Chapter 3

Aliens among Their Own: Black Females in the Community

The destructive relationship between black males and females is not restricted to the homefront. This chapter seeks to examine how the pernicious influence of the white standards has led to the oppression of black women and girls outside their homes by their own people. Public violence of this sort figures prominently in the novels of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor. Even in the novels where the white society is distant, the dark clouds of its dominion are very much noticed in the lives of the blacks. In order to get rid of their feelings of inferiority, they find some vulnerable member, usually a female who serves as a scapegoat, to feed their egos. Ostracism is thrust on members who offend the community by breaking its unwritten laws.

From a reading of the novels taken for examination, sexual abuse of female children seems a regular affair in the black community. Lovers exploit black girls and women and abandon them when they tire of them, thus reducing them to mere sex objects. Even within the Civil Rights Movement, the black female is relegated to doing work of secondary importance and exists more for providing sexual gratification to the black male. Prostitution turns the female body into an object for gross abuse and
a commodity for sale. Still more horrible is gang rape used as a punishment to women who refuse to conform to the heterosexual framework.

Fromm notes that conformist aggression is responsible for many unwarranted acts of violence, as in the behaviour of boys in a juvenile gang (207). The need to “effect” is often satisfied by having power over others, by experiencing their fear, by torturing them, and by sheer destruction (236). According to Dworkin, in a sexist society men consider freedom to be the freedom of the predator and women and girls would continue to be the prey (62).

Morrison, Walker, and Naylor treat the peculiar position of black women in their community, the victimized within the victimized group, who discover early in life that they are “neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph [are] forbidden to them” (Sula 52). Claudia, the narrator of Eye also comments on the plight of black girls: “Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with” (17).

Pecola in Eye suffers as a target of attack everywhere. She is ignored and despised at school. She is the only child sitting alone at a double desk. When one of the girls wants to be particularly insulting to a boy, he is declared to be in love with Pecola. Cynthia A. Davis marks her
as the “epitome of the victim in a world that reduces persons to objects and then makes them inferior as objects” (33).

One incident is particularly revealing. One day while returning from school, a group of boys circles and holds Pecola at bay as victim, surrounding her “like a necklace of semiprecious stones.” Thrilled by the easy power of a majority, they gaily harass her: “‘Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepnekked’” hurling two insults about matters over which the victim has no control: the colour of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult. Ironically, these boys do not realize that she is one among them or that their own father might have such habits. They dance “a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit” (55), like the choir boys-turned-savages in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*.

Morrison explains the unwarranted cruelty of these boys as the contempt for their own blackness. Their ignorance, self-hatred, and hopelessness are developed into a scorn that is ready to consume the hapless victim and this suggests Pecola’s role as a scapegoat. Studies in anthropology as well as literature have revealed the practice of scapegoating as an annual ritual of purification in certain communities. Chosen from among the most destitute of the city population, the scapegoat or “pharmakos” is often treated just like an animal for sacrifice. The pollution accumulated by a city during the previous year is expelled
through the scapegoat that is paraded through the streets, abused, thrust out of the city, and in early times, put to death. Thus the scapegoat is a denigrated person—one of “low” birth, anonymous, someone emptied of subjectivity, and reduced to refuse or nothingness. The animal, the infant, and the female are linked in this process by means of their vulnerability.

René Girard avers that in order to ward off the return of the original violence on which the community is founded, it seeks to deflect upon a “sacrificeable” victim the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members who it desires most to protect. So it seizes on a surrogate victim. The common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices is internal violence that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community. The human victims of sacrifice are seen to be either outside or on the fringes of society: prisoners of war, slaves, or “pharmakos” who can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal (4, 8, 12, 13). Notwithstanding the community’s awareness of the scapegoat’s innocence, it is symbolically loaded with the guilt of the community. In this way, the guilt or shadow is externalized and combated and finally exterminated as the alien instead of being dealt with as one’s own inner problem. So minorities and aliens typically provide the objects for the projection of the shadow. This eradication of the evil considered to be inherent in blacks is seen in extremely barbaric acts like the lynching of black men. If the victim is
drawn from outside the community, the surrogate victim, by contrast, is a member of the community. The sacrificial victim must at once resemble the members of the community and differ from them and is thus both insider and outsider (Girard 269, 291).

