Angel is upset after being told that she is a person of colour.

Indeed, after having her mother's partner say to her that she is a 'nigger', Angel thinks to herself: "Coloured! Nigger! Please, anything but a nigger." Tears, wanting to die, to be killed, to jump off the nineteenth floor on to Park Avenue. "Not white! How can that be?" (93). Frantz Fanon has studied in detail the black man's desire to become white in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon cites an example coming from René Etiemble's "Sur le *Martinique* de Michel Cournot" (translated in English), which is reminiscent of Angel's words: "'You, as a Negress—.' 'Me? a Negress? Can't you see I'm practically white? I despise Negroes. Niggers stink. They're dirty and lazy. Don't ever mention niggers to me'" (Fanon, *BSWM* 35). This kind of reaction, while shocking, is actually rooted in the belief that the white man is superior to the black man (Fanon, *BSWM* 178), a belief that was obviously ingrained in the minds of black people by white settlers: "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country" (Fanon, *BSWM* 9). Ziauddin Sardar argues in the foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks* that the black person wants to become white because whiteness represents purity and civilisation (xiii). In order to become whiter and be accepted by white people, the black person has different tools at their disposal: the mastery of Western languages (Sardar xv), especially English, and the rejection of their blackness (Fanon, *BSWM* 9). Angel is distressed when she finds out that she is not white, her whole world collapses. In fact, Angel has probably associated negative images to black people, which is why she is so shaken when she realises she is mixed. She has been raised in a white environment where black people were doubtlessly represented in a bad way, as demonstrates Fanon:

In the magazines the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always identification with the victor, the little

Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary 'who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes'. (*BSWM* 113)

It is a shock for Angel to discover her blackness when she had always identified with white people, with the people that were considered to be the 'good ones'.

Angel is not the only one who denigrates her skin colour, she is also the victim of racist remarks and behaviour at school and in her family. Indeed, we are told that when Angel learned she was mixed, she was not the only one surprised. The other students looked at her strangely as well because they were surprised to see a girl of colour behave like them. Fanon explains that as a black person, people expect you to behave in a certain way, to behave like a black person (*BSWM* 86). As soon as you do not behave as they expect, they are puzzled: "Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black man express himself properly, for then in truth he is putting on the white world" (Fanon, *BSWM* 23). But as much as Angel tries to behave like white people, she is not accepted by them. At school, the girls call her names and make her feel that she is not like them, no matter how hard she tries. Reni Eddo-Lodge talks about how despite all the efforts black people make to fit in, they are still "Being constantly looked at like an alien in the country [they] were born in" (111). In reality, Angel is divided between who she is and what she is expected to be. Like Jean Veneuse, Angel is caught between two countries, two cultures: "Jean Veneuse is a Negro. Born in the Antilles, he has lived in Bordeaux for years; so he is a European. But he is black; so he is a Negro. There is the conflict. He does not understand his own race, and the whites do not understand him" (Fanon, *BSWM* 46). Because she has lived all her life in the United States, surrounded by white people, Angel thinks of herself as white, but white people do not see her as 'one of their own'. Angel finds herself in a difficult situation when she learns that she is mixed "for the white race

would not accept [her] as one of its own and the black virtually repudiated [her]” (Fanon, *BSWM* 48). After the trauma, Angel then begins her quest for identity, as we will see in the next section.

Nonetheless, children at school are not the only ones rejecting Angel because of the colour of her skin, her adoptive family also gives her a hard time. Her grandmother (her father’s mother) in particular does not hesitate to show her her disdain:

Angel remembered meeting her dad’s mother, who lived in South Carolina. They had seen each other only twice, and both times it had been painful. It had been obvious the senior Mrs Fairbanks did not like her. She was five the first time they met, and she had asked her father, ‘Dad, why doesn’t Grandma like me?’ [...] Her dad had said, ‘Mother doesn’t like to hug and kiss.’ But Angel had seen her grandmother hugging and kissing the cousin. [...] Her ‘grandmother’ hadn’t liked her because she was black. (170)

As explains Reni Eddo-Lodge, white parents who have adopted children of colour should do their best to become race aware and anti-racist but not all parents are willing to take the time to actually learn (62-64). Angel’s father does not know how to react to his mother’s behaviour with Angel, he lets her do as she pleases without protecting and defending Angel. However, the most racist incident comes from Angel’s mother, who abandons her daughter after the death of Angel’s father because her new fiancé is racist. She suddenly asks Angel to stop calling her mother and calling her Cindy instead. Yet Angel had never seemed to have had any problems with her mother before. Strangely, it is after the death of Angel's father, that her mother decides to abandon her little by little as if John Fairbanks was the only link between them. We learn from the list of characters at the beginning of the book that Jasmine, the Fairbanks' Jamaican maid, is Angel's surrogate mother. Merriam Webster dictionary gives to the term ‘surrogate mother’ two meanings that can be useful in this case:



1 a: a woman who becomes pregnant by artificial insemination or by implantation of a fertilized egg created by in vitro fertilization for the purpose of carrying the fetus to term for another person or persons

2: one who acts or serves as a substitute mother

It is not specified in the list of characters or anywhere else in the novel whether Jasmine has actually given birth to Angel or if she has been a sort of substitute mother since she welcomed Angel in her home when her adoptive mother abandoned her. What we do know is that Angel is mixed, implying that at least one of her biological parents is white. There are indications in the novel that Angel's biological father could be her adoptive father, John Fairbanks. Before his death, John tells Angel: "I'm your father. Remember that" (168). These words spoken before he died, although they may seem trivial, can be interpreted as John's revelation of his paternity. If Jasmine has indeed been pregnant with Angel, John Fairbanks could actually be Angel's biological father. In this case, Cindy could or could not be Angel's biological mother depending on the surrogacy type. Thus, if John Fairbanks and Jasmine were the biological parents of Angel, it might explain why Cindy abandoned Angel after her husband's death, feeling that Angel was not her child. In fact, the narrator says at some point in the novel that Angel had not heard about Cindy since she had "finally done the impossible and become a real mother, giving birth to a boy" (97). This scene reinforces the idea that Cindy had never considered Angel her child. Racism obviously plays a part in Cindy's decision to abandon Angel, but it seems curious that Cindy would drastically change her mind and behaviour because of her fiancé's prejudices about black people. The frustration of not being Angel's biological parent, contrary to her husband, and the reaction of her fiancé which adds to this, could explain why Cindy decides to suddenly reject Angel.

