

# Bridging the Gap: Privileged vs. Underprivileged in Suzan-Lori Parks in the Blood

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 25.04.2021 Accepted: 15.05.2021 Final Version: 25.05.2021</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: Emmerencia Beh Sih</p> <p>PhD Scholar, Email: <a href="mailto:emme.brava@yahoo.com">emme.brava@yahoo.com</a> <a href="mailto:emme.brava7@gmail.com">emme.brava7@gmail.com</a></p>	<p>The objective of this article is to assess the different marginalized groups in society and demonstrate how they still negotiate with their oppressors so as to create their own identities. The power struggle is an important concern that exists in all societies today. In Parks' <i>In the Blood</i>, the different types of power relations that exist are at the level of race, class and gender which cause separation in the society. The issues of race, gender and class are fundamental in this play. This study problematizes three main concerns of contemporary drama— race, class and gender which are controversial to the American society and center on social inequality, oppression and downgrading. The thrust of the paper is to demonstrate how the underprivileged groups are treated in mainstream society and to evaluate how they still quest for self-hood in such states. In spite of the evolutionary trends of the “Black Lives Matter” and the spill-out that “All Lives Matter”, equality, justice and peace are far-fetching in American society. The new historicist approach suits this context since it discusses power relations in the different groups in the society as encapsulated in Parks' <i>In the Blood</i>. Tyson articulates: “The vehicle by which power circulates is a never-ending proliferation of exchange” (1). Power flows at diverse levels. Characters that are relegated by the privileged in Parks' play preoccupy themselves with constructing their own identities of race, class and gender, and make their voices clearly heard.</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Bridging, Gaps, Privileged, underprivileged, race, class, gender</p>

## Introduction

In the mainstream society, being black or a woman is a problem and it becomes worse when the woman is poor. Suzan-Lori Parks' play exposes the segmentation grouping in the American society. With the claim that America is the land for all, a place of justice and equality, Parks' plays bring out the contradictions in such assertions as she discloses the rate of injustice, oppression and inequality which is still very much in place in her society as represented in her texts. Parks presents the challenges of the oppressed and how they strive to find a voice in the presence of their counterparts.

## Condemnation vs. Resistance

In the Blood, Hester La Negrita, the protagonist, is condemned by the society because of her race, class and gender. In the prologue of the play, the chorus that Parks names “ALL” in a collective voice mocks and criticizes Hester:

*ALL  
SHE KNOWS SHES A NO COUNT  
SHIFTLESS  
HOPELESS  
BAD NEWS*

## BURDEN TO SOCIETY

*HUSSY*

*SLUT*

*PAH!*

*JUST PLAIN STUPID IF YOU ASK ME AINT NO SMART*

*WOMAN GOT 5 BASTARDS*

*AND NOT A PENNY TO HER NAME*

*SOMETHINGS GOTTA BE DONE TO STOP THIS SORT*

*OF THING*

*CAUSE I'LL BE DAMNED IF SHE GONNA LIVE OFF ME.*

*LET HER PASS*

*DON'T GET CLOSER (7-8)*

Hester is treated poorly in her own social environment due to her predicament of being a poor black woman with five fatherless children. The members of this hypocritical society who are supposed to protect and defend the rights of their members instead contribute in their exploitation, sexploitation and ironically see them as a “burden to the society” (7). Hester is called “slut” by the same people who sexually exploit her. Hogg, Michael and Dominic Abrams in “Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes” see Identity as people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of

people they are, and how they relate to others" (2). Hester is perceived in her own society as a licentious being. In the opening scene of the play, the word 'slut' is written on the walls of Hester's house under the bridge which makes her study place untidy. Unlike the people who mock and insult her, her social status gives room for her to be viewed as "bad news" to the society. The chorus, still in the opening scene tells us that:

*SHE DONT GOT NO SKILLS  
CEPT ONE  
CANT READ CANT WRITE.  
SHE MARRIED?  
WHAT DO YOU THINK? (6)*

Without critical analysis, one may be forced to condemn Hester for being an illiterate if her words and actions are not analysed with a diverse mind. The stage direction tells us that the "letters" of the word "slut" are "mysterious to her". According to Francis M. Deng in "War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan", identity is used to "describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture" (1). We are also told that she cannot read and write beyond the letter A. Though the society sees her as an illiterate who can neither read nor write, she resists and steadfastly declares to her white friend Amiga Gringa that "I can write my damn name. Im not such a fool that I can't write my own goddamn name. I can write my goddamn name" (32). It is therefore absurd to say that the letters of the word slut are mysterious to Hester because it is evident that she can read and even know the meaning of the word:

**Hester**

*We know who writ it up there. It was them bad boys writing on my home. And in my practice place. Do they write on they own homes? I don't think so. They come under the bridge and write things they don't write nowhere else. A mean ugly word, I'll bet. A word to hurt our feelings. And because we aint lucky we gotta live with it. 5 children I got. 5 treasures. 5 joys. But we aint got our leg up, just yet. So we gotta live with mean words and hurt feelings. (12)*

From the above view, it is apparent that Hester cannot only read the word but even knows that it is an "ugly word" which "hurt [their] feelings". In such cases, saying that Hester is an illiterate is questionable.

Though Hester is condemned for being an illiterate, she resists this illusion since there is evidence in the play that suggests she

is not illiterate or at least not as illiterate as at first impression and as previous critics suggest. It is also difficult to accept that Hester can only read and write one letter (A). This is because the one letter, (A) composed of other letters. For example, letter A composes of "V" which can easily become "W", "M", "N" and "Y". Another evidence can be seen when the Doctor asks her to read the "SPAY" in the "eye exam chart" (41), there is no prove that she cannot read the word because of her response; she asks for glasses not because she could not read like many critics will say but because she could not see. Besides justifying Hester as one who is literate, illiteracy in this context is looked upon beyond reading and writing. Illiteracy means not knowing well about a particular subject. In this play, the fact that Hester can take care of her children and even forego her own self for them makes her a good example of an African- American woman and hence, a non-illiterate.

## Racial and Gender Boundaries Insurrection

Parks presents the representatives of the society as people who instead of taking their responsibilities to help the dregs of the society decide to exploit them. All the governmental representatives take advantage of the have-nots of the society and see them as lucrative objects of exploitation even though they are in need. The representatives separate themselves from the same people they are commissioned to serve.

The Doctor who is a white and a representative of the medical institution humiliates Hester by doing a medical examination in a public street as if she were an animal. He queries her about her severe stomach pain which comes as a result of starvation. The Doctor in his confession attempts to distance himself from Hester despite his former intimacy when he says "I wouldn't touch her without gloves but then (Rest) we did it once in that alley there" (44). In spite of his exploitative attitude, he ironically calls himself "a man of the people" like Achebe's chief Nanga when he says:

**Doctor**

*When I see a woman begging on the streets I guess I could  
bring her in my house  
sit her at my table  
make her a member of my family, sure.  
But there are hundreds and thousands of them  
And my house cant hold them all.  
Maybe we should all just take one.  
Except they wouldnt really fit with us. (44)*