It is particularly revealing that the violence inflicted on a scapegoat, especially an insider, is in fact inflicted on the community itself because a community’s scapegoat stands in a metaphoric relationship to it. The scapegoat also acts as a displacement of its sins, and is in this sense, metonymic. Any community that has fallen prey to violence blindly searches for a scapegoat. The name-calling and abuse of Pecola is violence twice reflected—once upon the male himself, and again on the female as an expression of the tribe’s own guilt and shame when they project the shadow of evil upon her. Girard has pointed out that the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of misunderstanding (7).

Pecola is rescued from the abusive boys by the boldness of Frieda and Claudia. Maureen Peal, the high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into lynch rope, suddenly takes a fancy to Pecola and befriends her. Morrison links the violent imagery of the lynch rope hair with Maureen’s real motives. The friendliness proves to be put on because Maureen only wants to verify whether Pecola’s father sleeps naked. In the ensuing quarrel Maureen excludes the other three girls from her own circle of acceptance by screaming at them, “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and
ugly black e mos. I am cute!” Though Frieda and Claudia retaliate as best as they can by calling Maureen names, Pecola seems “to fold into herself, like a pleated wing” (73).

An extreme version of Maureen is seen in Geraldine, a black woman who tries to erase blackness from her life. She is one of the “sugar brown” (83) girls whose education has equipped them to do the white man’s work and be wary of their own racial attributes. The internalization of white standards creates hatred and violence in her dealings with people of her own race. In Butler-Evans’s view, hers is a case where respectability, an instrument of oppression, dictates standards of morality and ethics (70). Cleanliness becomes an obsession for her and consequently, sex is a filthy necessity not to be enjoyed, and mother love means meticulously meeting the child’s physical needs. She explains to her son Louis Junior the difference between coloured people, the group to which they belong, and niggers. “Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud” (87). Junior is allowed to play only with white children but he longs to indulge in pranks with black boys and the frustration of his innate longings turns him callous. He takes pleasure in bullying girls and tormenting his mother’s cat that he suspects is first in her affections.

Junior, who lives near the playground of Washington Irving School, once lures Pecola into his house with the promise of showing her some kittens. But he throws a big black cat right in her face that claws her face
and chest. Further, he prevents her from going out by barring the door. After a while, Pecola gets interested in the cat that responds to her touch with pleasure. Then Junior throws the cat against the radiator, almost killing it. At this point Geraldine returns home to be greeted by this scene of havoc. Junior conveniently puts all the blame on Pecola, who, at a glance, represents for Geraldine all that she has tried hard to avoid. She orders Pecola out of the house. “In an echo chamber effect, Pecola becomes the victim of Junior who is the victim of Geraldine who is the victim of centuries of oppression” (Heinze 70-71). Here also Pecola becomes the scapegoat for the inadequacies of her race.

Pecola’s rejection by teachers, classmates, and adults reinforces her conviction that she will become acceptable to everyone if she can exchange her brown eyes for blue ones. She prays fervently for blue eyes and finally approaches Soaphead Church, a conjuror. Like Geraldine, Soaphead also tries to separate himself in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggests Africa. Grewal finds in this alienation the epistemic violence and displacement wrought by the colonial project (28). He is a misanthrope, for the slightest contact with people produces in him a faint but persistent nausea. Since he cannot stand body odour or breath odour, he gradually turns his attention to children whose bodies are the least offensive and further limits his interests to little girls. He defends his conduct in letters to God that when he “touched their sturdy little tits and bit them” (181) he was
being friendly. His pedophilic fondness for little girls is another expression of perverted desire. Soaphead acts as a collaborator in the madness of Pecola by using her to administer poison to the unwanted dog. Pecola’s rape by her father Cholly is echoed by Soaphead’s metaphoric one.

Chikwenye Ogunyemi also notes the theme of the scapegoat running through the novel. Geraldine’s cat, Bob the dog, and Pecola are the scapegoats supposed to cleanse the society through their involvement in some violent rituals. Pecola is associated with the black cat with blue eyes, a competitor to Geraldine’s love for her son. The death of the cat should make a healthy relationship between mother and son possible, but Pecola bears the brunt of the whole affair. With all the unpleasantness that accompanies old age, Bob is repulsive to Soaphead just as Pecola is to others, both black and white, because of her ugliness. The dog is killed as an offering for Pecola’s prayer for blue eyes and she is exposed to its violent death. However, Ogunyemi is of opinion that the offering or sacrifice, be it cat or dog, is needless since uncharitable motives cause the deaths (116-17).

