JUVENILE TESTIMONIO: AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES IN SELECT WORKS OF ROSA GUY

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Testimonios are democratic form of epic narrative whereby history and literature are blended to relay historical experiences. In “Testimonial Literatures: An Introduction” (2011), S. Armstrong suggests that a testimonio may “include all categories considered conventional literature such as autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novella-testimonio, non-fiction novel, or ‘factographic’ literature” (39). Georg Gugelberger differentiates testimonials from autobiography stating that “autobiographies are writings by selves which are impressed by their own feelings of unique significance. In contrast, testimonials show that the self cannot be defined in individual terms but only as a collective self engaged in a common struggle” (qtd. in Armstrong 39). He further propounds that the erosion of the central authority of the first person author who is replaced by “a collective ‘we’ effects a displacement from the bourgeois individual toward the community of the witness” (qtd. in Armstrong 9).

Armstrong writes that testimonios “show how personal experience contains a larger political meaning” and serve as a “site of knowledge for enhancing multiplicity of human experiences” and expounds on how testimonial narratives serve useful in documenting voices that would have otherwise been silenced (40-42). Armstrong suggests that in testimonials, the central authority erodes gradually as it is displaced by the collective community and in the process, the accounts in the narratives become the recounts of not just the first person narrator but those of the collective community to which the narrator belongs. Armstrong is of the view that “testimonial literatures alter the balance between the centre and the periphery reconfiguring the global cultural differences pushing the margins to the center” (38). George Yudice views testimonial literature as “an

authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate the urgency of a situation…that personal story is a shared one with the community to which the testimonalista belongs. The speaker does not speak for or represent a community but rather performs an act of identity-formation that is simultaneously personal and collective" (15).

Testimonials, hence, serve as valid accounts of the history of a particular group or groups through the narration of certain "ordinary" stories or experiences of people at a certain point in time. A single voice in a testimonio becomes representative of the community from whence the narrator springs and in the process, a particular reality or truth is laid down for understanding the stance of the represented marginalized community which may have otherwise been silenced. Aurora Levins-Morales, therefore, views testimonios as "a new type of 'genealogy of empowerment' which show how everyday living experiences become the basis for theorizing, constructing and evolving a new genre of literature and culture. In this process, testimonies reveal and record a complexity of multiple identities with inspirational and theoretical perspective…by giving new voices and documenting silenced histories" (qtd. in Armstrong 42).

Post World War II existence revealed new kinds of reality or truth to the American population. As a result, there emerged men as well as women with new aspirations both, in the majority and minority populations. The pursuit of freedom and self-expression became even more pronounced among Americans. The majority culture could no longer enforce prejudiced segregation among the minorities. The cultural conformity in American life during the 1950s, as perceived by social critics, came under perusal and attack by writers in the 1960s. Eventually, the 1960s onwards saw a more combative period in American

civil rights movement as well as the rise of certain countercultures. The latter part of twentieth century America experienced numerous outbreaks of violence, campus unrest, political assassinations and urban riots. And in a major way, this dynamism in American society also came to be reflected in literature.

In later twentieth century American literature, the counterculture initiated in the 1950s by the Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, the Black Mountain Poets like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley and the New York Poets like Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch and John Ashbery against cultural conformity in America and traditional literary establishments were carried on into the 1960s "but in a fashion made extreme and fevered by the rebellious youth movement and the vehement and sometimes violent opposition to the war in Vietnam" (Abrams 218). American writings began to freshly explore the many strains in American social relationships: public unrest about the uses of government and industrial power, the institutions of marriage and the family, the rights and powers of racial minorities, women, and homosexuals, the use of drugs as well as alternative states of consciousness. In fact, writing became a site of multiple discourses and many of the literary developments during this period remained influential in the later periods. A resurgence of multiethnic literature took place where ethnic writers, following the lead of African-Americans, began to command attention by the 1960s.

M.H. Abrams notes:

> Many of the most innovative and distinguished literary works of the later decades of the twentieth century have been written by writers who are often identified as belonging to one or another 'minority' or ethnic literary

> group… There is, however, much contention, both within and outside these groups, whether it is more just and enlightening to consider such writers simply as part of the American mainstream or to stress the identity of each writer as a participant in an ethnic culture with its distinctive subject matter, themes, and formal features. This is the era of the notable African-American novelists and essayists Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Albert Murray, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison; the poets Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou, and Rita Dove; and the dramatists Lorraine Hansberry and August Wilson…it is also the era of the emergence of such prominent minority novelists as Leslie Marmon Silko (Native American); Oscar Hijuelos and Sandra Cisneros (Hispanic); Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan (Chinese-American). (218)

These novelties within American literature brought about the recognition that there could not be such a thing as a representative American literary writing. Writers began to re-examine the purpose of literature itself, what it should accomplish as well as the means in which to accomplish such purposes. This was, in a major way, a continued reaction against the cultural conformity of the 1950s. Philip Roth remarked in 1960 that "the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has had his hands full in trying to understand, describe and then make credible much of American reality" (qtd. in The Glencoe Literature Library, 6).

In the sphere of children's writing, per se, a new development was being made by the middle of the 20th century. Themes of cultural romance and nostalgia associated with

childhood that had been prominent refrains in previous centuries waned. “One reason for this” wrote Kimberley Reynolds in *Children’s Literature: A Very Short Introduction*, “may be because childhood itself was being prolonged: school leaving age was raised in both the UK and the US, meaning that more children remained financially dependent on their parents for longer and, at least in part a reaction to these adjustments, teen culture was born” (20). Writers explored various social and political themes in their writings for children: John Rowe Townsend’s *Gumble’s Yard* (1961) displays the plight of urban working class children; Anne Fine’s *Bill’s New Frock* (1989) is about a certain boy Bill Simpson who wakes up one morning as a girl and the book was seemingly an attack on gender inequality; Anne Provoost’s*Falling* (1995, trans. 1997) dwells on the relationships between the Jews and Nazis during the Holocaust.

Children’s literature, on the whole, came to be representative as well as reflective of different kinds of childhood or adolescence. Writers of children’s literature, in the 20th century, began to use “a variety of modes—realism and fantasy, tragedy and comedy—to confront a range of topical issues” (Reynolds 21). Reynolds also wrote: “What was not disappearing, though it was being challenged in mid-20th century children’s literature was the white, middle-class world of happy heterosexual families. From first readers and fairy tales through Young Adult fiction, the pages of children’s books, comics, and magazines began to be filled with children and young people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and latterly sexualities” (21). A notable aspect of later twentieth century American literature is, in fact, the success of many African-American women writers who have come across as distinguished literary voices that have served as vital articulations of varied experiences.

In the nineteenth century, writing for children by African-Americans made its first appearance with the work of Mrs. A.E. Johnson titled *Clarence and Corinne or God's Way* (1890). However, Johnson's book was didactic in purpose and included white characters without any mention of African-American characters. Refinement and expansion of this new tradition in the 1920s evolved from the work of W. E. B. DuBois. As evidenced in his powerful essays in "The Souls of Black Folk" (1903) and "Dusk of Dawn" (1940), DuBois "long held a special interest in children" (Harris 576). This effort at strengthening the tradition initiated by DuBois was furthered from the 1930s onwards by writers like Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950) and Arna Bontemps (1902-1973) whose writings aimed at creating "a social conscience" as termed by Rudine Sims in her *Shadow and Substance* (1982) for developing empathy in the white population towards African-American children (Harris 540).

Although African-Americans had been depicted in general literature since the seventeenth century, such projections have been observed to be distorted stereotypical representations. In the case of children's literature, the problem associated with African-American writings or their representations in literature has proved to be more profound. Violet J. Harris remarks:

> Not unlike that of African American literature written for adults, African American children's literature has had a tumultuous past. That past included limited awareness among readers; circumscribed publication and distribution; omission from libraries, school, and bookstores; and uninformed criticism. Several factors contribute to this state of affairs but one important factor is the existence of literary canons. Unfortunately,

> literary canons tend to include a preponderance of books that reflect the experiences, values, perspectives, knowledge, and interpretations of Whites, particularly Anglo-Saxons. Few texts written by African Americans or other people of color are designated classics, even though many exhibit extraordinary literary merit, expand or reinterpret literary forms, or provide a forum for voices silenced or ignored in mainstream literature. The vast majority of students do not read African American classics…because literary canons perpetuated in schools have become a part of a selective tradition. The same cultural processes that have led to the development of selective traditions have tended to ignore the contributions of African Americans to children's literature. (540-541)

From the 1960s and 1970s onwards a "culturally conscious literature", according to Rudine Sims, developed in African-American children's writing. Such literature "comes nearer to constituting a body of Afro-American literature for children. They are books that reflect, with varying degrees of success, the social and cultural traditions associated with growing up Black in the United States" (qtd. in Harris 550). Sims argues that the primary intent of these books is "to speak to Afro- American children about themselves and their lives…The elements that distinguish culturally conscious books are: major characters who are Afro-American, 'a story told from the perspective of Afro- Americans, a setting in an Afro-American community or home, and texts which include some means of identifying the characters as Black- physical descriptions, language, cultural traditions and so forth'" (qtd. in Harris 550). And "indisputably (a product) of the 20th century…are the hard-hitting scenes in American Rosa Guy's novels…" (Reynolds 21).

"Rosa Guy, a co-founder of the Harlem Writers Guild, is a key figure in Afro-American literary history about whom we hear remarkably little" (Brown 54). Born as Rosa Cuthbert to Henry and Audrey Cuthbert in Trinidad on 1st September 1922, Rosa Guy moved to Harlem, New York in the United States in 1932 with her sister, Ameze, to join their parents who had emigrated to America earlier in 1927. Orphaned as a teen, Guy quit school at the age of fourteen and worked in a factory to support herself and her sister. For brief periods, they lived in foster homes. In 1933, Guy and her sister were sent to live in Brooklyn with a cousin who was an ardent supporter of Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), a staunch proponent of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism movements in America during early twentieth century. Their cousin's views on Black Nationalism had a profound effect on the young Rosa. Her teenage years were made difficult within the African-American community due to the "outsider" status that was ascribed to her due to her West Indian origins. At the age of sixteen, she married Warner Guy in 1941 and bore him a son; the couple separated in 1950. Guy later attended New York University. Guy was a fervid supporter of Black Nationalism and other civil rights movements.

Rosa Guy was actively involved in the American Negro Theatre, On Guard for Freedom—a Black nationalist literary organization and the Committee for the Negro in the Arts. Her involvement in the Committee for the Negro in the Arts greatly impacted her artistic sensibilities and through the Committee she became acquainted with several artists including John Oliver Killens (1916-1987) with whom she later founded the Harlem Writers' Guild, a workshop for aspiring African-American writers, in 1951. Rosa Guy served as the Guild's president from 1967 to 1978. The workshop attracted numerous

participants including Audre Lorde (1934-1992), Douglas Turner Ward (born 1930), Paule Marshall (born 1929) and Maya Angelou (1928-2014).

"The assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., prompted Guy to embrace another genre. She wanted to know how violence affected young people and traveled South for the first time in her life to interview her subjects" (Warren 320). In 1968, after the race riots, the Civil Rights protests and the assassinations of (1925-1965) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), Guy travelled across America, interviewing African-American adolescents about their reactions to these events which were published in 1971 in her first book of nonfiction, *Children of Longing*. "Guy's first published works consist of two short stories of which there are no surviving copies. "*The Carnival"*, reflecting her West Indian heritage, and another her New York experience, were published in a Trinidadian newspaper by C. L. R. James, who in 1960 was editor" (Warren 320). Her debut novel, *Bird At My Window*, was published in 1966 and was dedicated to Malcolm X. Subsequent novels include *The Friends* (1973), *Ruby* (1976), *Edith Jackson* (1978), *The Disappearance* (1979), *Mirror of Her Own* (1981), *A Measure of Time* (1983), *New Guys Around the Block* (1983), *Paris, Peewee, and Big Dog* (1984) and lastly *My Love, My Love*, or *The Peasant Girl* (1985). *My Love, My Love*, or *The Peasant Girl* was adapted into a Broadway musical titled *Once on This Island* and was nominated for eight Tony Awards. In July 2005, Guy was honored for her body of literary work with the Phyllis Wheatley Award, given by the Harlem Book Fair. She has received *The New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year Citation (1973) and the American Library Association's Best Book Award (1973 and 1979) and the Coretta Scott King Award (1982). Rosa Guy died of cancer on 3rd June 2012.

The selected texts for study, Rosa Guy's trilogy, —*The Friends* (1973), *Ruby* (1976) and *Edith Jackson* (1978) — serve as interesting juvenile African-American testimonies of the grim realities of life in Harlem during the 1960s. This period saw a high rise in civil rights movement in America, it also witnessed the active evolvement of feminism, countercultures, antiwar protests and minority activism. There arose increased conflicts between conformity and individuality, tradition and innovation as well as stability and disruption. The time frame within which Guy's stories are located was also a period in American history when juvenile delinquency was at a high rise and the same time that youth radicalism gained prominence with the founding of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1962. By 1960 the "New American" population, which comprised of people from different races besides white, was 60 million or 20% of the total population. Mitchell and Taylor state that the 1960 also "brought great change, not only politically but also educationally, and these changes gave great visibility and accessibility to African-American literature, specifically. Without the political changes of the 1960s, educational reform by way of canon reformation and expansion would not have taken place" (2).