Another possible theory is that Jasmine is a substitute mother for Angel and not the one who actually carried her. In this case, the hypothesis that John Fairbanks is Angel's biological father would still be possible since it is not known where, when, and in what conditions Angel was adopted. Angel's first name is incidentally reminiscent of the name Beryl gave her daughter, Angela. In the same way that it is not known who exactly adopted Beryl's daughter, it is not known how Angel was adopted or who her biological parents are. All we know about Beryl is that her child was pale when she was born, that she named her Angela, and that she was adopted by the white American man responsible for the rape, and his wife. As for Angel, what we know about her is that she is mixed, and she was adopted by white American parents. The first time Angel and Beryl meet, Angel, says of Beryl that she seems familiar and scary and that she feels fear, joy and happiness at the same time without knowing why (24). Beryl, for her part, comments on Angel's skin colour by saying: "You fava one of we except you skin light" (24), which translates into "you look like us except your skin is light". On the one hand, Beryl's words can be interpreted as saying that Angel looks like a Jamaican woman, like the people of Kristoff Village except for the fact that her skin colour is lighter. On the other hand, the fact that Angel feels that she knows Beryl and that she feels fear, joy, and anger at the same time could be explained by the fact that subconsciously Angel knows that Beryl is her mother. Indeed, Beryl says that when she hears the voice of the child calling her, the voice has an accusing tone, the child blames her for abandoning her. Angel feels anger when she sees Beryl without knowing why, which could potentially indicate that Angel is the child that Beryl hears. As already mentioned, the child's voice is louder when Angel and Rupert move in next door to Beryl's house. Moreover, it is said that Angel also hears a woman's voice calling her:

Someone was calling her. [...] She gulped for air, and felt as if she had been held under water, but still she heard the voice. It was a woman's voice, she was certain and although the woman wasn't saying her name, she knew the woman meant her.

Angel felt goosebumps on her arms; she thought she saw someone, yet when she spun round no one was there. (95)

It is quite curious that both Angel and Beryl coincidentally hear voices and that for Angel, it is a woman's voice and for Beryl, a child's voice. Furthermore, when Beryl is taken to the river to be healed, she hears the child's voice calling her for help and when she dives to go look for the child, she finds Angel (214-215). Throughout the novel, clues are scattered about the link that might unite Angel and Beryl, their stories seem to perfectly complement each other. The scene of the river could be a way for Opal Palmer Adisa to conclude this story and confirm the reader's doubts and the hypothesis that Angel is the daughter that Beryl abandoned years ago. If we follow that hypothesis, Angel is the result of Beryl's rape. Therefore, she is the biological daughter of her adoptive father, John Fairbanks. This would not only explain the light colour of Angel's skin since her mother is black and her father white, it would also explain why her adoptive mother, Cindy Fairbanks, no longer feels connected to Angel after the death of her husband. In reality, in such case, Cindy probably had no choice in adopting Angel since her husband had raped Beryl, and Mazie threatened to cast a spell on him if he did not adopt Angel. Obviously, this is only a hypothesis based on the elements given in the novel. The novel leaves a lot of room for doubt and freedom of interpretation. We do not know Beryl's age or Angel's. All that is known is that Angel considers Beryl an older sister, but if Beryl was Angel's mother, only eighteen years would separate them. It could be possible that Angel is about twenty-five since she went to university, and Beryl forty-three. This would explain not only the many coincidences between their two stories but also the fact that Cindy suddenly rejects Angel after the death of her husband.

### *After the trauma*

After her mother starts rejecting her, Angel is sent to a boarding school. During the holidays, she goes to summer camps or to Jasmine's house, who has set up a room for her. After being rejected by Cindy, Angel attempts suicide: "That night Angel dissolved sixty aspirins in her milk and drank it in one gulp. She awoke in a hospital room, and her therapy increased from once weekly to three times. But she did not speak, refused to eat, and was still recuperating when the new school year began" (96). Bahk, Jang, Choi, and Lee in their study, "The Relationship between Childhood Trauma and Suicidal Ideation: Role of Maltreatment and Potential Mediators", found that "anxiety fully mediated the relationship between suicidal ideation [...] and emotional abuse" (40) and that "Anxiety has been identified as an important risk factor for suicide in adults" (41). There are indications that Angel, in addition to her suicidal thoughts, is also suffering from anxiety. Angel is a very fearful person; she is afraid and anxious about everything she does not know. These scenes of anxiety and fear occur after her trauma, there is no indication of such fears when she was a child, before the trauma. For instance, Angel is scared of Beryl's dogs and "on the verge of panic" (23) when she first meets Beryl; she also distrusts Beryl and is found by Beryl screaming and crying in fear because of the cockroaches. Judith Lewis Herman has demonstrated that the symptoms of psychological trauma are "a feeling of 'intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation" (33). When she arrives in Kristoff Village, Angel suffers a panic attack because of the darkness:

Here, darkness was a thick, still life form that drew everything and everyone into it. Angel felt panic, as if she was watching someone who looked like her suddenly shoved into pitch darkness [...] Angel felt her palms sweating and shivered. She pressed her legs against the damp upholstery of the

cab seat and forced herself calm. It couldn't be as dark as she was experiencing it or they certainly would have plunged off the road, as curvy and precipitous as the climb had been. She made herself relax and breathe deeply. Look ahead, she reminded herself, look ahead. For a while she steadied herself by focusing on the gleam of the car's headlights on the road; but when she glanced back she realised that how quickly that light was swallowed up again by the dark night. [...] If she had not been immobilised by her fear of the darkness she would have sprung out of the car into the night. But no! Not into that darkness. It would devour her. Her body would probably never be found. [...] Rupert had also become a part of darkness; she was the only light. She held up her palms to her face for confirmation, but even these she could not make out. Darkness was taking her too. It was going to swallow her whole. (19-21)