Girard has observed that in primitive societies the ritual victim is treated with veneration before being denigrated. Maureen’s friendliness, Junior’s invitation to hospitality, and Soaphead’s kindness can all be read as the prelude to the cruelty that lurks behind the facile expression of affability.
Pecola becomes the scapegoat, the sacrificial victim on whom the whole community purges itself. Only the three prostitutes, themselves outcasts, give love and recognition to her. Even Claudia, the sympathetic narrator admits that they have all felt the better for having cleansed themselves on her by dumping all the waste on her which she absorbed. “We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness” and “honed our egos on her, padded our character with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength” (205). Such violence that even friends can inflict on each other is the result of picking an internal scapegoat who becomes an enemy and enables the good feelings to be protected and preserved in the group. Morrison has said to Claudia Tate that the black community, which is itself a pariah community, contains pariahs within it that are very useful for the conscience of that community (129). This parallels whites’ use of blacks to confirm their sense of superiority.

Mr. Henry, the elderly boarder at the MacTeers tries to molest Frieda, fondling her budding breasts, and this is yet another breach of faith. But MacTeer, who unlike Cholly is able to protect his daughter, beats the offender and throws him out. Christian, however, finds in Mr. Henry’s misdemeanour a subtle preparation for Cholly’s rape of his daughter and Soaphead’s attraction to young girls (“Contemporary Fables” 66).

Like Pecola, Sula also becomes a scapegoat for people whose anger at the economic structure that keeps them down is vented on an enemy
within. By heaping their anger on Sula, the community is able to keep its frustration within bounds. If Pecola’s madness makes everyone feel sane, Sula’s evil nature highlights everyone’s goodness. Being a pariah, she gives them a chance to affirm their solidarity as a community. Sula’s sexual adventuring leads the people of Medallion to reject her. They see her as a witch and a scapegoat. However, they treat her as a scapegoat more because she puts her grandmother in a home than because she sleeps with the women’s husbands. Girard marks the plague or epidemic as a symbol for the sacrificial crisis (76). Obviously, Morrison has this in mind because Sula’s return to Bottom is accompanied by a plague of robins. However, the people do not stone her, but they avoid her, and let her run her course just as they do with the plague. These people believe that the purpose of evil is to survive it. The theme of a communal scapegoat links Morrison’s first two novels.

In Beloved the harsh treatment from the community is of another kind. It ostracizes the residents of 124, though they have all benefited from Baby Suggs’s generosity. She preaches to them during the weekly meetings in the Clearing to love themselves and be wary of the whites. However, a party hosted by her after the arrival of Sethe and the children turns into excess, and her friends resent Baby Suggs’s over indulgence. In their view she got proud and was overwhelmed by the sight of her daughter-in-law and Halle’s children. The scent of disapproval lay heavy in the air because of the
reckless generosity on display. They think: “Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave” (137). The communal voice is now that of the white master reprimanding the slave for violating the acceptable code of behaviour. The oppressors’ act is now perpetuated by the oppressed themselves. So they fail to give warning when schoolteacher comes riding to recapture Sethe. This lack of communication in a community that conveyed messages to each other even in the days of slavery is nothing short of betrayal and collaboration in the violence.

Sethe seems unrepentant about the infanticide. Her proud bearing, “trying to do it all alone with her nose in the air” (254), further alienates the community that misreads her chilly response. For Baby Suggs, however, “to belong to a community of other freed Negroes—to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed—and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance” (177) is very painful. So she spends her time contemplating colours on her quilt, her voice silenced. But the community refuses to acknowledge their involvement in this spiritual death. Sethe does not attend the funeral service of Baby Suggs but goes to the gravesite where she refuses to join the others in singing. They retaliate by eating the food they have brought, and not touching what Sethe has prepared. “So Baby Suggs, holy, having devoted her freed life to harmony, was buried amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite” (171).
Sethe’s children also feel society’s disapproval. When Denver briefly attends Lady Jones’s school, she does not immediately notice that her classmates make excuses not to walk with her. But she is pained by Nelson Lord’s curiosity about her life in prison with her mother. She becomes deaf and never goes back to school. The atmosphere at home becomes so unbearable that her brothers Howard and Buglar run away. Denver blames her mother for the alienation from the community. Actually, they face what according to Fromm is the most severe punishment in primitive societies, namely, ostracism (121). Patterson has identified it as the extrusive mode of alienation.