A notable feature of 1960s America was, perhaps, the popularity of the concepts of "black nationalism" and "Black Power" and of the Black Arts Movement, the artistic offspring of the Black Power Movement. M.H. Abrams observes,

> Black Arts Movement designates a number of African-American writers whose work was shaped by the social and political turbulence of the 1960s—the decade of massive protests against the Vietnam War, militant demands for the rights of blacks that led to repeated and sometimes violent

> confrontations, and the riots and burnings in Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, Newark, and other major cities. The literary movement was associated with the Black Power movement in politics, whose spokesman, including Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X, opposed the proponents of integration, and instead advocated black separatism, black pride, and black solidarity. Representatives of the Black Arts put their literary writings at the service of these social and political aims (24).

The "Sixties", as the period has come to be known, was a period in American history when Harlem was called the "Black capital" of the United States and the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) initiated what has been called the "long civil rights movement" (Yanella 27). President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert Kennedy were all assassinated between 1963 and 1968 and "hundreds of riots and civil disturbances occurred in a number of cities" (Yanella 82). The stories in the series are thereby situated during a time of violence in America—lynching, the assassination of black leaders, the bombing of black churches, mob attacks on black homes "too near" white neighbourhoods, brutal treatment of civil rights protesters, racial protests, sit-ins or riots.

The Friends is the story of a fourteen year old girl named Phyllisia Cathy. "The protagonist is a teenager, a recent immigrant from the Caribbean" (Harriet Arzu Scarborough 83). After a contented life on "the Island", life in New York is harsh. She gets insulted and beaten up at school. She soon forms a bond with the girl whom she initially reviles the most—Edith Jackson. In this book, we are introduced to the crucial characters that later appear in the other books of the series. Phyllisia hates her father

Calvin and the patriarchal autocracy exerted by her him. Ramona, Phyllisia's mother dies, within the story, of breast cancer. Calvin is highly ambitious and thinks it best to exercise a controlling dominance over his daughters. Though deep in his heart he nurtures a deep affection for them, he averts displaying any form of outward affection. He also despises Edith for being poor and forbids his daughters from mixing with poor people. In this book, Phyllisia narrates her plight as an "outsider" within her own community due to her West Indian origin and the book showcases the special challenge of growing up "in this miserable place called Harlem" (*The Friends* 5) where "being alone…meant being abused and threatened and beaten up" (*The Friends* 15) .

Ruby narrates the story of a beautiful seventeen year-old girl named Ruby Cathy, sister of Phyllisia Cathy who is the protagonist in *The Friends*. Along with her sister Phyllisia, Ruby lives under the absolute governance of her father who dictates their lives. She falls in love with "cool, calm, cultured, sophisticated and refined" Daphne Duprey whose personality is in stark contrast with that of Ruby (*Ruby* 55). She becomes obsessed with Daphne to the extent that she is willing to become whatever Daphne wills her to be. However towards the end, their bond is broken and Ruby attempts suicide. Through the character of Daphne, Miss O'Brien and Phylllisia, the writer exposes differing facets and ideals on Black Nationalism.

Edith Jackson is narrated by the protagonist from whose name the title is derived. She appears earlier in *The Friends* as "the dirty little girl" who became Phyllisia's friend. Unlike Phyllisia or Ruby, Edith finds little redemption in the world she inhabits. She lives through the death of her mother and then the disappearance of her father and ultimately the killing of her elder brother Randy in a mob riot on the streets of Harlem. She is faced

with the burden of supporting her four younger sisters. She and her siblings are eventually taken under the wing of "The Institution", an institution for orphans and juvenile delinquents, much to the chagrin of Edith who is convinced that she is capable enough to look after her sisters. Later, the children are all sent to foster homes. Edith gets pregnant by a boy who has no intention of marrying her. In the end, Edith is faced with the choice of carrying on her pregnancy or resorting to abortion.

The three texts can be interpreted in terms of cultural and historical experiences of African-American adolescents during a particular time in American history. In the 1985 edition of the Horn Book Magazine, Guy stated that "a novel…is an emotional history of a people in time and place" (Warren, 320). Dr. KC Lalthlamuani propounds that "a sense of urgency characterizes African-American writing since its inception. Writing being the testimony to their humanity, they sought to exhibit it through their texts" (241). Rosa Guy has skillfully relayed certain historical experiences from the perspective of juveniles and the events and incidents portrayed in the selected novels contain accounts that have been influenced by the lived experience of the writer herself.

At the heart of the juvenile "black" urban American experiences are the problems of race, gender, peer pressure, class, sexuality and poverty. Such problems are further aggravated by the marginalization of Phyllisia and Ruby by the African-American community in Harlem for being immigrants from The West Indies. As such, they are abused for speaking in accents different from those in practice by the old inhabitants. *Edith Jackson* uncovers the true realities of life lived by homeless orphans in the face of rapid urbanization. Foster and Davis opine that "writing was and still is very much a public and political act for black women writers" and "engage with a variety of subject

matters, challenging traditional notions and articulating new ideas" (30). The selected texts can, therefore, be analyzed and interpreted in terms of being "testimonios" or "testimonial accounts" of African-American adolescents during 1960s in Harlem, America.

"Racial and cultural marginalization has been to a large extent the story of human history. Philosophers like Kant were one of the earliest major European philosophers to conflate color with intelligence; positing the correlation between blackness and stupidity as self-evident" (Lalthlamuani 6). However, theories like Postmodernism and Postcolonialism have now exposed the notion of racial superiority as being societal constructs and this has motivated a new study of history where group or groups existing outside the society's hegemonic system have come to be recast on their own terms. In fact, literary texts have come to be studied not "as self contained autonomous constructs whose meanings can be detached from their contexts. They articulate values and structures of feelings which are embedded in the social and ideological discourse of the time" (Lalthlamuani 7). As a result, narratives on life experiences can become significant tools for narrativizing oppression or marginalization.

John Beverley suggests that "the best way to approach the subaltern is through testimonial literature" (31). Beverley views testimonio as being a democratic form of epic narrative. In *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004), he stresses that testimonios blend history and literature to relay historical experiences. Beverley maintains that a testimonio is "told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (31). Testimonios have been employed by numerous writers

from the margins to narrate the urgency of a particular situation as well as to communicate "a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival and so on (Armstrong 39). In testimonial literatures, Gugelberger propounds that "truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a presenr situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcising and setting a right official history" (qtd. in Armstrong 39).

Brooks and McNair expound on the significance of African-American children's literature as cultural artifacts. By cultural artifact, they mean "narratives representing a range of fluid depictions of African American life and the cultural practices engaged in by its members (136). They further explain that African-American children's writings "function as cultural artifacts because they communicate certain values, knowledge, and social practices. It is through challenging the selective tradition in children's literature that oppositional children's literature created by and about African Americans contains unique cultural characteristics that reflect aspects of African American life, history, and culture" (136). In "African-American Children's Literature: The First One Hundred Years" (1990), Violet J. Harris writes of literature as being a valued cultural commodity and proceeds to write about children's literature as playing the important role of "mediator between children, cultural knowledge, and socialization by adults" (541). She maintains that children's literature has for a long period of time maintained this traditional role in society and therefore possesses "symbolic and real power" (541). She explains how numerous books for children become "typical of their time" (542). She quotes Sims as maintaining that African-American children's literature of the latter part of the twentieth century "are books that reflect, with varying degrees of success, the social and cultural traditions associated with growing up Black in the United States" (550).

According to R.S. Bishop expresses how “across ethnic, racial, cultural, and national boundaries, and across time, children's literature has long been considered a vehicle for transmitting moral and cultural values as well as entertaining. When a group has been marginalized and oppressed, the cultural functions of story can take on even greater significance because storytelling can be seen as a means to counter the effects of that marginalization and oppression on children” (qtd. in Brooks and McNair 136-140). Moreover, children have their own perceptions of the world as well as different ways of seeing and thinking from adults which are valid because they reveal aspects of things that may be overlooked from the more fixed perspective of adults. African-American children’s writers have recognized “the power and function of literature to accomplish certain objectives, such as the revising of histories that have been mistold. Thus, African-American children’s literature is full of biographies of historical figures and reexaminations of historical eras and events” (Johnson 217).

Rosa Guy’s writings have been rooted in her own childhood experiences. Like Jane Austen who wrote artistically and dexterously about the intricacies of life lived within the confines of a limited geographic locale, Rosa Guy has skillfully and sincerely written about the African American adolescent’s angst of growing up in Harlem, New York. She once said: “What I write about in large part is the state of mind of the Harlem community…My concerns are the actual, everyday existence of its people: the hostilities, the anger and the small snatches of happiness” (Blair). Rosa Guy’s novels bear glaring evidences of events and incidents that have been drawn from the experiences of her adolescent years. She wrote in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* in 1995: “I do write about people I

know and many times situations that I am close to and I observe because that is the only way that you can write. You can only write bout what you know…" (Warren 13).

Amidst the turbulent events she underwent during her adolescence and in later years, writing seemed to provide the catharsis to her anguish. She confessed that writing "was a driving force in that orphan, out there on the streets…who needed something through which to express herself, through which to become a full-bodied person" (Warren 320). Dexter Fisher in *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers in the United States* wrote that the goals of African-American writers was to "authenticate the experience of black women, establish a context for understanding the traditions of the past, and create a sense of place and community back to itself by elevating the commonplace to the artist" (140). The novel, thus becomes a vital means of self-expression, artistic production and cultural conservation where the effects of race, class and gender "is portrayed and critiqued within a dynamic and fluid culture" (Mitchell and Taylor 9).

In Guy's novels, the faulty world of the adults is exposed. She reveals the miseries of growing up in urban America where human bonding has become a thing almost impossible and children meet with adult characters that care little for the well-being of their fellow humans. Maya Angelou, renowned writer and a close friend of Guy wrote: "She's never afraid of the truth", remarking on the sincere manner in which Guy represents events and experiences in her writings. Angelou further states, "Some writers dress the truth in a kind of elegant language, so it doesn't seem quite so blatant, so harsh, so raw. But Rosa was not afraid of that" (Fox). As Tony Cade highlights the manner in which African-American women's writings "are involved in a struggle for liberation: liberation from the exploitive and dehumanizing system of racism, from the manipulative

control of a corporate society, liberation from the constrictive norm of mainstream culture, from the synthetic myths that encourage us to fashion ourselves rashly from without (reaction) rather than from within (creation)" (3).

"For African American women writers, history has served as both text and context…" (Mitchell and Taylor 7). Dana A. Williams expounds that African-American women writers of the latter twentieth century have shown the "desire for mental and spiritual healing" and these themes "had become a central trope in contemporary African American women's literature"(75). And "one of the key ways writers have approached the trope is by using historical narratives to question both history and its relationship to the present" (Williams 75). Michael H. Miller observes, "Rosa Guy has written a real novel about real people in a real world. The characters' problems arise naturally from their background, circumstances, personalities and relationships; they are not problems imposed by an author who wants to write about problems" (The Glencoe Literature Library, 15). Nagueyalti Warren wrote of Rosa Guy: "Her works expose her own emotional history as the young West Indian woman, dislocated and marginalized, often longing for love and acceptance. We see also Guy's understanding of the African American urban experience. Utilizing her particular emotional history, loneliness, and pain she speaks to readers over chasms of generations and cultures about the experiences of life" (320).

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CHAPTER II: THE CHILD AS THE “OTHER”

Lois Tyson writes that the "practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called othering, and it divides the world between 'us'…and 'them' (420). Georg Gugelberg in "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America" (2001) writes that critical theory deals with the "construction of differences that are necessary cultural dimensions of empire-differences which make it possible to distinguish the colonized from the colonizer" (qtd. in Armstrong 38). This is what Gayatri Spivak terms as the "othering" discourse. Homi Bhabha propounds in "The Location of Culture" (1994) that when a certain culture's ideology comes into contact with those of others, possibly through a process of colonialism, the "purity" of its own ideology is called to question in the process. As an act of cultural defence, the dominant culture responds by branding those different from their ideals as "others".

Lois Tyson observes:

> There are many political and economic motives for othering, but the primary psychological motive seems to be the need to feel powerful, in control, and superior. Thus, colonialist psychology finds in the insecure individual fertile ground on which to establish itself…colonialist psychology is self-perpetuating: it encourages the personal insecurity that facilitates its operations. Because othering is the activity that both fuels and expresses it, colonial psychology depends heavily on racism and classism, two very successful forms of othering. (451)

Within Rosa Guy's narrative is found complex forms of multiple "othering" and this process of "othering" operates at several levels and is perpetuated by several factors prominent among which are race, culture, language, gender and class.