From the Doctor's speech, one is convinced that he can be very helpful in the society but ironically, he is very cunning. Bate Besong in *Disgrace: Autobiographical Narcissus* affirms the greedy nature of leaders and warns them on what may befall them in future if they do not change. As far as he is concerned, these leaders are "Greedy dogs that bark at his own... Look the South West Treasures with fake bills! (49). Thus, Besong warns these dogs (leaders) that they should use their eyes today to see their wrongs and make an effort to change rather than use the same eyes to cry in future when the tide shall turn, when he says: "isn't it better to use your eyes today to see than to use it tomorrow to cry" (49). The Doctor exploits Hester sexually who at first thought that sex could liberate her but finally realizes that it instead imprisoned her more. Later in the play, he explains that his sexual encounter with her was "phenomenal" (45). He tells us that he could not help himself in that situation. According to Harry Elam, both the Doctor and the Welfare Lady justify their organized exploitation of Hester through finding that the sexual desire enables them to cross boundaries of class and good manners in order to attain some kind of self-pleasure. But the case is different with Hester who "finds no sense of self, no freedom in these acts. Sex does not liberate her from but only imprisons her more in the system" (123). Though The Doctor and his wife, The Welfare Lady sexually exploit Hester, they still do not see her as equal. They sleep with her for their own sexual gratifications but Hester does not see it as any form of liberation but bondage.

Men in the American society believe they are superior to women as in the case all over the world, and so, they are apt to exploit them. In Bessie Head in *The Collector of Treasures* states: "The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded in a congenial sense, as being an inferior form of human life. To this day, a woman still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of life" (92). It is from this inferior position that a black woman is struggling to rise. With the limited power at her disposal, she tries to make a better life. Black women like Hester are oppressed not only by the white men but also by the black men and women as well. This position given to men makes them look upon themselves as superior to the women. The Doctor also tries to

make her less of a woman when he insists on conducting heteronomy on her so as to prevent her from having more children. Doing that challenges her womanhood. The Doctor only attends to Hester because it is his responsibility to do so. This is evident when he says: "every blemish on your record is a blemish on mine... you and your children live as you please Im the one The Higher Ups hold responsible" (37).

Also, in scene seven, Chilli, Hester's first love, proves himself superior to her because of his gender though he is a black man who is controlled by the whites. Lois Tyson states in a new historicist view point that power does not only originate from the top of the political and socio-economic structure. This means that the marginalized groups in the society also marginalize others as they feel superior to them. This is evident in Chilli's dialogue with Hester:

**Chilli**

*But I would still retain my rights to my manhood. You understand.*

**Hester**

*Sure. My\_*

**Chilli**

*Yr kid. We'll get to him. I would rule the roost. I would call the shots. The whole roost and every single shot. I've proven myself as a success. Youve not done that. It only makes sense that I would be in charge (93).*

From this discussion, it is evident that the women themselves accept the lesser position which the men assign to them because of the society's programming which places women beneath men. The chauvinistic ideologies see women as subordinate and as bearers of children. In Emercheta's *The Bride Price*, when Adah invites Francis to read the manuscript, he responds "you keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are a black. The white man can barely tolerate us men to say nothing to brainless females like you who could think of nothing except how to breast feed her baby" (178). The representation of black women in Emercheta's novel is also manifested in the life of Parks' Hester in *In the Blood*. Although Hester faces lots of challenges, she tries harder to construct a new identity in which she can make a decision for herself and not be pushed or directed by a man:

**Hester**

*Yeah.*

*(Rest)*

*I woulda run after you but-*

**Hester**

*I seed you and I called out yr name but I didn't run after you.*

*(Rest)*

*You look good. I mean you always looked good but now you look better.*

*(Rest)*

*I didn't run after you. I didn't give you away. (86)*

The fact that Hester does not run after her first love, Chilli, though she is aware of his whereabouts indicates she can live an independent life and single handedly take care of her children. By so doing, she proves herself to be an autonomous woman who does not need a man to make her succeed or bear her burden. If she had been in need of such assistance, she would have informed The Welfare Lady where her “mens” are.

Apart from Chilli and the Doctor who exploit Hester, Reverend D, an African American man who is a symbol of the religious body also exploits Hester sexually. This reveals that all the men who accuse her of sexual promiscuity and immorality are not free from it too. They make this known through their confessions. Deborah Gies argues that, “each of them has literally screwed Hester by profiting from their sexual exploitation of her” (81). They exploit her by using their strength as men following the society’s view of their position. Though Hester’s act is openly condemned by the society, the sins of the men who sexually abuse her are unknown under ‘perfect face of pretense’.