Paul D who meets Sethe after eighteen years knows nothing about her crime. When he contemplates a family life with her, Stamp Paid interferes in their life by informing him about the infanticide. He also shows the unbelieving Paul D a newspaper clipping containing Sethe’s photograph. Paul D is so much disgusted with the revelation that he reminds Sethe that she has only two feet and not four, insinuating that she exhibits animal qualities. Sethe realizes that she should have known that he too would behave like the rest of the community.

Harding and Martin argue that Beloved is both a revision and a conciliation of the conflicting values revealed in the earlier novels of Morrison and the double process can be retraced using the ritual pattern described by Girard. Rituals aim through the proper re-enactment of the
surrogate victim mechanism to keep violence outside the community. The acting principle at work in the sacrificial ritual is that “only violence can put an end to violence” (Girard 26) and restore peace within the collective body. The initial crisis in *Beloved* is triggered by a double outburst of violence both outside and inside the black community. On schoolteacher’s arrival, Sethe’s defensive murder creates the first breach in the cultural order. But the fatal encounter is made possible because the rest of the community spitefully abstains from giving the early-warning signal. The ritual atonement to end the violence is achieved by the return of the murdered child’s ghost. *Beloved* dramatizes the most extreme exigency that brings all the other characters to their breaking point. As opposed to the disruption caused by retributive violence, victimization dissipates violence and restores social concord (Harding and Martin 137-38).

The action of *Paradise* (1997) takes place between 1968 and 1976, though the background of the story goes back to 1870. Morrison relates the story of nine black families that have escaped slavery only to find greater discrimination threatening them from their own people. For ten generations they have been led to believe that the division they fought to close was free against slave, rich against poor, and white against black. But now they come across a new division: light-skinned against black, a concern that Morrison has explored in *Tar Baby*. However, this new division comes as a
shock to these men as their racial purity revealed in their black skin is considered a stain.

The Old Fathers of the three original families that constitute the nucleus of the community, Zechariah Morgan, Juvenal DuPres, and Drum Blackhorse established Haven, the only all-black town in 1890. These are men who are proud of their pure black blood, what Pat Best, the teacher-turned-historian describes as “8-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful” (193). Their rejection by their own people, which they have named Disallowing, is a “burn whose scar tissue was numb by 1949” (194). But those who survive the war come back home with further proofs of discrimination that they term Disallowing, Part Two. So they consolidate the pure blood and move farther west to establish another settlement, which they call New Haven. Later it is renamed Ruby after the first person to die there. It is their version of Eden.

Richard Misner, the clergyman of Ruby thinks of the insular nature of his parishioners. He realizes that he is “herding a flock which believed not only that it had created the pasture it grazed but that the grass from any other meadow was toxic” (212). They believe that the generations are to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too because of a deal Morgan had made with God to be pure and holy. So they are convinced that “unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as they resided in Ruby” (217). That is their recipe and deal for Immortality.
In that case Pat realizes that everything that worries them must come from women. Pat feels herself an outsider in the Ruby community because of her light skin inherited from her mother that Pat has passed on to her daughter. She also believes that her mother’s death, as well as her stillborn baby sister’s, has been caused by the delay in getting medical help due to Ruby’s prejudice for their light skin. Finally, she realizes that the purity of the all-African blood lines depends on the men’s ownership of their women’s sexuality.

The Ruby community is strictly patriarchal since the men’s sense of identity parallels that of the patriarchal structures of the white middle-class as they imitate their hegemonic practices. So they particularly resent the inmates of the Convent, who dare to flout the laws of Ruby. Originally a mansion nicknamed an embezzler’s folly, the Convent has existed long before the town of Ruby. It has started as an asylum-cum-boarding school for Indian girls. But in course of time, the endowment of the founder gets depleted and the school is enjoined to close. Mary Magna, the Mother of the Convent tries hard for a decision in their favour. But the male-dominated authorities are the least helpful as they wonder why in a Protestant state a bevy of strange Catholic women with no male mission to control them is entitled to special treatment.

Consolata, the faithful assistant to Mary Magna has been rescued by her while returning from Portugal to the United States. For thirty
years she offers her body and soul to God’s son and Mother but these years “crack like a pullet’s egg when she met the real man” (225), Deacon Morgan, who carries on an affair with her for a few months. Then he breaks it off and later on Consolata becomes a friend of his wife, Soane. The Convent becomes a refuge for many women of Ruby. Literally, it nourishes the Ruby community as many of them get bread from the convent, neglecting the communal purpose of the Oven brought along from the old settlement. Some outsiders also make it their haven. They are Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas.