In this excerpt, Angel is left completely paralysed by her fear of the dark. One can identify several signs of anxiety in this passage such as sweaty palms, intense fear, chills but also techniques to calm anxiety: deep breaths and remembering to look in front of her. Beyond the anxiety, one can also notice the omnipresent fear of being swallowed up by the darkness. This is reminiscent of what actress Lola Young writes about in *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*: "There is also in evidence in these anxious repetitions of colonial tropes, the fear of being re-absorbed into the dark, articulated as a fear of the dark or being swallowed, or ingested by the Other" (82). Indeed, Angel speaks at various times of being afraid of being absorbed and killed by the darkness. She also associates Rupert with this darkness, she says that he too has become part of the darkness (21). In this excerpt, there is also a ubiquitous lexical field of darkness versus light. Lola Young explains that these ideas of darkness and light are found in many late nineteenth century texts:

Similarly, much literary production during the late nineteenth century is replete with examples of "knowledge" about the character of Africans based on white supremacist attitudes towards 'race'. In particular the notion of atavism — the belief that the 'primitive' people of Africa constituted an earlier stage of human development — often recurs: all the references to primeval swamps, to

primitive rituals, the colonial subjects' perceived deficiency of language, intellect and culture attest to this belief. The texts are saturated with metaphors of 'darkness' infused with the presupposition of the positive association of whiteness, light, and so on, and negative attributes of blackness, dirtiness, ignorance, evil, and so on. (57)

Angel considers herself to be the light that it is about to be swallowed by the darkness. Considering the representation that Angel has of black and white people, it is difficult to imagine that there is no concurrence between her fear of the darkness and her misconceptions about black people. As Fanon explains: "the Antillean does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro" (*BSWM* 114). Indeed, Angel has always thought and always considered herself to be white, having been raised in the United States in a white context and by white parents. When she found out she was black, Angel expressed her disgust: "Please, anything but a nigger" (93). It is not trivial that Angel is afraid when she sees how the lights are being absorbed by the darkness, in reality, what she is afraid of is the Other because she has always associated negative connotations to black people. As an American, having behaved as and believed she was white for years, Angel fears being ingested and destroyed by the Other when she arrives in Kristoff Village.

Darkness only exists in relation to light. Darkness is precisely characterised by a lack of light, darkness is an absence of something. If we follow Lola Young's hypothesis about light and darkness as metaphors for white and black people, black people are characterised by an absence of whiteness. Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "the black man should no longer be confronted by the dilemma, turn white or disappear; but he should be able to take cognizance of a possibility of existence" (75). When Angel learns that she is black, she is not only disappointed to

be mixed but also and above all to not be white, as if all of a sudden she ceased to exist. After Angel's suicide attempt, Jasmine, the Jamaican maid, comes to see Angel in the hospital:

Angel would probably still be in that hospital if Jasmine hadn't turned up one afternoon to visit her. Black women have always spoken to each other. Straight. Getting right to the heart of the matter. [...] Then cupping Angel's chin so their glances were locked, she said 'Wha so bad about being coloured dat you go run from life?'

Angel hadn't thought about it in that way. Always it was that she wasn't white. It had never occurred to her that it might be perfectly fine to be coloured. But with Jasmine's hand still on her chin she allowed herself to reflect on that possibility. Who were the women she admired, and who showed her as much love as Cindy and John — or more? Jasmine, and before her at least three other women: Hortense, also from Jamaica, and Pam and Carol from Barbados and Grenada where she had gone several times on vacation. (96)

Angel had always considered so far that she was not white and thus, that she was missing something. Jasmine makes her realise that being mixed or being black is not an absence or a lack of anything. In *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, Reni Eddo-Lodge demonstrates that "neutral is white" (52), it is the norm while black on the contrary is the opposite of that, it stands for "the Other" (52). Eddo-Lodge argues that being mixed, having both white and black blood, does not change anything to that because people see you as a non-white person, as being different from them (62). The fact that Angel is partly white does not change anything in white people's behaviour, she is still not considered one of them. Jasmine explains to her that "de ground not even; not even at all, but we all have to learn to walk on it" (97). Eddo-Lodge discusses the problem of telling people and children that all human beings are equal (50), for, in truth, there is a whole series of problems that white people will never have to face:

And white privilege is an absence of the consequences of racism. An absence of structural discrimination, an absence of your race being viewed as a problem first and foremost, an absence of ‘less likely to succeed because of my race’. It is an absence of funny looks directed at you because you’re believed to be in the wrong place, an absence of cultural expectations, an absence of violence enacted on your ancestors because of the colour of their skin, an absence of a lifetime of subtle marginalisation and othering—exclusion from the narrative of being human. (52)

Although Angel suffered from racist remarks from her family and classmates, she was raised by her adoptive parents in a wealthy neighbourhood and in a big house. After her suicide attempt, Jasmine takes Angel into her home where she has prepared a room for her. Directly, as she catches a glimpse of Jasmine’s house, Angel regrets leaving the hospital: “Angel believed she had accepted being coloured until the cab stopped in front of what was to be her new home. It was nothing like what she had imagined. She didn’t want to be coloured any more. Nothing was familiar: not the way they spoke, what they ate, mostly not their familiarity, sharing everything, no privacy” (97). As a mixed child raised in the United States by white parents in a white neighbourhood, Angel is not familiar with Jamaican ways. Angel ignores everything about her black heritage and although she has always been seen as a black girl by white people, she has always felt more white than black as a child. After her experience at Jasmine’s house, Angel travels in Europe where she says she did not feel black or mixed as nobody ever asked her questions. While at first, she wanted to renounce her blackness at all costs, Angel gradually reconnects with her black heritage at the university when she takes a course on African religions: “Angel had taken a course in African religion, and she remembered reading that many of the West African native groups believed in ancestral spirits and worship. The longer she lived in Kristoff Village, the more the bits and pieces of information she had picked up seemed to fit together” (168). Opal Palmer Adisa in her interview with Elisa Serna