Racism operates, on the whole, as a major instigator for the process of "othering" to operate within Guy's narrative. According to Lois Tyson:

> Racism refers to the unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that results in discriminatory practices (for example, segregation, domination, and persecution)…in order to be a racist…one has to be in a position of power as a member of the politically dominant group… In other words, the systematic practice of racism…can occur on a regular basis only when those who do it can expect, by and large, to get away with it. And those who do it can expect to get away with it when the group to which they belong controls most of the positions of power in the political, judicial, and law-enforcement systems. (360-361)

Acclaimed writer Langston Hughes (1902-1967) had earlier in deliberated on the inevitability of the race problem in any African-American literary writing because of the inevitability of the realities of conflict. Hence, the race problem becomes a recurring theme in majority of African-American literary works and the same applies to the works of Rosa Guy. Racism, in Guy's novels, functions on a double level—"institutionalized racism" as termed by Tyson to describe "the incorporation of racist policies and practices in institutions by which a society operates" and "intra-racial racism" which is

"discrimination within the black community against those with darker skin and more African features" (378-379).

The perpetration of institutionalized racism within Guy's narratives is in found in the school classroom situation where the children are taught by white teachers who nurture no real desire in really educating the African-American students. In fact, teachers that would otherwise have been rejected elsewhere in white communities are placed in "black" neighbourhoods. As Phyllisia remarks, "…the schools around Harlem…never taught us anything. Then to have to jump from algebra that we never learned to geometry is nothing to play with" (*The Friends* 101). In *The Friends*, Phyllisia has a white teacher in her school who is afraid of the contempt of a class full of "black" Harlem children. However her fear does not prevent her passing racist comments on her students. Miss Lass constantly finds victims who come under her disgusted remarks and retorts on a student's African-American features or her hinting at someone's low intelligence as a trait latent in African-American community. Her snide remark on Carole Smith's hair draws the contempt of the class: "Perhaps it is because you greased your hair so well this morning that things keep slipping your mind" (42). Even her "star pupil" Phyllisia finds such a remark intolerable: "Carole Smith's face shone from the sweat of her embarrassment. And the shame that she was experiencing, because of her oily hair, her sweating face, became my shame" (42).

Miss Lass's racist verbal assaults are especially hurled upon Edith Jackson who is always late for school. Edith Jackson responds to Miss Lass's "Can you tell me, Miss Jackson, why your mother even bothers to send you to school?" with "I ain't got no mother" which elicits Miss Lass fury: "I wouldn't think that you did have a mother! ...The

way most of you come to school I wouldn't think that any of you had mothers. You come to school like pigs! Greasy, oily, filthy pigs! The filth in your streets shows what kind of people you are!" (*The Friends* 43).

Miss Gottlieb in *Ruby* is another example. She was "a remarkably ugly woman" with a "half-paralyzed body" who had no mercy even for a good-hearted students like Ruby and Consuela who helped her off with her coat even when she knows that the rest of the class scorned her and would never sympathize over her crippled state the way Ruby did. "But although her left side was dead, both of her eyes were alive—brilliant, black and beady, shining with hatred, which she directed at her students—most of whom were black and Puerto Rican" (16). Daphne Duprey, Ruby's classmate, is strongly contemptuous about such teachers as Miss Gottlieb. She tells Ruby:

> And she needs you to help her? She made it clear that she doesn't. She treats you like dirt. She treats us all like dirt. That's part of her disease. She actually believes we are dirt… We help her by just sitting in her classroom so that she can vent her hatred on us or else she'd go mad. Who else can she vent her hatred on? ...She and those like her hate us for being black, and they hate us because they need us. Who else can crippled outcasts like them teach> decent schools will not have them. They sit there being paid to tell us all kinds of things against ourselves; then they hate us if we don't accept it as gospel. They build themselves like gods on our backs, destroy us so that we are little imitations of themselves… their educational system only makes us fit for the ghettoes, where we end up destroying each other". (49)

In fact the education system, in so far as is presented in Guy's novels, seem to function as one important medium of imposition of the dominant American culture in Phyllisia and Ruby. It is in school that the two protagonists are made to recognize their "differences", their speech and mannerisms that make them different from the American children. It is in school that both the girls develop the "nervous condition" and are caught in the throes of two conflicting cultures. This problem is aggravated by the teachers who do not seem to comprehend or accept their differences. Miss O'Brien, though patient and understanding, seems to want to instill in Ruby an awareness of the social happenings in America and inculcate in her a way of thinking that, though on many levels is liberal, is altogether very different from the knowledge that Ruby has so far accumulated. This puts Ruby in mind of how far removed she is from the knowledge and awareness that are brought out through class discussions. "When an original culture is superimposed with a…dominant culture through education, it produces a nervous condition of ambivalence, uncertainty, a blurring of cultural boundaries, inside and outside, an otherness within" (Young 23).

"Intra-racial racism" is evident in the novels right from the very start. Cathy Calvin, Phyllisia's, father is an egotistical patriarch who believes that "a Cathy never have to like or be like or act like anybody in the world besides a Cathy…A Cathy does not brag about the fact that he is flesh and blood. He overlooks the fact that he is flesh and blood" (20-21). It comes as no surprise that he is extremely devoted to his wife Ramona who was "tall, and an olive complexion" (*The* Friends 17). "He likes light- skinned women" says Phyllisia about her father who had come to America in pursuit of the American Dream (*Ruby* 76). Calvin accepts a woman like Miss Effie "tall, broad, matronly" to look after his

household but detests the very thought of loving her when it was obvious that Miss Effie had accepted his employment all the while to catch his attention.

Intra-racial discrimination is more explicitly brought out by the writer in the way she contrasts the physical features of the two sisters—Phyllisia and Ruby—and the manner in which they are treated due to their looks. Phyllisia confesses, "I was plain and my family was good-looking…I was plain and tall, too tall for fourteen years, and without any shape" (*The Friends* 25). She describes her sister as having "cherry-brown complexion" (*The Friends* 25). And as a result, even their father's treatment of the two differed. Calvin jokingly remarks to Cousin Frank and Charles about Phyllisia when she comes home after being beaten up in school, "This is the baby…the trouble with that one, though, is she's ugly. Yes man, even when you take away that fat eye and swollen nose, she still ugly" (*The Friends* 23-24). Grabbing Ruby, he declares, "But I'm lucky all the same…God ain't forget me…from now on when you old-talk about pretty people you bound to remember this one" (*The Friends* 24). In Harlem, Phyllisia is snubbed and is friendless whereas Ruby attracts a lot of attention because she is "pretty".

The worst victim among the three protagonists in the series is undoubtedly Edith Jackson. Phyllisia initially refuses to befriend the "dirty little girl" with the "square little face" and wishes instead to catch the attention of "brown and round and pretty" Marian who lived across the street (*The Friends* 24). At "The Institution" for orphans, Edith and Suzy get chosen last for adoption over Minnie. As Edith remarks, "Suzy looked more like me…she was plain, brown-skinned, with short, nappy hair that even hair straighteners didn't manage" (*Edith Jackson* 5). What Edith faces for the most part of her adolescent life is being looked over or ignored by her fellow African-Americans all because she was

judged on her looks. She had initially been looked over by her best friend Phyllisia. She had suffered the same from Rev. Jenkins' daughters at Peekskill: "They were light-brown-skinned—a cross between their black father and light skinned mother. They never looked at us…not on the streets, not even in their own father's church" (*Edith Jackson* 9). Towards the end of *Edith Jackson*, Edith describes Ruby's boyfriend, Manny, and her three friends as totally ignoring her presence. She says, "Manny…hadn't seen me. He really hadn't seen me. Wiped me out…Ruby's friends were all light-skinned, fashion thin, with soft hair…they had actually wiped me out" (170-171).

Guy's strategy in highlighting this whole practice of "othering" based on discrimination between the supposedly "beautiful" and "ugly" probably stems from the desire to project the faulty notion that existed among the African-Americans in general and the African-American youth in particular. The 1960s-70s was an era in which ideals of "Black Power" and "Black is Beautiful" goaded the Black Movement. However, Guy depicts Harlem, probably the largest African-American community in North America, as being brainwashed with a mistaken standard for the judgement of "beauty". Guy's ideal is reminiscent of the aesthetic philosophies of Hughes's 1926 manifesto, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" where Hughes had stressed on the danger of the urge within the African-American race toward whiteness. The preference of "light-skinned" children over those with more African features and skin tone hinted at the African-Americans' unconscious undisputed acceptance of the "white" standard of what is "beautiful". Even when the supposedly "beautiful" or "pretty" characters like Manny, Calvin and Ruby's friends to name a few, were deeply into the Black Movement and professed strong support

for the Movement within the story, they are all guilty of completely wiping out the existence or presence of the likes of Edith Jackson.

Racism within the "black" community itself operates in an even more profound manner within Guy's novels in the way the Caribbean immigrant children are treated in Harlem. Watkins-Owens observes that "blacks" in America and "black" Caribbean immigrants into America had initially shared good relations. He further observes:

> Racial solidarity between the two groups later deteriorated into ethnic rivalry for scarce economic and political opportunities… much of the exacerbation of this ethnic division (can be attributed) to the brash rhetoric of the stepladder street speakers, particularly Marcus Garvey, whose separatist United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement was seen by his detractors as appealing largely to Caribbean immigrants. More fundamentally, the intensity of the ethnic rivalry was fueled by the quest for political power. De- spite their disproportionate representation in businesses and in the skilled trades, Caribbean immigrants were limited in their political reach by their smaller numbers, a fact the author at- tributes to the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. But their political progress was also limited by their low rate of naturalization. The upshot was that African Americans became the dominant power brokers for the limited amount of political opportunities that were available in Harlem. Watkins-Owens suggests that the drift from earlier racial solidarity to later ethnic rivalry was merely part of the dynamics of the convergence of two peoples

> "separated for centuries and brought together for the first time by migration and systematically denied equal opportunities. (qtd. in Palmer 269)

Phyllisia is marginalized in school because of her West Indian speech and customs. That she is treated as the "other" is evident in the way the other children made fun of her. Phyllisia relates :"they mocked my West Indian accent, called me names—"monkey" was one of the nicer ones. Sometimes they waited after school to tease me, following me at times for several blocks, shouting" (*The Friends* 5). Phyllisia's stranger status along with her intelligence and her Carrribean roots make her vulnerable to all kinds of abuse in the Harlem community and neighbourhood. She is ascribed with the status of "the other" and on a certain occasion the whole class abused her outside the school grounds with shouts of "You dirty West Indian" and "monkey chaser, monkey chaser, bring monkey soup for your monkey father" (*The Friends* 12). Phyllisia gets beaten up by the tough Beulah on one occasion and runs home with her clothes smeared in blood. Miss Lass uses Phyllisia as an easy target to channel the hatred of an entire classroom of "black" children away from herself: "She had to know that she was setting me up as a target...Miss Lass was afraid…and she was using me to keep the hatred of the children away from her. I was the natural choice because I was a stranger and because I was proud (*The Friends* 8). Phyllisia surmises about Harlem: "But being alone here meant being abused and threatened and beaten up" (*The Friends* 15).

It is for fear of this "othering" that Ruby, Phyllisia's sister, adopts a mode of what Bhabha calls "mimicry" which can be explained as "the desire of colonized individuals to be accepted by the colonizing culture and the shame experienced by colonized individuals concerning their own culture, which they were programmed to see as inferior" (Tyson

438). Ruby tries as much as possible to melt and assimilate into her new environment. When her mother tries to reason why Phyllisia alone is abused at school, Ruby replies, “it is because I don’t stick my hand in the air all the time and try to prove how smart I am… after all, Mother, you know how Phyllisia is. If she did not try to act so smart and know-it-all, she would not be opening up her mouth and continually be reminding the children where she comes from” (*The Friends* 18) to which her mother exclaims astonished, “Ruby, are you standing there telling me that you do not answer questions in class because you are ashamed of where you come from?” (18).

Relocation to a place and culture completely alien to them creates in Phyllisia and Ruby a feeling of confusion and anxiety. They experience, as a consequence, what W.E.B. DuBois first described in the “Souls of Black Folk” (1903) as “double consciousness” or “double vision”, the awareness of belonging to two conflicting cultures. Homi J. Bhabha also describes this condition as “unhomeliness”, a cultural identity crisis due to cultural displacement when caught between cultures and having a hard time in feeling a sense of belonging to both. “Double consciousness often produced an unstable sense of self…Being “unhomed is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at hoe even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak” (Tyson 423).

In *The Friends*, the *t*wo sisters, Phyllisia and Ruby, find themselves placed in a community of folks that are at once similar to yet so different from them in that in Harlem, they are amongst people with whom they share a common decent, a shared “blackness” yet at the same time perceive cultures, speech and customs so different from those they have grown accustomed to. Their marginal place can be identified as standing “between

conflicting, competing cultures: identifying with one emotionally, curious about the other intellectually" (Young 22). Such ambivalent attitudes and multiple identities are defined by the Zimbabwean novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga as the native's "nervous condition", where his or her existence is strung between differing layers of culture (Young 23).