Reverend D who is supposed to represent the church uses Hester as his sexual tool for satisfaction. Their illicit relationship results in Hester having her youngest child- Baby. Michael Foucault holds that power flows at all levels and in every point, which proves that even the plagued are also oppressors. Instead of protecting his people and community, Reverend D hypocritically acts as though he has nothing to do with Hester and her son, who is also his son. By presenting such figures, Parks satirizes the religious bodies that preach one thing and practise another. Though he preaches about charity and assisting the underprivileged, he never takes any positive action in assisting Hester and his son. When she tells him about Baby being his son, he asks her to leave, calls her a slut and even threatens to crush her underfoot:

**Reverend D.**

*I'll have my lawyer deliver the money. Its better if you dont come back. Its too dangerous. My following are an angry bunch. They dont like the likes of you.*

**Hester:** *But you do. You like me.*

**Reverend D.:** *Youd better go.*

**Hester:** *Why you don't like me? Why you don't like me no more?*

*(He tries to go back inside. HESTER grabs a hold of him)*

**Hester:** *Don't go.*

**Reverend D.:** *Take yr hands off me.*

**Hester:** *Why you don't like me?*

*(They struggle.... He brutally twists her hand. She recoils in pain and falls to the ground.)*

**Reverend D.:** *Slut.*

*(Rest)*

*Dont ever come back here again! Ever! Yll never get nothing from me! Common Slut. Tell on me! Go on! Tell the*

*world! I'll crush you underfoot. (102-3)*

The Reverend in this scene criticizes the same action he himself is guilty of. Though he takes part in Hester’s promiscuity, he calls her a ‘slut’. He asks her never to come back so that he can keep his abusive actions hidden. This exposes the ill-treatment given to the underclass by people who “be” in the society. Presenting this is just a way of disclosing that there is no institution which is free from injustice and immorality and though it may not be visible, that does not make it non-existent. This play also portrays how patriarchal societies push women to act wrongly and then judges and condemns them. The patriarchal model in Parks’ play has no colour boundary since the male oppressors are both blacks and whites.

Parks’ women are clearly victims of a repressive patriarchal society. Hester is victimized by her gender as she passionately desires to be a good mother. She starves herself just to ensure that her children feed well. She provides them with their needs and tells them stories to make them sleep. She is an example of a real African American mother. Black women are represented in dominant culture as rough and of no importance. Nevertheless, Parks presents a black mother as someone who “at all cost, nurtures, protects, self-sacrifice” and cares for her children. Hester La Negrita depicts a resilient and strong woman who still stands firm in spite of all odds. In such a state, she still creates a new identity and self –respect for herself. She deconstructs the general perceptions and ideologies against her and defines herself differently. The society calls her ‘slut’ and her children ‘bastards’ but she calls them her ‘treasures’ and her ‘joy’ repeatedly on pages 7,12,21,22,23 and 50. This unique and alternative way of viewing herself gives her another identity and proves her own self-respect which is different from the capitalist perception of society. The manner in which she metaphorically presents herself in the story means that she identifies herself differently.

As other mothers, she devotes her time and energy to taking care of her children and tells them stories to make them sleep. Her story of the five brothers and a princess designates her personal construction of herself:

*There were once these five brothers [. . .] And there was this Princess. And she lived in a castle and she was lonesome. She was lonesome and looking for love but she couldn't leave her castle [. . .] And one day the five brothers heard her and came calling and she looked upon them and she said: "There are five of you, and each one is wonderful and special in his own way. But the laws of my country doesn't allow a princess to have more than one husband." And that was such bad news and they were all so in love that they all cried. Until the Princess had an idea. She was after all the Princess, so she changed the law of the land and married them all. (19-20)*

From the story, Hester metaphorically recounts the story of her own life. This story may be a justification for her actions and her five fatherless children. She metaphorically calls herself a princess who changes the law of her society and marries the five brothers because of her independent decisions and needs. Similarly, in her discussion with the Doctor, she says: "Oh, I coulda been the Queen of Sheba" (41). Hester does not see herself as any kind of person like the society perceives her. She connects herself to royalty which describes her determination to change the manner in which others conceive her.