Martínez talks about how a course on African religion when she was at university in the United States changed her life:

When I went to College in the US, for the first time I took a class on African religion and that opened up my world. Before that, I was raised in Jamaica in what I think is a very narrow Judeo-Christian belief, Anglican. By the time I was thirteen I knew there had to be something else because for me, the God I was supposed to be worshipping was such a mean bastard. Everything we did was sin. [...] I just feel religion is such an oppressive tool in the Caribbean, and I think the way it is taught is a form of oppression, not a form of liberation. [...] Within my Black Power African kick, I realized that the motherland is not England, but Africa; this kind of profound shift in sensibility. I took a class on African religion and for the first time my world began to make sense. I saw elements of things in Jamaica that people whispered about, and you shouldn't look at. Elements of the Yoruba tradition in Pocomania, and in other practices that people do and that they don't have the name for it because they lost the names. (207-8)

In this interview, Adisa explains that she did not feel close to the religion that was prominent in Jamaica. She felt that she did not understand it until the day she discovered African religions in which she found many elements of Jamaican culture, elements that made much more sense to her. Like Adisa, Angel begins to understand herself when she takes the African religion course at university, this course is like a wake-up call for her. Gradually, Angel begins to accept her identity as a woman of colour and Kristoff Village allows her to retrieve her roots and finally find her place: “Kristoff Village was nothing like Brooklyn eleven years ago. She felt comfortable, as if she belonged here in a way she never had in Brooklyn, even long after she had accepted her identity, referred to herself as black, wore her hair in a short natural style and called herself Anaya” (98). It can be observed that when Angel arrives in Kristoff Village, she already begins to reject American culture in favour of the Jamaican one. It is said at several points in the novel that the villagers call Angel 'Miss American Lady' and that she hates it, something she probably would have liked when

she was younger. However, some of her prejudices sometimes resurface, such as when she talks about the inhabitants of Kristoff Village who see signs in nature, in the owls, the bushes, etc. : “A voice inside her head told Angel, ‘Pack your bags and return to civilisation, the good old USA.’ But another voice laughingly said, ‘You home, child, you home. You just don’t know it yet. Tek it easy.’ It was the Jamaican voice, she suddenly realised, taking the slip of paper from Charley’s hand” (167). In this scene, one can see that Angel is torn between two cultures, two countries. She hears both the American and the Jamaican voice inside her head and cannot figure out which one she should listen to. Nonetheless, Angel slowly lets go of her prejudices and starts to embrace Jamaican culture. Angel recognises in Kristoff Village some elements that she has learned through her course on African religions: “Their values and ways were ancient and, Angel suspected, could be found duplicated in many small villages throughout West Africa, where colonisation had not laid its infected hand” (172). Angel progressively detaches herself from the United States and the racist ideas she was taught at a younger age, Kristoff Village allows her to complete her rediscovery of her history and embrace it fully.

In accordance with Judith Lewis Herman's theory, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, the resolution of trauma occurs in three phases: securing the safety of the victim, the reconstruction and mourning of the trauma, and the reconnection with community members and normal life (155). In Angel's case, the three stages of healing take place over several years. Indeed, it can be considered that she is put in safety when she goes live with Jasmine, far from her adoptive mother, but it can also be considered that she is only safe when she arrives in Kristoff Village, protected by the women of the community. As already mentioned before, Angel’s trauma is only reported by the narrator, Angel never tells her story to anyone throughout the novel. In fact, after Angel tries to confront Cindy about her wish to go to Howard, it is said that: “Angel and Cindy never mentioned that incident again; it became one

of the many unmentioned aspects of their lives” (98). Herman argues that when a woman or child is the victim of abuse, “she may find that the most traumatic events of her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality” (8), as a consequence “her experience becomes unspeakable” (8). Yet silence poses a problem for the second phase of healing, which consists of the reconstruction of the trauma story. Although Angel does not tell her story, unlike Monica and Beryl, she does take the time to remember her trauma and to forgive “the white woman who hadn’t been big enough to raise a black girl” (189). Angel’s second phase of recovery concludes with the mourning of her trauma during the funeral of Miss Madge, Beryl’s mother:

As hard as Angel tried to control her emotions, she felt tears streaming down her cheeks. She wanted to wipe them away and conceal her grief, but Beryl held one of her hands and Rupert the other, and they both were crying, so she relaxed and enjoyed the warm, salty release her tears produced, realising that where she was she was not required to put on a brave exterior. Grief was not a shame to be experienced in private or concealed from the rest of the world. So Angel cried, for all that she had missed, for the biological mother and father she never knew and probably never would, and for finding love with Rupert who had brought her to his village where she felt peace at last. (198)

The community of Kristoff Village has succeeded in providing Angel with a protective environment where she feels free to cry and show her emotions. Angel finally gets a chance to express what she feels, everything she had buried over the years because she was ashamed of her emotions. Herman explains that it is common for a victim of chronic abuse, such as Angel who has been rejected over the years by her mother and society, to feel that they no longer have a real identity after the trauma (86). In most cases, they form a fragmented identity and “may be preoccupied with shame, self-loathing, and a sense of failure” (Herman 94). As already discussed before, Angel does not know who she is, she is torn between her American and Jamaican roots. When she learns that she is mixed and that her mother abandons her, she is disgusted and does not

accept herself as she is, to the point of trying to kill herself. The sense of identity that Angel had before the trauma has been destroyed, she must now learn to develop a new identity (Herman 196). After the trauma, Angel tries to rebuild herself, to go on an identity quest, but she struggles for years to find who she really is. It is in Kristoff Village that Angel finally finds peace. It is in Kristoff Village and in the members of the community that she finds the sense of belonging and family that she was so desperate for:

For the first time in years she thought affectionately of Cindy, and wondered how she was. Just before she and Rupert left to come to Jamaica, Jasmine had written to tell her that Cindy had cancer and was undergoing surgery.