Phyllisia is strongly hesitant to adopt American mannerisms yet there arises a part of her that desires to feel as comfortable and adapted to her environment in tune with the other children around her although her initial choices for such an adaptation be prejudiced. In the initial chapters of *The Friends*, Phyllisia constantly reminisces about her happy life on the Island with her aunt and it is obvious that she believes the Island life to be the perfect mode of existence and place for children to grow up. At the same time, Phyllisia craves for companionship and a fresh life in her new environment. "It was so lonely to be in this city without a friend", she muses (*The Friends* 26). She is intrigued by city life at Harlem as her friendship with Edith grows and eventually enjoys subway rides, trips to the zoo and visits to the big stores. She gains insightful knowledge on the Black Movement in America and expresses erudite views on the Movement to Daphne in *Ruby*. However, life in Harlem and Life on the Island are intermittently juxtaposed, compared and contrasted and Phyllisia's loyalties or rather her heart belongs to or is given to both worlds.

Even though Ruby tries her best to assimilate and follows the mannerisms of her classmates at school, there still remains a part of her that cannot help abiding with few of the customs that she had been taught as a child. Ruby endeavours helping the spiteful Miss Gottlieb despite the latter's ingratitude and repeated verbal abuses hurled at her earns her the nicknames like "Uncle Tom", "Uncle Tom's Uncle Tom" and "a white folks' nigger" (*Ruby* 17). Consequently Ruby feels "like a desolate island in a stormy sea" (*Ruby* 41).

Daphne, the girl she falls in love with, confesses “So let me say I think that you are worse than an Uncle Tom. At least Uncle Toms tom to survive. But you bow and scrape with such open-eyed sincerity” (*Ruby* 47). Ruby can but only reply, “Stop it! Please don’t. Can’t you see, I am not an American! I cannot hate like you!” (*Ruby* 49). While on the one hand Ruby makes efforts to adapt to Harlem by refraining from displaying her knowledge the way Phyllisia does and avoids discrimination on that ground. On the other hand Ruby and her friend Consuela cannot help displaying affection and kindness to their fellow human-beings the way she was taught in the West Indies before she relocated to America which makes them victims of the sneers of the other “American” children. “It was true. She and Consuela had come from places, cultures where the old were revered, pampered, respected. Where they could do no wrong and the most impossible demands were carried out—or at least considered with deference” (*Ruby* 37).

Another factor contributing to the “othering” process within Guy’s narrative is definitely the problem of class differences. Edith Jackson is the single most striking victim of such a process. Phyllisia had loathed Edith primarily because of her clothing that spoke downright of her poverty—“clothes unpressed, her stockings bagging about her legs with big holes, which she tried to hide by pulling them into her shoes but which kept slipping up, on each heel, to expose a round, brown circle of dry skin the size of a quarter” (*The Friends* 3). In fact, even after they form a close friendship Phyllisia could not help notice the contrast in their attire. When Phyllisia takes her “best friend” home to meet her mother, it is obvious that Phyllisia expected Edith to “notice the glaring contrast of… (her) home to that dark railroad flat where she lived” (102). Phyllisia admits the real reason why she had never invited Edith home was “because she was so shabby” (*The Friends* 100).

When Edith fails to be in awe of Phyllisia's home, the former is furious and is satiated when her father orders Edith, the "picky-headed ragamuffin" out of their house (*The Friends* 107). Phyllisia shows the same class haughtiness as her father does and Edith remains the significant "other" who reinforces their class pride, reassures them of their status and maintains the difference in their class.

Edith, time and again, becomes the signifying "other" for the "high rise" class of the "black" community. "Even within Harlem social distinctions existed... Houses stood that had been built for the wealthy. Their beauty and style attracted successful African American doctors, lawyers, artists, and other striving professionals." (The Glencoe Literature Library 15). And the social distinction created through residential dwelling is also seen in Guy's stories. People of the ghettoes were either unwelcome or completely ignored in the more affluent neighbourhoods as is evident in the way Phyllisia is rashly treated by Calvin and then again by the doorman on her visit to Phyllisia's home after she runs away from Peekskill. Eighth Avenue, Edith's neighbourhood, is shown as the "other" part of Harlem where "winos…crunched together at the corners", "junkies…nodded all along the sidewalks", "alley cats marched in and out of the gutted buildings", the "bricks of …building were blackened with smoke" (*Edith Jackson* 158).

Karl K .Rasmussen observes:

> People of the ghetto are viewed as belonging exclusively to the lower class- a ménage of low-skilled working people and the chronically unemployed or underemployed. According to this view, the inhabitants of the ghetto are the victims of society's arterial sclerosis, the rejects and the resigned. They

> are the inevitable result of the absence of acceptance and opportunity. As such, the ghetto lacks power and strength; it lies outside the periphery of the society with no plug-in with the established order. Consequently, the ghetto is colonized, policed by outside forces, and exploited. It is pictured as a socially sick area in need of renovation and remediation. (283)

It is true that Ruby and Phyllisia experience the feeling of being at a loss which is resultant of the displacement that had occurred when they were forced to leave their comfortable existence in "The Island" and had to relocate to Harlem. They had been faced with the problem of adjusting to the "Americanization process". Having relocated to a community with people of the same descent as theirs is however a daunting task because there existed a wide gap in culture and mannerisms. Nevertheless, they at least have the saving grace of their father's affluence or rather his consistent attempts at affluence, evident in the way their house is furnished, which makes it many degrees easier to gain acceptance eventually and fizzle their marginalized status eventually. In fact, the experience of being an "outsider" in one's own culture is much more severe for Edith in comparison to either Ruby or Phyllisia. For Edith, the chances of climbing the social ladder are extremely constricted given that she has an old father who is near to non-existent and a mother who dies of tuberculosis. Poverty becomes her lot. Edith is left with the responsibility of looking after a dinghy household and four younger sisters and that responsibility which she whole-heartedly accepts is snatched from her when her elder brother, Randy, is shot and they are taken to "The Institution" for orphans.

Towards the end of *Edith Jackson*, when Phyllisia advices Edith to ignore Manny and Ruby's friends who had completely "wiped out" any knowledge of her existence in

the room, Edith muses to herself, “She didn’t have to explain them to me. I knew them. I had always known them. They had lived around Harlem long before… (Phyllisia) had come on the scene from the West Indies. They were Americans like me. I had always known those tall, light-skinned, curly-haired Mannys” (*Edith Jackson* 171). The irony here lies in the fact that these same adolescents converse in the next room, vehemently condemn the whites and discuss heatedly on “black” emancipation. Edith is only left to wonder, “If they were black, what about me?” (*Edith Jackson* 171). Then the answer comes to her suddenly, “I heard from the mouth of someone who knew: ‘You are their statistics’ ” (*Edith Jackson* 171).

A distinct aspect of marginalization that can be analyzed within Rosa Guy’s novels is the “othering” of children by adults. The agony of living in an adult world at a significant period and geographic locale in history is aptly brought out by Rosa Guy. The “othering” process here exerts a weighty leverage on the actions and thought-processes of the three protagonists of Guy’s novels. As Mary Ann Lindberg writes:

> As they grow familiar with their world, children become dreamers who feel capable of conquering it. Unfortunately they find that most of the world seems to have been conquered already. Their lives are managed by adults, in fact often organized, scheduled and planned with very little opportunity for them to explore the unknown, experience the dangerous or even help plan and control their physical environment. They dream of how well they would perform if only given the chance. (329)

Phyllisia and Ruby suffer strict control under a father who is absolutely clueless yet self-assured about raising his children. The process of growing up including the stress

and strife of adolescence is made all the more complex by the adult s around them especially their father Calvin. Calvin's orthodox, over-protective, self-righteous and ingenuous handling of his daughters' daily activities creates an unhealthy tense atmosphere at home. Ramona, their mother, wanted no part "of rows and anger" and "slipped…into her world", into a calm where no one could reach her, her "bright mood" as Phyllisia called it (*The Friends* 86). While Calvin's extreme methods ranging from forceful feeding of Phyllisia who had refused to eat due to sickness after her mother's death to lashing Ruby's back for having a boy drop her home and kiss her, are all intended at fine tuning the growth process of his daughters, they serve no real purpose except instill a deep fear for him in their hearts. The needs, expectations and desires of the children are cornered with no space for release or expression. "We are here, his prisoners…" is how Ruby defines their plight (*The Friends* 148). Calvin has no sympathy or understanding for his daughters to help them with their struggles in adjusting to life in Harlem nor does he cater successfully to their emotional needs and psychological growth.

Phyllisia finds the adult world in Harlem to be rather bizarre and vastly opposed to the adults that she fathomed on "the Island". When she got beaten up in school foe being a West Indian, "grownups stood looking at the yelling mob…more adults adjusted themselves to get a better view" (*The Friends* 11). She observes: "Walking slowly, painfully toward my street, I stared hard into the faces of grownups, searching for a look of pity, of concern…But no older person stopped to look at me or ask me. They just did not notice me…The adult world simply walked by" (*The Friends* 14). As a matter of fact, even her parents appeared to remain oblivious to the children's dilemma. Aghast at her parents' mental fencing after her mother's naked display of her cancerous breast to her

children, oblivious to the mental anguish that the children suffered on account of their mother's behavior, Phyllisia is anguished over such a display. "The cruelty of the moment had pierced us deeply. Ruby and me", she confesses, "but they were not aware of us".

For Edith Jackson, her encounter and her experiences with the adult world only served to develop in her the habit "of not seeing grownups" (*The Friends* 46). Edith's status and plight in life puts her under a real threat of vulnerability within the African-American community in Harlem and in Peekskill, of melting "more easily into that mass of numbers called statistics—faceless statistics" (*Edith Jackson* 53). Even when Mrs. Bates, the retired lawyer, shows concern for her well-being, it is revealed to be a concern stemming from a desire to like her not the way she is but from the desire to mould her into something she wanted Edith to be. Despite Edith's attempts at going through life on a mind of her own be it looking after her siblings or falling and failing in love, a return to obedience under the adult world in the form of Mrs. Bates.

Ann O. Gebhard explains, "Mrs. Bates is determined that Edith will succeed in mainstream society; she wears that symbol of white, middle-class culture—a string of pearls" (54). Edith describes the manipulative Mrs. Bates: "Her hands fingering her pearls, her lips rolled back into her white smile" (*Edith Jackson* 79). Although she is infatuated with Mrs. Bates' nephew, James, "Edith perceives herself as distanced from the world of middle-class blacks" (Gebhard 54).

> Those girls with their big Afros-they had always lived around Harlem, somewhere. Their fathers, their mothers, had always been our dentists, doctors, lawyers, even our preachers. They had walked the streets and never seen me. They had not gone to my schools-no more than white. They

> had gone to private schools. Their buses had driven past me while I walked, holes in my stockings, shoes run over, on my way to school. They had never seen me. (*Edith Jackson* 171)

The process in which marginalization occurs in Guy's novels depicts the true eventuality of the race problem that the African-Americans had faced in America in the 20th century. The plot and events in her novels are fully significant in bringing out relevantly the several nuances appertaining to the problems intrinsic to Harlem at the time that the novels were written. The several little concerns relating to each child character along with the doubts and quandary intricate to each of them reveals Guy's genuine discernment of the problems associated with adolescence and more explicitly with growing up "black" in the United States at a volatile period in American history. As Dr. KC Lalthlamuani has observed, "the discourse of marginality needs to be translated into a discourse of disruption and resistance. It is in this sense that narratives offer the space to articulate resistance. Thus 'race' and 'gender' need not be debated only as political and social issues, but also as narrative representations (8).

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CHAPTER III: GENDER POWER DYNAMICS

Modern feminist theorists like Toril Moi have deconstructed the term ‘gender’ by bringing out the difference between the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’, which otherwise have been used interchangeably. ‘Sex’ has come to designate a biological connotation while gender has been defined to be a social designation. In fact, gender itself has come been identified as a new type or category by which marginalization takes place or through which the process of “othering” occurs. Here, gender does not dwell solely on the issues related to women, their oppression or emancipation. Gender ideology also shapes conceptions of masculinity.

Stanford Lyman observes that

> Power must be translated into authority if control over others is to be maintained without constant recourse to brute force…Authority, in turn, is a particular and complex form of impression management, designed as it is to legitimate the right of the few to rule over and decide the fate of the many. If we take as an assumption that there is no natural or necessary right of some individuals to dominate over others, then the particular way in which any individual or collectivity establishes this right is through an efficacious social construction. Typically, this construction takes the form of a myth that identifies the ruling group and justifies its right to rule. These efficacious social constructions are basic and essential dramas. They guarantee lasting power for as long as the myth continues to persuade, mollify, or overawe its audiences. (44)

Within the gender power paradigm, there is no doubt, that women have taken a backseat. The history of most societies reveals that male superiority has been socially sanctioned and male domination has been pervasive. MacKinnon has observed that "male dominance is perhaps the most pervasive and tenacious system of power in history . . . it is metaphysically nearly perfect. Its point of view is the standard for point-of-viewlessness; its particularity the meaning of universality. Its force is exercised as consent, its authority as participation, its supremacy as the paradigm of order, its control as the definition of legitimacy (qtd. in Scales 1376-1377).