Aside gender representation and identity constructions; race marginalization also causes the underprivileged to create a new identity. P. McClarenin "Unthinking Whiteness, Rethinking Democracy: Critical citizenship in Gringoland" suggests that racism be inherent in the culture of the U.S, a legacy of the institutions of slavery, imperialism, and capitalism. In Parks' plays, it is obvious that the oppressed groups are also oppressors. The women who are generally suppressed by the men tend to oppress their fellow women because of their skin colours. In *In the Blood*, though Amiga Gringa and Hester are women and friends, their relationship is strained by the concept of race. In spite of the fact that they are both under patriarchal domination, their difference in colour blurs this suppression. This race difference is revealed in their exchanges:

**Amiga:** *Yr working. Im-looking for work.*

**Hester:** *I bet I could get you some sewing.*

**Amiga:** *Oh no. Thats not for me. If I work, Hester, I would want to be paid a*

*living wage. You have agreed to work for less than a living wage. Mayas*

*well be a slave. Or an animal.*

**Hester:** *Its a start. She said if I do well-*

**Amiga:** *If you do well shesgonna let you be her slave for life. Wouldnt catch me*

*doing that. Chump work. No nono. But its a good thing you are.*

*Example to the kids.*

**Hester:** *I aint no chump.*

**Amiga:** *Course you arent. Yr just doing chump work is all.*

**Hester:** *It's a leg up. Can't start from the top.*

**Amiga:** *Why not? Plenty of people start from the top. Why not you? (66)*

Amiga Gringa considers that, as a white woman, there are certain things or jobs she cannot do because it is not meant for white skin people like her but rather for the blacks. In her opinion, doing such jobs means enslavement and hence she cannot stoop so low to work for a black woman who will eventually make her her slave someday. Her skin colour gives her power over the blacks in the society because she can possess and offer what they cannot. Gloria Wade-Gayles in "No Crystal Stair: Vision of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction" says the reality of the black woman is different because: "Black women live in structural opposition with a dominant racial and dominant sexual group. In each subordinate group they shared potential common interest with group co-members, black men on the one hand and white women on the other. Ironically, each of these is a member of the dominant group: black men as men and white women as whites" (38). By virtue of their race, class and gender, black women in America find themselves at two points of intersection. Just like Hester, Amiga Gringa too cannot thread a needle but criticizes sewing for a profession which implies that it is beneath her. Unlike Hester, Amiga Gringa is able to sell "the fruit of [her] white womb" (71) and make money for herself. She prefers to thread on an illegal path that will give her money fast and easy. What matters to her is the money and not how she gets it.

Hester's children are no match to hers since there is no demand for black children. Hester refuses to give her children for money and prefers to bear the entire burden alone because in her estimation, selling them will make her less than nothing. Parks presents a black woman as someone who carries all the burdens of the society. Zora Hurston Neale in *Their Eyes were Watching God* defines the position of a black woman as a bearer of all the societal problems when Nanny explains to Janie that "de

whiteman is de ruler of everything”(14) and “De whiteman throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is the de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (14). Nanny gives the impression that the women are the ones who shoulder all the load of the society since the load finally ends with them often moving from one hand to another. In Parks’ *In the Blood*, Hester is bearing the weight of a black mother figure as she takes care of her five fatherless children single handedly and faces the plight of being a poor black woman. In Gringa’s view, keeping the children will not give her access to money when she tells Hester that no one will give her money carrying a baby around. Though a poor white woman who claims to take part in Hester’s oppression, she contributes to exploiting her. She steals food and money from her any chance she gets and uses it to improve on her own life. She steals the money, sells her watch and also persuades her to sell the fabric The Welfare Lady asks her to sew. She looks for any opportunity to exploit her to the point of using her for money making sexual display, as she explains:

***Amiga Gringa***

*Girl on girl action is a very lucrative business.  
And someones gotta do something for her  
Im just trying to help her out  
And myself too. Ok. They don’t call it capitalizm for nothing.  
(Rest)  
Ah what do you expect in a society based on capitalism.  
I tell you the plight of the workers these days\_\_\_\_.  
Still one day imgonna get her to make the movie...  
(72)*

She admits that what she is doing is capitalism. Karl Marx sees capitalism as an exploitation of man by man. Gringa exploits her own friend just to get herself rich but ironically declares that she is trying to help her. Since capitalism in the society is seen as a society’s construct she sees no reason hiding it in her confession. Capitalism is viewed in the society as some kind of pride that people should not be afraid to do or say it. Amiga Gringa is only friendly to Hester when she wants something from her.

Although Hester’s white friend treats and criticizes her, she refuses to be judged by the mainstream ideology and thus, she constructs her own sovereignty differently from society’s perception. In their exchange, Hester proclaims her selfhood which she thinks has been misrepresented:

***Amiga Gringa:*** *Theyregonna give you the test. See what skills you got.  
Make you write stuff  
Hester: Like what?  
Amiga Gringa: Like yr name.  
Hester: I can write my damn name. Im not such a fool that I cant write my own goddamn name. I can write my goddamn name (32).*

After the statement, she asks Gringa to be quiet. Hester resists the dominant ideology that sees her as an illiterate at the beginning of the play and gives her a different identity from that of the society. She highlights three times that she can write her name as an attempt to reconstruct an identity that has been misconstrued. Later in another scene Hester demonstrates her power over her friend when she tells her that “cheat me I’ll kill you” (71) after giving her the fabric to sell. She also possesses a fully developed personality and sense of identity when she explains to her that: “Jabbers daddy walking right by with a big gold pocket watch. But did I tell? Did I run after Welfare and say “There’s Jabber’s daddy?” I did not. Can you imagine?” (67). Hester makes known her independent life to her friend. This is to prove that she can live independently without relying (solely) on a man for survival. Margaret Cavendish in “Female Orations” calls on women to become independent and industrious to liberate themselves from their male counterparts. She states: “We live and die as if we were produced from beast, rather than from men; for men are happy and women are miserable; they possess all the ease, rest, pleasure, wealth, power and fame; whereas, women are easeless with labor, easeless with pain, melancholy for want pleasures, helpless for want power and die oblivion, for want of fame”. (73) Hester liberates herself from relying on a man who only hurts her feelings and makes her sad while they have their peace and fame. She argues that, women should set their own standard and make themselves known in the society rather than relying on deceitful men, die and forgotten easily because of no recognition.

**Beyond Race: A Discourse on Class**

Parks’ plays are not solely on who is black or white but rather, who is accountable for the plight of another and why? Parks in order to justify that her plays are not all about being black or white submits that “It’s insulting, when people say my plays are about what it’s about to be black—as if that’s all we think about, as if our life is about that. My life is not about race. It’s about being alive. [ . . . ] Why does everyone think that white artists

make art and black artists make statements?" (qtd. in Solomon 73). Parks' plays do not focus only on racism but also on classism since the blacks themselves are sources of oppression to their fellow brothers. In *In the Blood*, Hester La Negrita is exploited by Reverend D, Chilli and The Welfare Lady who are African-Americans and by the Doctor and Amiga Gringa who are whites.