‘I should write her,’ Angel said out loud.

‘Who?’ Rupert asked.

‘Cindy, who used to be my mother’, Angel replied, and it didn't hurt any longer. [...]

They all laughed, and Angel wasn't sad anymore, not about Mother Madge's death or about Grandmother Fairbanks or Grandma Ruth — not even about Cindy's rejection. She supposed, with great relief, that Kristoff Village was healing her and that it didn't matter that Beryl and Mother Madge weren't related by blood; they were related by spirit, and that was all that mattered. (171)

Angel fully comes to terms with her trauma in this passage, not only does she forgive Cindy and is willing to talk to her again, she also puts the trauma behind her. Herman has argued that healing and the development of a new self can only happen through connections with others (61, 133). After forgiving Cindy and putting the trauma behind her, Angel is overcome by a sudden desire to know her biological mother when she is in the river. At the same time and in the same location, Beryl hears the child's voice calling for help and when she dives to find the child, she discovers Angel. The hypothesis of a family tie between Beryl and Angel has already been discussed in the previous chapter, as Beryl could indeed be Angel's biological mother. Another possible option is that Angel and Beryl find each other in the river because they both crave the same thing, a family.

Even if Beryl is not Angel's mother, she soothes Angel, she acts for her as a mother figure, in the same way that Angel takes the place of the child that Beryl lost. As Herman demonstrates, after the resolution of the trauma, the victim who does not have children may manifest a wish to start a family (207), as does Angel after the birth of Arnella's baby: "Monica's face was light and peaceful, Miss Cotton's serene, but Angel was feeling her own emptiness. She and Rupert were married over a year now. Perhaps it was time to start a family" (89). Kristoff Village not only allows Angel to make peace with her past and finally find a sense of belonging but also to finally be able to stop looking back and look forward to the future.

## V. Chapter Four: Althea

Althea is Grace and Desmond's daughter. Not a lot is known about her, in fact, we learn more about Althea after her trauma than before. We do, however, have more information about the abuser, her mother, Grace. Like Monica's rape, Althea's trauma takes place during the period covered by the novel. However, since Althea's abuse takes place near the end of the novel, it is only possible to analyse the consequences of the trauma in the near future. There is no way to determine accurately whether Althea will suffer any long-term consequences of this trauma since this belongs to the future.

### *Trauma story*

Like Angel, Althea does not tell anyone about her trauma. This can be partly understood by the fact that there are witnesses of the scene, notably her brother, Peter, who runs to warn their father, Desmond. Desmond arrives on the scene and witnesses Grace's aggression on their daughter. As it has been done previously, we will try to analyse the scene of the abuse in order to detect any element that could indicate why Grace attacked her daughter so violently. The narrator gives the following account of Althea's aggression:

Desmond recovered, ran to the front, and recognised his youngest child, Peter, the one always sent on difficult errands. He was shouting for help, screaming something unrecognisable. Desmond leapt the gate and ran to meet his son. Holding him tightly by the arms, he ordered him to calm down.

'Daddy. Mamma killing Althea. Mamma killing Althea.'

[...] Already a few people had gathered and were inching their way towards the house. He pushed through them, bursting inside and the wetness that smeared his face was his daughter's blood. Grace was on top of a bleeding Althea beating her with a thorn stick and one of Desmond's leather belts

and cursing her at the top of her voice. All Desmond could make out was, 'Is you father and him whore's fault.'

Desmond sprang at Grace and grabbed at the belt. She reared at him like a tigress, hitting out and spitting. He freed the belt but she held fast to the stick, poking at him. He saw out of the corner of his eyes that Althea was naked, and blood flowed down her back. He kicked at Grace, tripping her; she clung to his feet and he felt her teeth trying to saw through his skin. [...] Only a grim blow to the side of her face caused her to let go of his leg, but she took with her a piece of his flesh. She began to scream and tore at her hair, shrieking, 'Peppa! Peppa! Peppa!' (159)

In this scene, one learns a little bit more about why Grace would beat her daughter. Grace yells at Althea that it is her father's and Monica's fault, implying that she is angry because of their relationship. However, Althea has nothing to do with this story, she is innocent. Herman in her chapter entitled "Child abuse" establishes that children who are abused are frequently blamed by the abusive parent for many problems, such as family ones (103-4). In this case, Grace does not actually blame Althea for Desmond's extramarital relationship with Monica, yet Althea is the one she is taking revenge on. It is common for survivors of child abuse, such as Grace, to direct their anger and violence against those who did not cause it (Herman 104). In her book, Herman recounts the testimony of a child abused by his mother:

There weren't any rules; the rules just kind of dissolved after awhile. I used to dread going home. I never knew what was going to happen. The threat of a beating was terrifying because we saw what my father did to my mother. There's a saying in the army: "shit rolls downhill". He would do it to her and she would do it to us. One time she hit me with a poker. After awhile I got used to it. I would roll up in a ball. (99)

What this survivor of child abuse explains is that their mother used to beat them because their father was also violent with her. Probably not in a position to express, to externalise this violence, the mother redirected this violence against her children. This is in line with what Fanon says in *The*

*Wretched of the Earth*, the natives learned violence from the colonisers during colonisation, this violence that was learned, that was “deposited in his bones” (52) has to come out one way or another (52). Fanon explains that, at first, the native will redirect this violence against his own community (Fanon, *TWE* 52). This is exactly what happens with Grace, she cannot channel the anger she feels against Desmond and Monica, and so she expresses her anger on a person on whom she can manifest this violence, in this case, her daughter, Althea. This is not the first time that this phenomenon of anger displacement has been observed in a text by Opal Palmer Adisa. Indeed, in the short story "Brethren" from the collection *Until Judgement Comes*, a character says that he almost killed a child because he was angry:

Jacob reflects on the time he came close to chopping off the little brown boy's head. If he had done so, it would not have had anything to do with the child, nor would his action have freed him. The little boy was merely the loudspeaker. The person who was blaring the noise was hidden. Destroying the loudspeaker would not stop the person whose orders would still determine his life. Jacob had to find the person responsible for setting the chain of events in motion. (22)

It is obvious in this passage that the child is not responsible for the anger that Jacob feels. He recognises that the child would probably make an easy victim but he realises that it would be useless to hurt the child because the child is not the one he is angry at. Unfortunately, in the case of Althea, Grace does not realise that hurting Althea will not solve her problem. In *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory* (2008), sociologist Randall Collins, demonstrates that in order for violence to occur “the persons involved must find a pathway around confrontational tension/fear. The most prominent of such pathways is attacking a weak victim” (134). Collins states that a victim can be weak because of the situation, the helplessness of the victim, the fact that they cannot defend themselves allows the aggressor to attack them (135). Besides the situation, a victim may also be



weak and powerless because of her status or relationship to the abuser, for example, children. Children and adolescents are much more vulnerable than adults and therefore more prone to abuse (Herman 60). In Althea's case, her mother feels it is her right to beat Althea because she is her mother, and Althea cannot defend herself. Furthermore, Collins argues that violent people are not violent at all times, they become violent because of “situational circumstances” (136). When Grace beats Althea, she claims it is because of Desmond and Monica’s affair, so it can be assumed that if that event had not taken place, she might not have resorted to violence. Finally, Collins also writes that certain background factors contribute to an increased likelihood of becoming violent, such as previous abuse:

Being a prior victim of abuse is yet another background condition; although often asserted as an explanation of violence, it has the same shortcomings. A considerable body of evidence supports the point that persons who were victims of child abuse tend later in their lives to become themselves perpetrators—not only of abuse but also other crimes of violence (and other forms of social deviance). (136)

Grace has also been a victim of abuse, having been traumatised as a child by her mother who forced her to spend the night outside to overcome her fears. However, the consequences of Grace’s trauma will be discussed in more detail in the next section dedicated to what happened prior to Althea’s trauma.

### ***Before the trauma***

As previously mentioned, Grace went through a traumatic event as a child. It is said that Grace was already a fearful child before her trauma, her mother, believing she was helping her, locked her out at night to fight her fears. As we know, it had the opposite effect, Grace's mother found her “curled

up on the ground, foaming at the mouth” (61). After this trauma, Grace's fears increased to the point of “often sending her off for days, immobilised and foaming” (61). There is no doubt that this event in Grace’s life had critical consequences on her, notably on her behaviour and the way she handles problems. Herman argues that although a lot of survivors of abuse do not become abusive themselves, some do become perpetrators (113). Grace is part of this minority of victims of abuse who become aggressive themselves. Indeed, we learn from the narrator that Grace is “a good enough mother, and although rather too quick to reach for and use the belt” (56). The beating of Althea by her mother is not an isolated event, it is part of a long list of violent acts perpetrated by Grace, on her children and others. Although Grace more often resorts to physical violence, she also uses emotional abuse, such as when she forces her son, Peter, to deliver the food she prepares for Desmond to Monica's house. Nordstrom observes in *Terror Warfare and the Medicine of Peace*, that people who have witnessed violence learn violence and reproduce it (115). Nordstrom and Herman concur that people who have been abused, or who have witnessed violence, tend to resort to violence to solve their own problems instead of using other methods, such as communication (Nordstrom 115-116; Herman 104). This kind of behaviour can be observed in Grace, who is a victim of childhood trauma. Grace’s mother had already used emotional abuse to help Grace overcome her fears, although she blamed herself for it and never locked Grace outside again. Grace has, in part, learned violence from this traumatic event and has the belief that violence is the solution to any problem. This can be seen at different times in the novel, such as when she participates in Monica's gang rape because Monica is having an affair with her husband, Desmond. It is also evident when she beats her children and especially when she almost beats her daughter, Althea, to death because of the anger she feels towards Desmond and Monica. It is also probably not insignificant for Grace to attack Althea in particular when it is said that Althea has always been a “daddy’s girl” (159). It is possible that Grace attacks Althea in order to take revenge on Desmond

since she knows it will hurt Desmond even more. Finally, it is also hard to ignore the fact that Grace does not like being a mother because she finds “the task too burdensome, and her most pleasurable days were every fortnight when she took the bus alone to Savanalamar to visit her parents” (61). It is worth considering that Grace may not like being a mother either because she never recovered from the trauma and is still in a way that fearful child who needs her parents.

Certain elements of Grace's trauma are reflected in the people around her, including, as already mentioned, the violence she learned. However, violence is not the only consequence of Grace's trauma that affects her loved ones. Herman explains that when aggressors are family members, the victim may feel like she is a 'captive', these types of trauma deeply affect the victim and destroy her identity and the image she has of her body (93): “The result, for most victims, is a contaminated identity. Victims may be preoccupied with shame, self-loathing, and a sense of failure” (94). During the scene where all the women gather at the river for the healing ritual, Althea is not comfortable getting naked in front of the other women in the community:

Althea, the youngest, and not accustomed to undressing in front of others, especially since her mother had told her that nakedness was an affront, felt very awkward. [...]  
She was also shy, having been raised by a mother who felt her body was ugly and even a sin, and so had warned her to cover up and not let anyone look upon it. (213)

Grace's shame about her body and her discomfort have direct roots in the trauma she suffered as a child. Nevertheless, as we can see in the scene above, Grace passes on this shame, and this self-consciousness about her body to her daughter, Althea. Psychologists Garbarino and Gilliam define the concept of intergenerational transmission as followed: “The premier developmental hypothesis in the field of abuse and neglect is, of course, the notion of intergenerational transmission, the idea that abusing parents were themselves abused as children and that neglect breeds neglect” (111).