Elleke Boehmer observes:

> Women…experienced different practical and discursive constraints from men in the colonial field. Moreover, their work was read and meditated in ways other than those associated with their male counterparts. However, if they experienced discrimination in the masculine world of the Empire, still European women more often than not formed part of the same race and social group as their male consorts and counterparts. By contrast, native or subaltern women were, as it is called, doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, social class, and, in some cases, religion, caste, sexuality, and regional status. (215-216)

Eleanor W. Traylor writes that African-American women writers of the later twentieth century not only wrote of themes relating to the power realtions between "black and white America" but more importantly on the "renegotiation of the power relations

between black men and women—itself a revolutionary event" (50). In The *History of Sexuality—Volume One: The Will to Knowledge* (1976), social scientist and historician, Michel Foucault propounded that "power is everywhere; …it comes from everywhere" (93). Such studies enabled the study of the parallelism in the movement of power and have feminists to study power as multi-dimensional and not emanating from a single core. This study in the dynamics of power enables women writers to re-interrogate the past in order to reclaim their space in general discourse.

Grauerholz and Pescosolido opine that "Cultural ideals and underlying power relations are revealed in a number of products, including children's books (113). And Dianne Johnson has expressed that "there are still gender related issues that need to be addressed to continue changing the landscape of American children's literature in relationship to writers and artists of colour" (210). A significant body of children's literature deals with issues relating to gender."Initially, concern focused on the representation of girls and how texts tended to adhere to a feminine ideal that disadvantaged them… Writers and publishers consciously set out to address this problem, creating guidelines and works that were intended to counter sexism. Ultimately, this campaign resulted in a large and eclectic body of texts that offers many ways of being successful and female" (Reynolds, *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* 46-47). In the works of Rosa Guy, the gender issue has also been touched. Interestingly, Guy has revealed the intrinsic dynamisms in the gender power relations. This is not surprising because the books came out at a time when Black Feminism was starting to gain ground.

"For most children, childhood takes place in families, and families are ubiquitous in children's literature…As well as being shaped by such general factors as economic and

religious trends, the family story has consistently responded to changing theories about children and childhood" (Reynolds, "Changing families in children's fiction 85-89). In analyzing the power relations within the selected texts, the family itself becomes a unit of oppression because the family serves as a site of male domination. "Most African-American novelists of the 20th century are concerned with the plight of the woman, her position in the family, in society and the world at large. As her position within the family is the focal point of this unending spiral of relationships, this is their primary concern" (Uma 16).

Calvin Cathy imposes his power on his two daughters, Phyllisia and Ruby. "Power acts by laying down the rule" (Foucault 83). He commands absolute obedience from them and their grievances hardly meet with reason. "He was not a man of softness. Gentleness came hard to him. Tenderness embarrassed him. Loving words were painful…he gave up any attempt at softness, and with his decision his face ceased its quivering" (*The Friends* 89). Calvin controls the social circle in which his daughters mingle and even chooses their friends. In *Ruby*, "Calvin had met Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez by telephone and they all approved of the friendship" between Ruby and Consuela. "Well, he certainly has power" says Daphne Duprey on speaking about Calvin, "We should refer to him as the Omnipresent. He, spelled with letters capitalized and italicized" (67). In fact, Daphne describes him as "a male chauvinist who shook his male organs around to gain what he couldn't gain with his brain" (*Ruby* 130). Reasoning with Calvin seemed an impossible task for his daughters because "he'll believe just what his ego wants him to believe" (*Ruby* 155).

"Sexist ideology brainwashes men to believe that their violent abuse of women is beneficial when it is not" writes Bell Hooks (77). For Calvin Cathy, violence is the lone measure by which to discipline and control his children. "Because I have the right" is his response on his practice of violence at home (*The Friends* 6). He backhandedly slaps Phyllisia's mouth when she whines about being brought to Harlem. "He would backhand me first and ask questions later" is how Phyllisia describes her father's method of dealing with her (*The Friends* 44). On finding Ruby being dropped home by a boy, Calvin lashes Ruby's back with his black belt. On spotting Ruby with Daphne and her mother, Calvin's reaction is gruesome: "One blow threw her to the sidewalk, then he was over her hitting, hitting. Ruby held up her hand, tried to cover her face. Finally, she felt herself being half dragged, half carried, and then shoved into the car" (*Ruby* 171). Overcome with grief over her mother's death, Phyllisia gets sick and is unable to get up or consume food. The only strategy that Calvin comes up with is that of forcing his daughter to get up and eat her food with the threat of whipping her with his belt.

"Men struggle to succeed in the public world of business and industry, but failing that they rule in the family" (Uma 12). Calvin Cathy's relocation to America, or "man's country" as he calls it in pursuit of the American Dream also comes with the additional responsibility of providing for his family (*The Friends* 63). Failing in his pursuit, he vents out his frustration by exerting excessive control over his family. Alladi Uma observes: "often a man's frustration at not finding employment, at not being able to get along in the world outside, at being impotent to protect either himself or his family from the hostile environment make him a tormentor at home" (12). Calvin has his own "cliché ideas of making it in society, a petit-bourgeois mentality" (*Ruby* 167). And it appears that Calvin

thinks that “othering” of the womenfolk enables him to gain his “masculinity” or rather his “manhood”.

Phyllisia and Ruby, on the other hand, show desire for freedom from patriarchal oppression and “where there is desire, the power relation is already present” (Foucault 81). Foucault defines power as “the process through which ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses” the force relations (92). Phyllisia and Ruby devise ways by which to trick their father and pursue freedom at least for social mobility. Sisterhood plays a vital role in the subversion of authority. Uma has observed how in African-American and Indian writings, sisters “who have different outlooks on life never let their visions interfere with their affection for one another. Sisters having dissimilar or contrary views can empathise with one another…Sisters in distress…are able to relate to each other by sharing experiences and discussing their problems” (78-79). Phyllisia and Ruby, together, develop ways and means to defy Calvin’s authority sometimes openly while at other times, in a more discreet manner..

Phyllisia, who is more capable of outrightly displaying her vehemence, falls victim more often than Ruby to her father’s anger and violence. In the opening chapter of *The Friends*, Phyllisia says, “Calvin is my father. To myself I use his first name, as a sign of disrespect” (6). “He would backhand me first and ask questions later” is how she describes being handled by her father (*The Friends* 44). Ruby describes how her father “with his stern, no-nonsense attitude, his rigidity, his old-fashioned notions, inevitably clashed with Phyllisia, her languid laziness. Neither had any intention of changing—Calvin, because he felt righteous, and Phyllisia, because she kept her distance from him in the pages of books” (*Ruby* 10).

However, Phyllisia adopts ways of defying authority. Her strategy develops from blatant display of anger to a more subdued trickster mode of convincing her father to grant her her wishes. But as the story progresses to the second series, Phyllisia's develops a "special charm" that is hard to deny (*Ruby* 183). Phyllisia is perceptive and learns how to play on her father's weakness: "Like a camel sensing water in a desert, I sensed a spot somewhere in him that I could touch and hurt. I intended to go after it" *(The Friends* 157). She even gets to make her father bear the guilt of being responsible for Edith's downfall. Towards the end of *Ruby*, Phyllisia manages to convince Calvin that he shared a responsibility in Edith's misfortune and this play on his guilt enables Phyllisia to continue her treasured friendship with Edith.

Ruby initially has a calm acceptance of her father's high-handedness particularly due to the fact that Calvin prided himself on many factors, one being Ruby's beauty. Ruby is more submissive and obedient compared to her sister. However, her love for Daphne changes her attitude towards her father. "It was not fair for him to use his authority, his bigness, his great voice, his towering strength…" is how she grows to feel about her father (*Ruby* 173). Calvin "had often accused her, but he had always trusted her" (*Ruby* 71). But after Calvin disapproves of Daphne, Ruby "closed herself so that he could not read that she no longer needed the crumbs of affection for which she used to beg" (*Ruby* 71).

The girls derive high satisfaction when they trick their father and prevent him from force-feeding Phyllisia during her illness caused by grief from her mother's death. Phyllisia narrates: "putting his belt back on, he went out, leaving us smug and self-satisfied because for once we had been able to trick him and wipe that stupid smirk off his face" (*The Friends* 132). When Calvin indirectly forces them to go to the movies, Ruby

slips out through the back gate and returns through there. They then leave the theatre for home knowing fully well that Calvin was spying on them. Ruby visits Daphne with the excuse that she is being tutored by her friend and in a major way, she is. As the two girls grow and develop, Calvin eventually feels "his authority slipping" (*Ruby* 71).

Ramona develops methods in defying her husband's high-handedness. As their family friend, Charles, remarks: "…you are a remarkable woman to be able to bear the burden of so much greatness" (*The Friends* 22). Especially after her sickness, she develops a "distant, quiet attitude", escaping into a "bright" mood where she remained oblivious to everything around her and where nothing could reach her attention, not even her husband's anger or the hostile atmosphere that existed Calvin's anger filled the atmosphere at home (*The Friends* 88). Ramona also could outdo her husband in most of their animated verbal debates. "It was eerie, their efforts to outdo each other. Great humor without laughter" is how Phyllisia describes it (*The Friends* 88). Her mobility is limited within their home but she seems to constantly escape into a different imaginary world. And towards the end of her life, Calvin confesses the silent hold that she has over him: "What do you want me to say?...You know me, Ramona. I play the fool sometimes. I make things big—bigger than they are sometimes…Ramona, I can never lie to you!" (*The Friends* 89).

However, it is not that Calvin physically forces his will stringently on Ramona though he certainly does express his will verbally to her. However, Ramona is never shown as ever defying Calvin's authority even though she counters his viewpoints verbally. Time and again, Calvin reveals the soft corner that he reserves for Ramona and he does not go as hard on her as he is hard with everyone else. But, Ramona comes across

only as a woman of words but never action. Her fine intellect and liberal understanding of the world remains concentrated within her words. Guy does not reveal the exact reason except her illness for which Ramona's mobility remains limited. Her role is a passive one. She does not master events but only accommodates herself to them.

Uma writes that "most women, in spite of all their grievances, give in to the system, for they are not able to break away from their acculturarion; they often end up unhappy, putting on a façade of happiness" (7). Dana A. Williams is of the view that in African-American communities, "the community…imposes limitations on its women even as it sustains the community at large and quotes Barbara Christian who suggests that the community is "a major threat to the survival and empowerment of women (73). Perhaps, the same community that limits the freedom of Phyllisia and Ruby and Edith also has the potential to confine Ramona to the home setting.

Guy has not, however, projected Calvin's character without redemption. Lizzie Thomas Golden has observed:

> Coping with the vast changes of urbanization, the black man has had to carry out a dual role. Without thought or recognition of this fact, most scholars painfully comb black literature to support the contention that the black man is shiftless, negligent of the family, and is, on the whole, a "low-down dirty snake in the ground." Thus, with no regard to the givens or the realities of life itself, we have numerous works, saturated with ad hominem attacks, lending undue support to all the negative qualities of the black man. Conversely, we have other scholars who direct our attention to the

> political nature or some other distinguishing quality in the black man. Yet, too few scholars acknowledge the black man's primary role, which is functioning as a father, a father who must head his household, an undertaking in itself. As head of his household, he has had to do what is necessary to feed his family, clothe his family, shelter his family; do what is necessary to keep his family free from fear, care, and anxiety. In addition to this primary role, the black man has had to take on the extra responsibility of fighting for black liberation. (95)

Phyllisia and Ruby ultimately realize that "after all, he really isn't a monster (*Ruby* 27). Calvin seeks the help of Cousin Frank and Charles The realization that she is "so much like him" alters Phyllisia's perception of her father. When she attempts to convince him of letting them stay in Harlem, she describes Calvin as regarding her as a person for the first time. ruby has a more insightful perspective into the workings of her father's being. "True, he was big, loud, cruel sometimes—but not ordinary" (*Ruby* 27). Especially after Ruby attempts to commit suicide, Calvin experiences a substantial shift in perspective. Ruby muses on the strangeness of "how well she knew her father, his hidden kindnesses, his terrible cruelty, his lack of graciousness, especially when trapped" (*Ruby* 152).

Guy has exposed the notion of patriarchal superiority and "the residual influences of patriarchal autocracy associated with the days when father was always credited with knowing best" as false notions (Reynolds, "Changing families in children's fiction", 205). Calvin Cathy is gradually shown to be a man of flaws though he may profess and proclaim

himself to be otherwise. As Phyllisia muses in Chapter Nineteen of *The Friends*:

> I blamed my not going to my friend on Calvin. I blamed it on him, strangely enough, because he was wrong about Ruby. True, I had never really liked him. He was mean, he shouted too much, and he gave stupid orders for us to obey. But beneath my dislike I had always been convinced that he was right. Now he had been wrong about Ruby and I asked myself, had he ever been right about anything? Right or wrong, he had the advantage of being our father, and we were his prisoners…How could someone who had never been right about anything have such complete control over people's lives? Over my life? (145-146)

Power has been elaborated by Foucault as "the process through which ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses" the force relations (92). Throughout the numerous incidents through which Calvin's high-handed authority come in direct confrontation with the natural growth process of his daughters, the slight changes in his treatment of their need for independence becomes visible. Here, power becomes a dynamic force in which there is constant shift of power from one source to another. Calvin made be fooled by his children but sooner or later, he is able to learn the truth and exercise control over them. On the other hand, Phyllisia and Ruby quickly perceive novel ways by which to secretly defy patriarchal power. Without Calvin's open declaration, Guy makes it evident that Calvin arrives at a slow appreciation of his daughters' strengths.