The Welfare Lady who represents an institutionalized social help for the poor like Hester is not helpful at all. She blames Hester for her poverty, orders her around, offers her a sewing job but does not teach her how to sew when she cannot even thread a needle. She does not give her the chance to express her desire. When Hester asks her if she can express herself after receiving the fabric, her response is "needless" (59). She only helps Hester because it is her duty to do so. She tells her that "I care because it is my job to care. I am paid to stretch out these hands, Hester, stretch out these hand. To you" (55). Her words are fundamental to the capitalist society in which the fortunate do not see it necessary to assist the have-nots because they are not of the same class. She obtains services from her and gives her just one dollar for her services. When Hester asks for some money, in order to silence her, she asks her if she can change 50. Andrew Tata Ngeh in "Anglophone Cameroon Poetry and the politic of Liberation: The Poet's Vision of Emmanuel FruDoh and Bate Besong" points out that "poverty becomes the aftermath of someone else's affluence (188). Ngeh stresses on the binaries that are constructed as poverty can only be valued when one sees the riches. Hester who sees her opposite feels inferior in their mist as they are not even willing to take her out of her wretched state. Although the Welfare Lady describes herself as a woman, and a black woman just like Hester, she too draws a sharp line between herself and Hester. Her reaction to her makes her feel the class distinction and subsequently, isolates herself as an underprivileged woman in a capitalist society. In her confession, she states:

**Welfare**  
*And I should emphasize that  
 She is a low-class person  
 What I mean by that we have absolutely  
 Nothing in common  
 As a caseworker I realize that maintenance of the  
 system depends on a well- drawn boundary line  
 and all parties respecting that boundary  
 And I am, after all,  
 I am a married woman (62)*

Hester is seen as a different kind of human being since she is a black and a poor woman who is not married. As a result, she is not supposed to mingle with the privileged in the society because they are not of the same class. Unlike Hester, the Welfare Lady is a worker, belongs to the middle class, is respectable and a married woman. Her status creates some difference between them. She does not see any reason to help her when she tells her that "The world is not here to help us Hester. The world is simply here. We must help ourselves" (59). She represents the different categories of people in the society: the privileged and the underclass. Emmanuel FruDoh, like Parks in his poem "Njangi House" criticizes the exploitative nature of the society's representative when he calls them "representative my foot" (*Wading the Tide* 7). This is not only a mockery but also a down play of a state institution that should work in favour of the commoners but rather they exploit them. According to The Welfare Lady, there must be that distinction, she states that "I walk the line/ between us and them/ between our kind and their kind. / The balance of the system depends on a well-drawn boundary line /and all parties respecting that boundary" (60-1). Class distinction is encouraged by the overriding society that demands mutual respect for the well-drawn boundary between the two groups for the balance of the system and security.

Parks' class line is not based on race but the individual's socio-economic status. Poor people are seen in the mainstream society as threats and sources of insecurity, and hence they should be taken away. This gives reasons why the higher ups request The Welfare Lady and the Doctor to perform hysterectomy on Hester. As the Doctor says, the Higher Ups want, "results! Solutions! Solutions! Solutions!" (38). They think that, Hester's bringing forth of many children will eventually increase the rate of criminality and hence insecurity. Thus, doing that will reduce the rate of delinquency. Hester who sees children as her 'pride', 'treasures' and 'joy', thinks that stopping her from having more means taking her joy away from her when she says "I don't think the world likes women much" (59). The "women" Hester is talking about her is not just women per se but 'black poor women' like herself who are marginalized by the men, white and rich. Though being relegated by all these groups, the dominant society still wants to take away her womanhood which will turn her to a living corpse.

Although Hester is neglected because of her socio-economic status, she still finds voice in the means of her oppressors, and subsequently, crafts a new identity. When the Welfare Lady tells her that the Doctor recommends she get a hysterectomy, she says "Don't make me hurt you" (57), and uses this same statement when The Welfare Lady calls her children five bastards. (58). Hester who perceives her children as treasures gets irritated when the society looks at them from a different direction which is not favourable to her. She thinks that the society's restriction of her having more children means taking away her joy and her identity from her. To change that, she threatens to hurt her to create her identity. She goes further to call her "bitch" after she leaves. She wants her independent life without any interference when she declares that "The shelter hassles me. Always prying in my business. Stealing my shit. Touching my kids" (55). When the Welfare Lady asks her to go to the shelter and get hot meal. She repeatedly tells the Welfare and other characters that she wants her "leg up".