The same way that violence can be transmitted from one generation to the other, trauma can also affect the next generation. Indeed, psychiatrists Yehuda and Lehrner argue that “There is now converging evidence supporting the idea that offspring are affected by parental trauma exposures occurring before their birth, and possibly even prior to their conception” (243). Indirectly, Althea also suffers the consequences of her mother's trauma. Grace's trauma however took place well before Althea's birth, but Grace's post-traumatic syndrome is partly transmitted to Althea. Althea feels embarrassed and ashamed of her nudity because her mother herself had not been well in her body since her trauma. Moreover, Althea is afraid to get naked because the women will realise that she is pregnant. However, Miss Cotton had already noticed her pregnancy when she took care of her after Grace beat her. Miss Cotton had claimed that that was the reason Grace had hit Althea. As has been examined before, sex is considered taboo and shameful in Kristoff Village. Monica is insulted because she takes advantage of her liberated sexuality. It is therefore not common to talk about sexuality and reproduction with children, even less so in the case of Grace, who is already not confident in her skin. This is reflected in the scene in which Monica and Althea discuss Althea's pregnancy:

‘Ah neva sleep wid him, Aunty Monica. Him tek me down near de riva and we did lean up against a tree. Him tell me ah couldn’t get pregnant if we no lay down.’

Monica sighed. She imagined how little Grace had probably told the girl about her body, or about getting pregnant. (205)

In this excerpt, it is clear that Althea has not been educated at all about how one gets pregnant, she has to rely on what the boy tells her, which is incorrect. The fact that Grace did not talk to Althea about sex is also an indirect consequence of Grace's trauma, who considers the body, and therefore sex a sin. Several factors in Grace's background may explain why she came close to killing her

daughter, her traumatic experience reflects on Althea, who suffers the consequences of Grace's unresolved trauma.

### *After the trauma*

One of probably the most direct and proximate consequences of the trauma is the madness that takes Grace. She had already manifested elements of insanity when she hit Althea and bit a piece of her husband's leg and she cried out "Peppa! Peppa! Peppa!" (159). It seems that Grace's insanity is due to several factors, although Monica thinks it is the consequence of her participation in her rape. Although this hypothesis is probable, one specific element leads to another explanation when Desmond comes back to the family home: "He had been home to find that Grace, in a little girl's voice, kept calling to the women who were looking after her, 'Mama come plait me hair'" (185). In this scene, Grace seems to go back to her childhood, which the narrator confirms with the following: "the day after Grace almost beat her daughter to death, bit out a piece of her husband's leg, then quietly returned to her childhood, hanging on to her mother's dress" (189). The fact that Grace calls after her mother when she is with the women who care for her is consistent with what Herman says about traumatised people: "In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection" (52). Although in this case, Grace is not the victim anymore but the perpetrator, it can be suggested that hurting her daughter, like her mother did to her, reminded her of her own childhood trauma. Similarly, when Grace is taken to the river to try to calm her madness, she attempts to drown herself. According to a study on adverse childhood experience, which comprises childhood trauma such as emotional abuse, survivors of such experiences are 2 to 5 times more likely than people without such experiences to attempt suicide (Dube et al. 3089-3090). This could be yet another consequence of Grace's trauma and imply that

her trauma is still unresolved or has resurfaced as a result of her violent acts towards both Monica and Althea.

As previously stated at the beginning of this chapter, we do not know a lot about the sequelae that Althea will keep from her trauma. Indeed, it is too soon to evaluate whether Althea will be affected by her trauma all her life, even if, from what we have seen so far, most trauma survivors do keep sequelae. Obviously, when Grace beats Althea after raping Monica, it is an extremely violent and traumatic episode, but it is not the first time that Grace has been violent towards Althea. Grace regularly whips their children, according to Desmond, which creates a heavy and violent atmosphere in the family home (56). Opal Palmer Adisa tells Elisa Serna Martínez in her interview, that “in the Caribbean physical beating is allowed” (214) and that many mothers who have been cheated on or whose partner has left, redirect their anger at their children (213). Adisa explains that this violence and anger is in part caused by the trauma that the women have had no time to heal from (Serna Martínez 213). Grace is burdened with two unresolved traumas, one when she was a child and the trauma of her husband cheating and leaving her, that are causing her to act incredibly violently. Althea, as her daughter, finds herself stuck in this situation and in her violent family context. Herman demonstrates that a family home, which acts as a place of captivity, can be the site of repeated and prolonged trauma (94). Such situations leave marks on the victims, especially on their sense of self. The victim's identity is forever changed as well as her relationship with her body (Herman 93). Survivors of this type of repeated abuse often feel uncomfortable and “unsafe in their bodies” (Herman 160). It has been shown previously that Althea is not comfortable with nudity and her body because her mother passed on the legacy of her trauma to her. However, Grace has been a victim of the same type of abuse that she is inflicting on Althea, namely child abuse, whether physical or psychological. It is therefore conceivable that

Althea has a bad relationship with her body because she herself is suffering the consequences of the abuse she suffers at the hands of her mother.

In *Grace and Althea*, we find two similar traumas that have very opposite outcomes. On the one hand, Grace is unable to overcome her trauma, probably because she never got the help she needed, and continues to suffer from it decades later. Even at the end of the novel, Grace becomes insane, and while she definitely needs therapy, she is sent home for lack of space in the psychiatric hospital. On the other hand, Althea is taken care of right after the traumatic incident. For a trauma victim to heal, three steps are essential: getting the victim to safety, reconstructing the traumatic event, and reconnecting with community members (Herman 3). Althea is put into safety straight away when her father comes to save her from Grace. She is then taken to Olive's house where Olive heals her wounds before bringing her to the hospital in view of the severity of her injuries. Herman analyses that when it is a family member who is the perpetrator of the abuse, as here in Althea's case, the least safe place for the victim is the family home (162). In situations such as these, the victim often abandons or loses loved ones or their home in order to escape and put a stop to the abuse (Herman 172). Althea has to break all ties with her mother who abuses her if she wants to have a chance to move on and leave the trauma behind her. When she comes back from the hospital, Althea is brought to Monica's house so that Miss Cotton and Desmond can look after them both at the same time. After a few days, Arnella suggests that Althea stays with Monica and tells Monica that she must act as a mother for Althea now that her mother is no longer around. Monica takes the opportunity to ask for Althea's forgiveness, telling her that she never meant to hurt anyone and offers Althea to stay with her: "You can stay wid me if you like cause me no have nothing against you and you broda dem. Me no know much bout being no moda, but me is a good listener, me try to be fair and me love laughter" (203). Monica provides Althea with a safe place for her to live in, away from the family home and Grace. Althea accepts Monica's offer and tells her that she