Traditional and modern ideas of the notion of gender and gender mobility and power are also juxtaposed within the novels and this strategy serves to enhance the context

of the gender power dynamics that the writer seems to endeavour to bring to notice. The character of Calvin Cathy vacillates between old and novel perceptions of women and their potential. While he does not seem to entertain the notion of women equaling men or of their defying bourgeois gender ideals, he however desires that his daughters make significant progress in education. The Hernandez family is perhaps, a good example of tradition. Consuela Hernandez's parents make plans to marry her off when she attains the age of nineteen. Mrs. Hernandez tells Ruby, "My Consuela is not so smart in school…But what does it matter? For a girl it is not important. She will be getting married soon…She is already nineteen. She cannot go to school forever" (*Ruby* 99). When Ruby tells her of her plan to go to college, Mrs. Hernandez replies, "College? That is no place for beautiful girls" (*Ruby* 99). Cousin Frank and Charles, having been up and about in New York for long, are in any ways modern men who recognize the grievances of Calvin's children and his unjust measures. "Let the children talk nun, man" says Frank, "The time gone when women and children stop in the background" (*Ruby* 114).

Male autocracy and power in the form of patriarchy may seemingly appears as the major source of power. However, as Foucault has stated, "Power, insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movements (Foucault 93). This gives rise to the fact that "power does not emanate from a sole centre. Power is "not an institution, and not a structure" (93). Power, therefore, reveals itself to be multi-dimensional and this can be said of the gender power dynamics as found operational in Guy's narratives as is evident in the way power alternates or juggles between the male-female center. This flux in gender power dynamics,

perhaps, stems from what Mary Helen Washington in “Teaching Black-Eyed Susans” draws as the “emergent woman”, one who is coming to an awareness of her own psychological and political oppression and becoming capable of creating new life and new choices for herself, usually through a harsh experience of initiation that makes her ready for the change (qtd. in Scales 1389). As Williams suggests, “what we find…African American women writers are many ‘black girls’ singing their own songs, and they sing them bravely, boldly, and remarkably” (85).

The importance of narrativizing female oppression as well as portraying the parallelism in the male-female power relations and the ways in which female “black” characters have made possible this breach in male autocracy within the limited mobility permitted to them cannot be denied. It can be viewed as the African-American woman’s attempt to defy the bourgeois efforts in diminishing their self-expression as well as breaking the stereotyped definitions of “black womanhood”. By defining her experiences, Rosa Guy constructs a uniquely “black” and female self and dismantles false notions of male superiority.

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CHAPTER IV:

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST: STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

Dana A. Williams writes that “contemporary African American literature by African American women writers offer full expressions of the complexity of contemporary African American life, particularly as this life relates to the black woman” (71). On writing about the varied writers concerned with children’s literature and the African-American experience in America, Violet J. Harris observes, “the culturally conscious authors do not hesitate to present historically accurate portrayals of the horrors of the African American experience in the United States” (551). Harris points out the relevance and significance in children’s literature of exhibiting the different ways cultures have experienced historical trauma. This condition is essential for aiding the growth of children into what Stanford and Amin describe as a “positive sense of black-self—rediscovering and redefining their past, looking into themselves, and exercising some degree of self-determination as they look to the future” (Corson 24-25). The “black” American experience is presented by these writers as containing multi-faceted struggles with complex psychological, social and economic dynamics.

The everyday struggles of the protagonists in Rosa Guy’s novels—*The Friends*, *Ruby* and *Edith Jackson*—are related specifically to the “black” woman’s experience. However, this is not to say that the writer has generalized the “black” experience or rather the “black” woman’s experience through a single person’s experience or experiences. Guy has narrated the ordeals of three completely distinct adolescent girls in the three novels and brings the reader to a fair understanding of the distinct nuances of their lives experienced as African-Americans within their community. The distinctiveness in their experiences may be traced to several factors—age, class, gender, sexual orientation, peer group and family to name a few. The protagonists are placed in “an African American

culture in which there exists a conflict of values—the values of the folk community and egalitarianism in conflict with the values of a society dominated by individualism and the competition of the 'cash nexus' " (Gebhard, 52). The novels become one of inquiry where "the purpose of the journey or quest…is to probe, to scrutinize that which has made the journey or the quest necessary. The quest is seldom completed, and the result is often an impermanent wellness which may require further and further investigation" (Williams 83-84).

In "Discovering Caribbean Literature: Discovering Self", Harriet A. Scarborough emphasizes the significance of the works of Caribbean women writers, including Rosa Guy, in aiding women of African descent in their life-long quest for self-knowledge, in understanding the "self" and in the comprehension of their complex background and history. She observes:

> Although these books by Caribbean women with female protagonists represent a range of style, forms, and attitudes, according to R. Shea (1992), they share a critical perspective: "They formulate questions of female identity in the context not of the solitary individual but of a complex network of family and community relationships" (38). Their protagonists are adolescents who, like their respective countries, are experiencing a political and cultural reality in transition. They also quite readily demonstrate what Carol Gilligan (1982) terms "a crisis of connections, a central dilemma of inclusion: How to include both oneself and others." Adolescent girls find that this struggle is usually a choice between hurting others and sacrificing oneself… They write with wit, sensitivity, and a

> brilliant command of language about the conflicts and contradictions of class and color. (83)

An analysis of the novels reveals the protagonists as going through adolescence, a rough and confusing period of their lives. The reader is informed of the adolescent girls' personal struggles toward adult independence. Rudine Sims considers "language, relationships between young and old, extended families, descriptions of skin color, names, nicknames, terms of address, historical and cultural traditions, and religious and other belief systems as authentic ways to characterize the experience" (Brooks, 137). Ruth H. Hamilton has opined that "an adolescent…is not always the same person, depending on the context in which she finds herself" (100). In fact, theories like Post-structuralism and Deconstruction have shown how the "self" is a fragmented collection of numerous "selves" that has no stable meaning or value except those we assign to it. This holds especially true for Guy's protagonists. Their identities can be identified "as situational and not fixed" (Hamilton 102). As Stuart Marriott has written, "Children… develop an identity within a social context. Part of the process of learning who they are is also learning who they are not…" (10). The complexities of everyday life in Guy's novels can be attributed to the daily struggle for existence and the search for identity in the midst of cultural and economic changes in America.

"The contradictions inherent in the struggle towards liberation is mirrored in the young by Black Liberation's movement towards freedom" writes Terri Clark (21). And the struggle for survival can perhaps be fruitfully studied by analyzing the social location of the protagonists in Rosa Guy's novels. According to Greg Hamilton, "Social location applies to the social categories of one's identity: race, class, gender, religion, sexual

orientation, ethnicity, and so on. It also applies to social roles (sister, student, and friend) and extends to include one's experiences and relationships" (100). "School is nearly impossible for Ruby. Made the butt of jokes and called an Uncle Tom because she helps a crippled white woman teacher on and off with her coat, Ruby is ostracized by her class-mates who do not understand that such courtesy is an essential part of Ruby's sense of her own dignity and responsibility as a human being" (Walker, 51). Terri Clark observes, "Ruby constantly struggles and feels her way through life. She is the idealistic humanist and the extreme opposite of Daphne. Any of her struggle for sexual identity is eclipsed by her struggle away from her father" (21).

Social marginalization as discussed in Chapter One contributes, to a major extent, to the complex life struggle of each protagonist especially in the formulation of their respective identities. Institutionalized racism and intra-racial racism function as determinants of their thought processes and perceptions of the self in terms of self-worth. Each protagonist is faced with distinct circumstances in the African-American community and hence, is faced with marginalization on distinct grounds. . In fact, Guy shows the relevance of race in the formation of a "black" woman's self-definition. Dana A. Williams expresses that "…it is largely African/Caribbean American women writers who interrogate issues specific to the black diaspora to highlight the tension created by an insider/outsider position, which they represent both through their subject position as immigrants who have adopted the United States as their home and through their position as minorities in majority culture that often fails to make easy their self-definition" (77).

In *The Friends*, Phyllisia is verbally and physically abused in school for her West Indian origin. Moreover, she is made to feel unattractive and uncomfortable with her

features and is snubbed by Marian and her "ugliness" is blatantly declared by her father. Phyllisia shows visible signs of difficulty in developing any emotional bond with her family especially her father. Phyllisia is guilty of employing discriminatory judgements on people based on their physical demeanour. She initially metes out to Edith, the same type of discrimination that she loathes when she had been made to stand in the position of victim by her classmates and her father. The whole process of discriminatory tendencies, here, shows possibility of being imbued into a child's psyche

The "double consciousness" arising due to relocation from the West Indies to America and the resultant operations of cultural difference between the two locations creates a crisis within Ruby and Phyllisia. Nostalgia and longing for the past as well as mandatory adjustment to a new culture and customs add to the angst of adolescence and of growing up. Phyllisia's difficulty in adjusting to her new environment is made all the more worse by her being ill-treated at school. Ruby and Phyllisia, after having lived a contented life on "the Island" with their aunt, they relocate to America where their parents had already set up residence. Phyllisia describes their relocation as inevitable "since [their father] has sent for us…and set us down in this miserable place called Harlem, New York". (*The Friends* 4-5).

In fact, economically driven migration had always been an important demographic element in American history and many American writers have narrativized the pros and cons of such migrations. Yanella observes how "pride of place and ideas about the values associated with particular places always played important roles in American cultural history. Most individuals at least partly defined themselves by their origins, by the places

where they were born. Given that Americans moved far more often than people in other countries, they also defined themselves by the places to which they migrated" (82).

Harlem functions as the focal point wherein the girls' quests for identity and struggle for survival occur in the selected novels. Within Harlem occur their self-interrogation concerning their identity particularly s it realities to their Caribbean heritage. Ruby, with a softer nature craving for affection, was beguiled by the difficulty in forming stable human relationships in Harlem. The African-American community becomes a terrain of intraracial conflicts and differences.

Race poses a major problem for Edith Jackson in her continuing struggle in life. In fact, the race problem serves to be the struggle with which Edith is faced throughout her adolescent years. She recognizes society's perception of the likes of her and develops a detached attitude of facing society's "othering" of her. When James impregnates and abandons her, Edith vows to have the child despite her poverty. But her first visit to a welfare clinic changes her mind. At the end of the novel, Edith chooses to abort the child and seek Mrs. Bates' help. Guy's vividly realized characterization of Edith Jackson dramatizes the cultural conflict the poor black adolescent may experience. "A nurturer, Edith values family and community, but to succeed in either the white or black middle-class world she must, at least temporarily, suppress those values" (Gebhard, 54). Mrs. Bates is determined that Edith will succeed in mainstream society and she wears the symbol of white, middle-class culture—a string of pearls. Describing her as manipulative, Edith observes "Her hands fingering her pearls, her lips rolled back into her white smile" (*Edith Jackson* 79).

Edith perceives herself as distanced from the world of middle-class blacks:

> Those girls with their big Afros-they had always lived around Harlem, somewhere. Their fathers, their mothers, had always been our dentists, doctors, lawyers, even our preachers. They had walked the streets and never seen me. They had not gone to my schools-no more than white. They had gone to private schools. Their buses had driven past me while I walked, holes in my stockings, shoes run over, on my way to school. They had never seen me. (*Edith Jackson* 171)

On one occasion when Edith had visited Phylissia's home, she had been humiliated by the girl's father, who "hated the difference between me and his things ... 'Ragamuffin,' he shouted. 'Get she out. I don't want no ragamuffin in my house'" (89).

Intra-racial racism provides no redemption for Edith though it provides a certain degree of ease to Phyllisia and Ruby. Edith's struggle is, perhaps, heightened by economic hardship. Her clothing spoke of her poverty during her early years in Harlem. And she encounters first-hand social distinction in terms of affluence from Calvin Cathy. Edith relates, "He hated me! Hated the difference between me and his things. Hated my ragged coat on his red sofa. Hated my nappy hair, my run-down shoes on his rug" (*Edith Jackson* 89). edith expresses to Mrs. Brown at "The Institution" : "We may be poor but we still people" (*Edith Jackson* 102). And Phyllisia realizes soon enough after they become friends that Edith was a thief, or "slick" as Edith called it. Edith recalls after a few years, "Being poor made being slick important". In other words, it was necessary for her survival and for the survival of her family.

The novels also reveal how the cash nexus and materialism impacted the mobility, marginalization and acceptance of characters within society. Edith Jackson is the striking example. Guy reveals economic affluence as forming a major role in the determination of survival. Calvin marries a wealthy woman and appoints her as guardian of his daughters. When he dies, Phyllisia and Ruby are left with means by which to survive.