Also, the Reverend who represents the church also draws a line between himself and the underprivileged. This is evident in his speech when he says:

**Reverend D** ... *Let me give to the poor. But not any poor, just those respectable charities. I want my poor looking good. I want my poor to know that it was me who bought the such and such. I want my poor on t.v. I want my famous poor, not miscellaneous poor. And I dont want local poor. Local poor dont look good. Gimmie foreign poor. (73)*

The Reverend who is supposed to assist the poor does not see it necessary to do so since by doing this, he has no encouraging reward except a "thank you" (73). He chooses to show concern to the privileged ones in the society because he recognizes he will gain their favour and thus, make himself rich. It is ironical that a religious personality who is supposed to encourage equality between the different groups in the society, instead suggests they have "a distant relation with no complication" (74). Parks does that as an attempt to scorn the Christian body which instead of bringing people together works very hard to keep them apart due to their socio-economic status. She satirizes the double face representative of the religious institutions who says one thing but means another. Like The Welfare Lady and Reverend D, Amiga Gringa, Chilli and the Doctor also see Hester as the 'Other' and hence they have nothing in common.

Hester's own beloved son condemns her though she makes it possible to provide all his needs. Instead of consoling his mother who has been rejected by his father, Jabber joins the other exploitative men to denigrate his mother. Jabber intentionally calls his mother a slut after hearing it from Reverend D when he wakes up from sleep, and eventually recalls the word which was scrawled on their wall. Though he knows that it is "a bad word" (104), he still asks his mother the meaning of the word. The punctuation mark indicates his action. The first four times that he asks his mother the meaning of the word, it appears in quotation marks but the last time that he calls it after being warned by his mother, it is not put in quotes. This action causes Hester to kill him. The stage direction tells us:

*She quickly raises her club and hits him once. Brutally. He cries out and falls down dead. His cry wakes Bully, Trouble and Beauty. They look on. Hester beats Jabber's body again and again and again. Trouble and Bully back away. Beauty stands there watching. Jabber is dead and bloody. Hester looks up from her deed to see Beauty who runs off. Hester stands there alone. Wet with her sons blood. Grief stricken, she cradles his body. Her hands wet with blood, she writes an A on the ground. (106)*

Hester who tries her best to protect her five 'treasures' ends up killing one of them just to assert her identity and reject the society's stereotype. Schafer maintains "It is Hester's final attempt to write her own story and claim her own identity rather than accept, that offered by a society that will condemn her" (2001, 193). In the last confession which is Hester's, the killing does not even bother her but the mistakes she has made having them. After killing Jabber, she calls her children "mistakes" and "bastards" instead of "treasures" when she states that, "Bad mannered Bad mouthed Bad Bad Bastards (107). Her attempt to bring up her children in a responsible way fails because of society's construct. The younger generation copies what it sees and hears from the older ones. Jabber first sees the word "slut" when it is written on their wall. He uses the same word to condemn his mother's action like the society. Hester could not help it seeing her beloved son joining the group of the exploitative men which causes her to act poorly.

To conclude, the presentation of the blacks, women and the poor in Parks' *In the Blood* is a contemporary issue which is worth discussing and re-examining. The claim of justice, peace and equality preach in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still remain

a dream as people ( Characters), as represented in Parks' play still face discrimination at different levels. If the recent campaigns of the "Black Lives Matter" and the "All Lives Matter" are taken into consideration, humans will be treated fairly irrespective of their class, race and gender; as such, the United States as well as the world at large is going to be a conducive place for people to dwell in.

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