does not think her mother will ever come back since she does not like Kristoff and always wanted to be with her own mother (204). Once Althea has been put into safety, normally, the second step of recovery consists of the reconstruction of the trauma. However, in Althea's case, there were witnesses of the abuse, people already know what happened and who is the abuser. In order "to hold traumatic reality in consciousness", Herman argues, there is a need for "a social context that affirms and protects the victims and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance" (9). The role of the community, once they are aware of the abuse that took place, is "to repair the injury" (Herman 70). The community does that by taking both Althea and Monica to the river to heal them. Follows a ritual to heal the victims, during which the women of the community anoint Althea's body. Herman insists on the importance of the community and relationships in the last stage of recovery (133):

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (214)

For Althea, this stage of recovery is particularly important because, with the trauma, she lost her mother. The group of women allows her to feel surrounded again and supported by those she calls "aunt, mamma, sister" (213). In them, she finds a new family to welcome her and it is thanks to them, that she eventually accepts the child she is carrying. Herman explains that the best signs of trauma resolution are the victim's desire to leave the trauma behind her and focus on the future (211). The survivor is ready to rebuild herself and "become the person she wants to be" (Herman



202), Herman adds that in some cases the survivor may even express the wish to build a family (207). Thanks to the support of the women in the community and the support of Monica, Althea feels ready to face the future with serenity. While initially, she had wanted the child she was carrying to disappear, she is finally beginning to accept it and make plans for the future with that child. Therefore, Althea asks Monica to help her raise her daughter:

She rubbed her stomach, smiling; she was going to be a mother, and she would be a good one to her daughter. Althea felt brave then. She raised her head, and looking at Monica in the eyes said, 'Ah gwane have a daughter and ah would like you to help me raise her.'

Monica stared at this girl who had come to her through her pain, and felt capable of accepting the honour bestowed on her. 'If ah gwane help you raise you daughter, then ah gwane be needing you blessing.'

Althea cupped her hand and rinsed off Monica's body. The sun was full and bright when they emerged. (219)

Althea feels ready for this new life as a mother with Monica at her side to help her. Moreover, Althea says in this passage that she will be a good mother to her daughter, implying that she will not be violent with her, thus stopping the transmission of the trauma and violence inherited from her mother.

## VI. Conclusion

The present thesis aimed to decode why and how people resort to violence and what are the consequences of these acts of violence. It has been demonstrated in this work that individual backgrounds and pasts are of paramount importance in the development of violence. Poverty, previous abuse, relationship problems, are all factors that can trigger violent behaviour. Many theorists, including Fanon and Nordstrom, argue that violence is learned; the perpetrators may have learned it because they have been themselves a victim of abuse or because they witnessed violence (Fanon 52; Nordstrom 115). This hypothesis seems to be partially confirmed by Opal Palmer Adisa at two points in the novel:

Wickedness was a woman, could be any woman wronged or believing she was wronged, any woman who separated herself from the clan, any woman who forgot that she wasn't invincible, any woman who didn't know that if you spit in the sky it was bound to fall on you. (160)

I said Grace might be foolish but she is a woman too and even the mildest woman can be prompted to sting or bite or kill. (158)

In these excerpts, Adisa insists that any woman could become violent if circumstances were favourable to the development of violence. This is consistent with the idea that violence is indeed learned and that anyone can become violent when put in conditions that encourage the development of violence. One can indeed imagine that if Grace had not been abused as a child or Marva had not suffered extreme poverty while growing up, they would not have acted the way they did.

Another determining factor in the development of violence is the legacy of slavery and colonisation. When the white American man rapes Beryl, a young black Jamaican woman, it is hard not to see the racism behind it. The man considers that he has the right as a white American

to sexually abuse black women as slave masters did with their slaves (Davis 183). The Caribbean is seen as a place where everything is allowed, where it is possible for whites to live out their colonial fantasy as slave masters (Sánchez Taylor 42). This man's white privilege also means that he will never be held responsible for his actions, since Beryl, as a black Jamaican woman, would not only not be believed by the hotel manager, but also fired for accusing a white tourist of sexual abuse. It would be utopian to think that justice would have been done if she had reported the rape.

Finally, while violence can be learned, Norstrom argues that it can also be unlearned:

But the people in Mozambique stressed that if violence is made, it can be unmade as well. The great majority of Curandeiros and Curandeiras with whom I spoke throughout Mozambique had developed sophisticated techniques to heal traumatized war victims in a way that reduced violence in general. (116)

The women of the community of Kristoff Village can be compared to Mozambique's Curandeiros. With their solidarity and support, and their healing powers inherited from their ancestors, they help Monica, Althea, and Beryl recover from their trauma. Althea is surrounded and taken care of directly by the women of the community after her trauma. This allows Althea to rebuild herself as quickly as possible and to stop the process of transmission of violence. In contrast to Althea's example, her mother, Grace, has never been cared for and has never had the opportunity to heal and resolve her trauma. She continues to live with the consequences of her trauma all her life, becomes violent towards her children, Monica, and her husband, and eventually goes insane. Althea and Grace are both victims of child abuse, the different outcomes of their traumas lie only in the way their traumas were dealt with, reminding us of the importance of the process of healing and resolution of the trauma. The example of Althea shows how early care has a positive effect on the victim and gives hope for a potential solution to stop the transmission of violence.

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