Familial influence and guidance or the lack of it contributes profoundly to influence the growing up process in the protagonists. In Guy's narratives, the family unit seems to function as a fundamentally bourgeois social unit, exerting ideological influence on the children, be it Phyllisia and Ruby's family or Edith's foster families. This garners hostility towards the family from the protagonists. As Kimberley Reynolds has studied:

> Hostility to and mistrust of the family were driven by figures such as anthropologist Edmund Leach, and the psychiatrist R.D. Laing. From their different perspectives, both were highly critical of the nuclear family, seeing it as inward looking, emotionally stressful, alienated from community, and hence damaging to its members. Leach blamed the family for many of the ills of society, including increases in violent behavior, while Laing suggested that families prevented individuals from using their talentsand being fulfilled, sometimes leading to mental illness. By the 1960s these new ways of thinking about the family were beginning to take shape in children's literature. In *The Friends* (1973) and following novels, Rosa Guy shows black families sinking under the pressures to succeed in urban America… (202)

Patriarchal autocracy as discussed in Chapter Two serves as an important factor in influencing, deterring or shaping the formation of an identity in the adolescent protagonists. For Ruby and Phyllisia, Calvin Cathy embodies absolute patriarchal autocracy. He exerts strict parental control without comprehending his daughters' emotional needs or without considering the effects of his personality on their psychological growth. He hits Phyllisia on the lips for whining about being brought to America, forces Phyllisia to swallow food while she is sick from grieving due to her mother's death and lashes his seventeen year old daughter Ruby with his belt for having a boy drop her home and kiss her. The obedience that Calvin commands from Ruby and Phyllisia arises out of their deep-rooted fear of him and not due to a devoted respect for him. Ruby perceives her father "like a giant shadow that darkened the dell (*Ruby* 7). Phyllisia confesses: "I was afraid. If my hatred for Calvin had grown during my convalescence, my fear of him had tripled" *(The Friends* 133).

Ramona, their mother, suffers from breast cancer. She has an affable temper, an understanding nature and is the standard of beauty for her family. However, the threat of approaching death creates in her an indifference such that she escapes into her "bright moods" where nothing could reach her. She grew to become preoccupied with her illness and her problems. Only towards the end of her life does she realize the hazard of her preoccupation:

> It is hard, no matter how we try, to think of our children as outside of us, with problems of their own. So naturally it is difficult to guide them. If I had not been so caught up with all of my problems—my—my—fears—I might have been able to have seen some of the things happening about me.

> I would have known—should have known—what you were going through. Sometimes I was so glad for you and Ruby to leave the house, leave me alone with my problems…today was the first time I allowed myself to see that the things we love and accept, the things we value, make us parents our children's problems" (*The Friends* 110-111).

Such a familial environment definitely had its effects in the growth and maturation of Ruby and Phyllisia. The most profound influence can perhaps be observed in their social behavior and adjustment as well as their emotional development. Phyllisia shows lack of the ability to develop significant affiliations with those around her and prefers to remain aloof from society. As a matter of fact, Calvin's racial bigotry rubs off on Phyllisia who initially shows signs of misjudging people like Edith based on their outward demeanour. Ruby, on the other hand, "could not bear loneliness" (*The Friends* 75). Instead of shying away from company like her sister, Ruby craves for emotional bonding and sympathy. She develops a soft nature, unable to willingly hurt anyone and expecting ready sympathy from those around her. She enjoys being the focus of attention and this is what seperates her from Phyllisia and generates he latter's anger towards her. "She needed praise like other folks need food" is Edith's impression of Ruby (*Edith Jackson* 89). Her search for a significant emotional bond is perhaps the main reason why she becomes obsessed with Daphne Duprey.

Edith Jackson, on the other hand, does not have the luxury of assessing her emotions or dwelling on the cruelties of life. "I used my eyes as natural drapes around my brains" is what she says (*Edith Jackson* 27). Growing up without dependable parents or the efficacious influence of adults, Edith is quick to always assume responsibility for her

sisters even when they are placed under “The Institution”. Accepting and shouldering the burden of the difficulties of life comes naturally to her. She self-appoints herself as the guardian over her sisters and does not trust “The Institution” or their foster parents to have their best interests at heart. “That really got me hot: folks digging into my family’s lives” she says. And for this reason, she finds it hard to comprehend the fact that Bessie wants to defy her wishes or that Minnie wants to move on to a life without her sisters.

Edith’s recollection of her dead parents is like that of a distant bad dream that has left her with added struggles in life:

> I shook my head. Remembered the squeaking of his (her father’s) old rocking chair where he had sat rocking, looking out the kitchen window, his back to his roomful of kids. Kids he never spoke to. Love? I never thought of love concerning him. Never thought much of love concerning my mother, either, when she was dying on the kitchen cot of TB…Ma had no business having kids after Bessie. Yet she had gone on to have Suzy, then Minnie ten months later. She dragged her life for on for five more years until Ellen was born. Lord, to think of that shuffling old man and that sick woman loving and making babies. Making them, then leaving them for me to raise…While that old man and sick woman sat around getting sick, sicker, old, older—then dying”. (*Edith Jackson* 69)

The death of their father evokes no emotion in Edith and her siblings. Edith relates: “We had not cried when he went out and did not come back. Out of habit we listened for his morning shuffle that day. Then we forgot it. He next morning we remembered we had not heard it the day before, and we went on to make plans” (*Edith Jackson* 69).

Edith functions only to perform her duties towards her family. She grows up without the affections of her parents. In fact, she functions as parent for her siblings because her father and mother are non-functional as parents in the true sense of the term. Her attempt at loving and being loved by James, Mrs. Bates' nephew proves futile. Lack of affection in her childhood years creates in her the instinct to want to protect her loved ones. The lack of parental guidance and of motherly care forges in her the responsibility that she narrates as the "duty from the time I looked up and saw the world. Duty to cuddle, but never be cuddled. Duty to carry but never be carried. To change diapers, to wash clothes, to clean, to teach" (*Edith Jackson* 69).

Edith, who values familial togetherness and sisterhood, fights the suggestion she and her siblings being put in separate foster homes. However, her desire for togetherness gradually proves impossible. "It had been tough finding and tougher to keep foster parents willing to take in four kids" (*Edith Jackson* 17). In the first chapter of *Edith Jackson*, she and her siblings are portrayed as being in their "third foster home in the two years since…[they] had become orphans and had entered The Institution" (17). And in the end, she finds herself engulfed in the struggle for existence alone, but not hopeless however.

In fact, Guy's novels show the reality of life lived by African-American orphans and how the struggle for existence is really the struggle faced by of the Ediths of the world. As Mrs. Bates remarked, "In this poverty situation, orphans—the abandoned ones—are by far the most vulnerable…vulnerable—meaning they can most easily be used; melted into that mass of numbers called statistics—faceless statistics. And nothing is worse than being one of the faceless" (*Edith Jackson* 53). And it is at The Institution where the real struggle for survival is conceived. The Institution was a place where all the

"abandoned, abused, and orphaned" were sent and where "Black children just don't have the luxury of choices" (*Edith Jackson* 94, 98). Mrs. Bates also relates how "one never gets over being an orphan—when it happens young. Just being out there, alone, becomes the force that moves your life—for better or worse. That's why…orphans always find each other between earth and sky out there in the world" (*Edith Jackson* 54).Edith relates how "…the Institution kids…had never known a home with a friendly hand or body. Didn't know how to cry for it, or got tired from trying with no one to answer. And so they lay quiet as rag dolls in their cribs" (*Edith Jackson* 93). That the requiem for survival generates fast learners even in toddlers and young children is portrayed through the children of The Institution. At The Institution, children were divided and grouped into "foster", "troubled" or "JDs—juvenile delinquents (*Edith Jackson* 20). Two year old Pip Squeak who did not cry and four year old Mary Allen who could not walk were branded as "retarded" by the staff at The Institution because they were slow in their development and seldom portrayed emotions readily. Edith takes care of them and realizes their slowness could only be attributed to lack of proper care. And then the truth behind their behavior hits Edith as she decides to leave. She narrates Mary Allen's reaction, "…she had never expected me to stay. For her no one ever stayed. I walked to the door, feeling her tears, yet she'd never shed them. That four-year-old had learned to live" (*Edith Jackson* 111).

The city of Harlem itself stands as a reflection of the struggle for survival in a complex world. The grievance of ghettoized African-Americans is narrated through police practices especially the random shooting of African-American males. Mrs. Robbins remarks, "…this police brutality has got to stop…there are too many black boys who get

shot just because they run" (*The Friends* 140). Edith's brother, Randy, meets the same fate. After being bullied, the death of her mother and suffering Calvin's tortures, Phyllisia describes her emotional state to that of Harlem: "I felt hardened—a part of the concrete buildings and sidewalks of the city" (*The Friends* 150). Mrs. Bates, Edith's benefactor, in her anger is observed by Edith as, "Her face changed to pure street—125th Street at Lennox Avenue, Harlem" (*Edith Jackson* 78). As Mrs. Duprey relates, "It's a question of survival… Everything is survival. These men will kill you or make you kill yourself if you let them… Even women who go to church on Sundays are only working for survival. They pray hoping, others hope praying—but baby, it's all in the knowing" (*Ruby* 170).

America in general and New York in particular becomes described as hard ground for survival struggles and chaos. The whole environment seemed hostile towards the young protagonists. Charles compares Calvin to New York and says that "they both seem made to dazzle the eye and to wear out the mind" (*The Friends* 29). Frank describes the Americanization process as starting "out in school with a head full of sense" and leaving it with "full of nonsense" (*The Friends* 29). Mr. Charles prodded that in New York schools was that parents allowed teachers "to get away with murder" (*The Friends* 79). Daphne Duprey professes that the educational system holds disadvantages for the African-Americans because they "only make [students]…fit for the ghettoes, where [they]…end up destroying each other (*Ruby* 49). Due to the civil rights disturbances, the police kept "poking around and getting nasty" (*The Friends* 79). Phyllisia describes New York air as "clear, sharp, tingling and infectious" (*The Friends* 83).

In fact, the whole process of survival strategies and struggle for existence is equivocal to the ongoing changes during the contemporary period and also to the staunch

black movement at that time. The 1960s was a code word for either liberation or distortion. It was also a time when the rat-race for making more and more money accelerated. It was also a period in American history when the generation gap loomed ever larger and this is evident in the way conservative individuals like Calvin Cathy failed to understand the new American adolescent way of life. As discussed by Phillip R. Yanella, the period between 1965 and 1967 was a time when several hundred disturbances occurred each summer in African-American areas of cities. In fact, the entire period was sometimes called "The Long Hot Summer" and race riots occurred in these cities. In *The Friends*, an episode in Chapter Seven describes the summer race riots.

Phyllisia narrates:

> Then it happened. What the children, the teacher, even Edith had been waiting for. The side-walk exploded. There was a hush—everyone stopped talking and breathing at the same time—then as though a rubber band had been cut, bodies shot out of everywhere at the same time—then as though a rubber band had been cut, bodies shot out of everywhere at the same time. One shout heaved to the heavens, and like a roaring wave, bodies slammed against me, pushing me backwards, forcing me off my feet, yet holding me upright by sheer numbers, the pressure of movement. Policemen on horseback rode into them, swinging clubs, policemen on foot waded in and broke up the wall of human flesh into smaller, more manageable knots. My support gone, I fell to the sidewalk. Feet stumbled over me, people tripped and fell, pulled themselves up and rushed to join whatever was going over my head… A battle was raging on that stoop. Men, women and a force of

> police were tangled in one ferocious heap…I looked around in despair, from this end of the street where traffic was snarled, cars were overturned, to the opposite end of the street where police on the sidewalk had cornered gangs of youths, lining them along the buildings" (53).

This struggle for survival is not limited to the child characters but also to the adult characters who find it increasingly difficult to get by in a tough world. Calvin Cathy migrates to America in search of the American Dream. However, his dreams come short when he is faced with reality in America. On more than one occasion, he seeks to obtain a loan from Cousin Frank for furthering his dreams but his request met with rejection. Cousin Frank deliberates to Calvin on the difficulties of making it big in America. Frank tries to drive home the fact that Calvin's zeal and overbearing pride in are by no means substantial foundations by which to obtain economic prosperity in America.

Ramona Cathy is portrayed as psychologically disturbed due to her inability to cope with the fact that she has cancer. She spent "so many hours of so many days, sewing or looking out of the garbage-piled backyard where alley cats screeched and bits of hardy grass inevitably grew between the cracks in the concrete" (*The Friends* 113). Her illness makes her muse on life and makes her realize how bourgeoisie mentalities like that of her husband create profound difficulties for the existence of the less fortunate. She tells Phyllisia, "Children, by all means, by whatever means, change your parents so that the lives of all of us—all of the Ediths—must be more bearable on this earth" (*The Friends* 111).

Edith's nameless father is faced with an existence that seems profoundly soulless. While Randy and Edith try her best to make life bearable for the family by engaging in

petty employments and making their little dinghy as homely as possible for the little girls, the father figure does not seem able to cope with life. His existence within the house is confined to the chair at the corner of the room and his mobility is limited to his daily leave for work in the evening. That is all that is left of his existence. He exists but has ceased to live and that existence itself is wiped out with no remaining source of knowledge as to the details of his death. His children do not know how to mourn for a father who had never made his presence or existence felt within the family.

Lynne Vallone observes:

> Many late twentieth and twenty first century children's books feature comic or cynical views of the failures of adulthood in nurturing, educating or even conversing with contemporary youth. In these books the difference between adult and child favours the child not because of the greater intrinsic worth of childhood so much as because the adult values depicted are limited to consumerism, competition and social-climbing…In 'resistant' narratives, the universal child becomes the particular child—raced, classed, gendered and so on…Within children's literature, the impulse to confront notions of difference cannot be separated from questions of identity—figuring out who the protagonist (and child-reader) might become both in relation to others and in the surrounding world. (181-183)

Guy's use of the bildungsroman form to highlight the struggle for existence is highly significant. M.H. Abrams defines bildungsroman as a "novel of formation" where the subject is the "development of the protagonists' mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into

maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (201). However, Guy's use of the bildungsroman seems to be what Geta Le Seur has explained as exposing "conditions which robbed her of a memorable and happy childhood" (qtd. in Williams 84). Dana A. Williams has explained that the "black woman writing the *Bildungsroman* force the world to consider how race influences one's coming of age in particular and one's life in general…the black woman's *Bildungsroman* presents the realities of being black and female in a society in which she is doubly marginalized, all the while investigating the ways in which the protagonist's coming of age might best negotiate and accept her marginalized cultural past" (84).

On writing about Young Adult African-American books, Carolyn M. Corson observes, "The books show Afro- Americans as courageous people, able to survive difficult circumstances through dreams, laughter, and caring relationships with others (24-25). Rosa Guy's novels narrate the complexities of "black" adolescent life that had been shadowed by the Black liberation movement. As Vallone has rightly suggested, "…children are different from adults—and they are biologically, physically and psychologically 'other'. And the pleasure and pain of human existence contains the impossibility of bridging that difference between self and other" (188). In Rosa Guy's novels, identity can therefore be observed as a product of intersectionality in that identities of the protagonists are influenced directly through their various immediate surroundings and indirectly through the economic and social upheaval of the time. The struggles faced by the characters are struggles necessary for survival and in a modern dynamic world where cultures fight the battle for existence.

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CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Rosa Guy, “prolific and yet under-read writer of discourse-raising young adult novels” has successfully imbibed and merged the elements of autobiography, bildungsroman and history to offer expression of the complexity of her contemporary American experience, especially in relation to her experience as a “black” woman (Traylor 60). Her trilogy—*The Friends*, *Ruby* and *Edith Jackson*—can be read as community-based fictions “critiquing community and wider American impositions on identity that dwarf the possibilities of self-actualization” (Traylor 66). They significantly narrativize the perceptions and experiences of children and express such juvenile experiences in relation to family and community in the context of literary history.

Harvey J. Graff writes:

> More commonly, commentators accept with little question the evidence of adults’ comments as sufficient to indict the dress, manners, “insubordination”, and “precociousness” of the young (and often their parents and origins). The bias of generational criticism, and the memories on which it is based, join together with the substitution of elders' views for the thoughts of the young to complicate efforts to understand children, adolescents, and youth in their historical contexts. Locating direct and unbiased evidence about children and youths is seldom easy; the question of what should count as acceptable source is very tricky. Therefore, we must treat all data regarding the young critically and with care. Class, gender, ethnicity, race, and other key factors add their weight to the problem. Unfortunately, the emotionally powerful judgments and language on which we base our understanding of young people past and present are

> often fragile or contradictory, if not simply inaccurate, when examined closely. Images and ideologies about the young intertwine in complex, inseparable ways (55-56).

Ruth H. Hamilton opines that “one of the most effective ways of understanding childhood experience is to recall one's own childhood” (30). And this is, perhaps, the achievement of Rosa Guy as a writer. But her depiction of childhood is not coloured with romance. Instead, it is infused with realism and recollections of her own lived experience of “othering” in an urban society. Her ability to represent her own experiences as an adolescent, dislocated and marginalized and the angst of growing up is highly credible and authentic. As a matter of fact, Guy’s writings do not show intense didacticism as is the case with several children’s writings. Nor do they appear to be adult-monopolized articulations of juvenile experiences which can be otherwise said of many children’s books. Guy has presented authentic narratives of adolescent experiences within a historical context and narrativize the many problems associated with the historical, cultural and social context that make them relevant testimonial accounts or testimonios. In fact, “children’s literature written by African American women has always confronted hard issues. Issues such as slavery, the civil rights movement, education, and the family ties are the foundation of the literature” (Johnson 220).

Violet J. Harris writes

> Because literature is a valued cultural commodity, traditions evolve around its definitions, functions, and value. The same holds true for children's literature, which is indeed a valuable and valued cultural commodity.

> Children's literature serves the important role of mediator between children, cultural knowledge, and socialization by adults. Moreover, because children's literature has long maintained this traditional role in society, it possesses both symbolic and real power. (541)

The selected texts of Rosa Guy serve as testimonial accounts by depicting the manner in which "historical reality comes into our homes and affects our personal lives in the deepest possible ways" (Tyson 429). And Guy reveals the effects of such historical realities on young children and adolescents. The experiences presented in Guy's texts are raw and undistilled. Her writings serve as discursive spaces in which problems of relocation, survival struggles, gender marginalization, adult control and check on child mobility are charted. In her texts, Guy seems to have solved the problem of situating the young within society and within a historical moment with considerations of the conditions of childhood and the angst of growing up.

Lois Tyson observes that "the political content of African-American literature includes correcting stereotypes of African Americans; correcting the misrepresentation of African Americans in American history and the omission of African-Americans from American history; celebrating African-American culture, experience and achievement; and exploring racial issues including institutionalized racism, internalized racism, intra-racial racism, and the combined oppression of racism, classism, and sexism" (402). And the same can be said of Rosa Guy's texts. Guy portrays various facets of the African-American experience from her own lived experience. In fact, a notable aspect that Guy portrays within the selected texts in the representation of African-American experience is her representation of female juvenile experience which serves as relevant aspects of the

experience. The various concerns that Guy imbibes within her texts are significant in enhancing the correction of stereotypes that Tyson has mentioned.

"The basic issue of representation has been an ongoing one. And it has not been uncomplicated" (Johnson 212). Guy's installation of autobiographical elements in representing African-American culture and experience serve to enhance her narratives. Rosa Guy writes with "wit, sensitivity, and a brilliant command of language about the conflicts and contradictions of class and color" (Scarborough 83). . Guy's texts reveal the truth of Vallone's statement that says "not every book that includes a protagonist of colour has to be about race relations with a white majority" (184). As such, Guy's texts focus more on African-American characters and their relations with each other. Rosa Guy has offered concrete and astute critique of the African-American community itself to "justly criticize negative aspects of African American culture" (Harris 552). She seems to point out the need for the African-American community to look within or rather the need for emancipation within the race or community itself before battling external forces of racism or oppression. Guy has revealed, within her narratives, the absolute need for African-Americans to escape from the desire towards "whiteness" and the practice of internalized racism in order for "black" emancipation to become successful. The need for "black" brotherhood in spite of differing origins has also been stressed. The celebration and pride in one's own origin and race and respect of the same in others is what Guy appears to vindicate. Guys texts, therefore, provide "exceptional aesthetic experiences; they entertain, educate, and inform; and they engender racial pride" (Harris 551)

Scarborough narrates how "a common problem of those of…African descent is that others often find it convenient to lump us all together, make some quick

generalizations about our experiences, and lay claim to 'understanding' us" (82). Thompson and Woodard believe that it is only through "immersion in black history and culture that an author can gain the perspective necessary for the creation of literature that is both culturally authentic and aesthetically satisfying" (Taxel 251). In her texts, Guy has endeavoured to present the differences in experience among individuals and this is achieved through the narration of the experiences of Phyllisia Cathy, Ruby Cathy and Edith Jackson. In fact, the siblings, Ruby and Phyllisia, are shown to be distinct in their acceptance of a new environment, their reception of a new culture, their viewpoints on the civil rights movement and their relations with others. And this diversity in African-American experiences is enhanced through the various characters in the texts. "For these are characters who think about the world, who talk about politics, who are at ease with ideas of more than one interpretation" (Walker 52). In fact, all the major and minor characters serve some useful purpose in proving the multiplicity of this experience.

Dianne Johnson draws:

> Writers…such as Rosa Guy, have been instrumental in complicating our thinking about blackness in more sophisticated ways. For example, people often use the term "the black experience", implying that all black people are alike, denying the multiple dimensions of our experiences. Guy's novel…is a powerful analysis of class dynamics in black American communities, asking questions about how socio-economic status, educational status, skin color, and other factors affect not only our lives in this society as a whole, but our interactions with each other. Language, too, is one of these issues that create and exacerbates various tensions. Some

> readers are not always comfortable with literature whose characters speak in language that is "in character" Specifically some might object to the use of black English (AAVE/ African American Vernacular English) in fiction. But honest writers…have their characters speak in the language that is realistic to their circumstances and appropriate to various contexts. (220)

In addition to presenting this issue, Guy also "makes clear that the experiences of peoples of various parts of the African diaspora are intimately related" (Johnson 217). In fact, most African-American women writers of children's literature and young adult literature have imbibed this relation. Rosa Guy's trilogy *The Friends*, *Ruby*, and *Edith Jackson* explore the "deep and profound tensions between West Indians and US black people in the multicultural New York City" (Johnson 218). The diaspora has not been romanticized nor has the relationships between people of African descent from various parts of the world.

Most importantly, Guy seems to stress the futility of the prevailing black-white oppositional forces of her contemporary age. Through the projection of the relations of the foster children in Mother Peters' home where Edith Jackson and her siblings have also been kept, Guy has revealed the importance of the essential brotherhood of the human race. All along Edith had believed in the difference of the experience of being an orphan between "black" children like her and white children like fourteen year old Kenneth with "blue eyes" though they lived in the same foster home under a "black" parent (*Edith Jackson* 15). "I had no fight with Kenneth" said Edith, "except that to me black folks and white folks didn't dig each other" (*Edith Jackson* 15). Edith had been hard on Kenneth for no other reason than for his being white only to come to the ultimate realization in Chapter

Eleven that "I had resented him for so long—for nothing—for being white. Yet his misery and my misery tied us in that place where prejudice didn't count. Where nothing counted except understanding: being *out there*. In that, we were sure 'nough brother and sister" (*Edith Jackson* 68). Here racism and colonialism is revealed as existing within—in the individual psyche and influencing personal identity and perceptions of others

Rosa Guy's trilogy as testimonio of the African-American experience, indeed, proves relevant in highlighting aspects of African-American history from the perspective of young adolescents. The alteration of balance from the centre to the periphery takes place through the process of transfer of narrative from adults (the controlling voice in most of general literature) to children (the less represented voices in literature). Children have often been misrepresented in literature by adults because they have often been characterized through the adult's perspective on childhood. Guy, on the other hand, narrates adolescent experiences purely based on her lived experience. This has enhanced the study of African-American culture and experience in that the lesser heard voices of juveniles are represented. And the added significance of her narratives also lie in the fact that she highlights "black" emancipation not as the fight against whites or against themselves or a fight within mankind but more as a state of mind in which freedom is obtained from shackles that bind and tie men to subscribe to oppressive and repressive ideologies.

Mitchell and Taylor state:

> Throughout history, African American women writers have chronicled and critiqued the American experience… Once marginalized, if not ignored, by

> mainstream America, African American women writers are…central, indeed essential, to American letters and culture… as Frances Smith Foster asserts, African American women writers have "used the Word as both tool and a weapon to correct, to create, and to confirm their visions of life as it was and as it would become"…African American women writers seem to be in conversation with each other when one reads the recurrent themes, topics, motifs, and concerns in their writings… (1-2)

The novels of Rosa Guy can positively be inferred as being dialogic in nature. A dialogic work "permits numerous voices or discourses to emerge and engage in dialogue with one another. In dialogic works, the culture's dominant social or cultural ideology may vie with the discourses of popular culture" (Murfin and Ray 107). Mikhail Bakhtin had embarked on the view that literature is always bound to abound in varied voices and no work can ever be monologic. Guy has presented multiple voices without placing them in a hierarchy. Rather she has represented muti-voices from within society's elite and marginalized without placing any due superiority on either. The voices of weaker sections like Edith Jackson and those from the ghettoes including the "winos" are shown to be almost drowned by the bourgeois but can never really be suppressed. This intermingling of voices makes the interaction lively and thriving leading to stylized articulation.

Guy's novels, as testimonials, serve as examples of literary forms or methodologies of understanding identity and community within the American context. Testimonials serve as "markers of diverse identities and communities" and Guy's narratives become sites of intersection of "ethnicity, nationality, race, class, gender, sexuality, age" and identities (Armstrong 40). "The psychological and historical interests

merge with the literary consideration and illuminate the social climate effectively" (Hamilton 30). Rosa Guy's trilogy—*The Friend*s, *Ruby and Edith Jackson* validate her stance as a writer in to what Mary Helen Washington foregrounds as the "connection between the black woman writer's sense of herself as part of a link in generations of women, and her decision to write" (qtd. in Scales 1389).

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