K.D., nephew of Deacon and Stuart Morgan, is a thoroughly spoilt young man who has been going out with Arnette Fleetwood. The fifteen-year-old Arnette becomes pregnant but K.D. is reluctant to marry her, in spite of the community’s unwritten law on the inevitability of such marriages. Watching Gigi alighting from a bus, he is immediately fascinated by her. When Arnette taunts him for this new infatuation, K.D. slaps her. He begins to chase Gigi to the Convent till she is tired of his chaotic devotion. “She had teased, insulted or refused him once too often and he chased her around the house, grabbed her, smacked her” (256). It needs the joint efforts of Mavis and Seneca with kitchen equipment to pull him off her. After having stalked her for years, he now speaks of her as strange and devious.
K.D. joins the Ruby citizens who blame the Convent women for everything that goes wrong. A secret meeting near the Oven plans an attack on the Convent with the obvious agenda of protecting their cult of true black womanhood. But under this guise they plot the hunting of the marginalized women by an already marginalized community of blacks. They believe the women to be child murderers, lesbians, temptresses, and witches who have turned the former Convent into a coven. The encounter made by nine men representing the nine families of Ruby results in the death of some women and severe casualties for the men. The convent women become scapegoats in Ruby, a “backward noplace ruled by men whose power to control was out of control” (308).

Arnette, psychologically scarred by K.D.’s treatment of her, leaves her home and reaches the Convent. She stays there till she delivers of a premature baby that lives only for a few weeks.

Billie Delia, Arnette’s closest friend despises K.D. for various reasons. He has the audacity to propose to Billie both before and after his affair with Arnette. He forgets Arnette while she is away and “chased any dress whose wearer was under fifty,” leaving “his future bride pregnant and on her own, knowing that it was the unmarried mother-to-be (not the father-to-be) who would have to ask the church’s forgiveness” (152). He lets Arnette suffer for four years and finally consents to marry her only when Gigi kicks him out of her bed.
Victimization of black girls is never an isolated event. Seneca has various bad experiences from black boys. She starts the masochist habit of slicing her skin in one of the foster homes that she is brought up. While Harry, a foster brother, yanks at her jeans to get off her underwear, the safety pin holding together the jeans opens and scratches her stomach. When Harry gets to the panties, the line of blood excites him even more. Mama Greer, the foster mother is sympathetic to find the wound while bathing her. But Seneca does not tell her about what has happened. Next time she scratches herself on purpose but the sympathy is diluted. So she tells Mama Greer about Harry’s conduct. Greer is shocked more from fear of a bad name for the home and asks her to keep quiet. Soon Seneca is transferred to another home.

Bitter experiences haunt Seneca from high school and the eleventh grade. She is pained to find herself always singled out. For example, if she is drinking Coke with five girls, she is the one to get her nipple tweaked by a boy on a dare. Even a man sitting with his baby daughter on a park bench lifts his penis and makes kissing noises on seeing her. Boyfriends take her devotion for granted. If she complains to them about the misconduct of friends or strangers, they get furious with her. Eddie, who is imprisoned after his car runs over a child, complains to her about everything when she visits him and gives her a number of errands. She
takes the blame for everything and continues to punish herself by inflicting shallow wounds on her body.

Billie Delia also becomes a pariah for no fault of her own. Nathan DuPres used to take her for a ride on his horse even before she could walk, and one Sunday when she was “three years old—too little, still, for everyday underwear” (150) she “pulled off her Sunday panties before raising her arms to be lifted onto Hard Goods’ back” (151). This innocent act is interpreted as a mark of her sexual promiscuousness by everyone including her mother Pat who punishes her. Billie quickly learns the cautionary look in the eyes of girls whose mothers have warned them away from her and “her virginity, which no one believed existed, had become as mute as the cross Reverend Misner was holding” (151-52).

In Song Hagar, like her biblical namesake, becomes an outcaste, banished by a bored lover, before losing herself in her own wilderness (Carmean 47), just as Abraham sent away his wife Sarah’s handmaiden into the wilderness after begetting a son. Milkman falls in love with Hagar though she is his senior by several years and keeps the affair going for years till he gets tired of her. She has become “his private honey pot” or “the third beer” (91) that one drinks without relish. In her despair Hagar tries to kill Milkman many a time as the “calculated violence of a shark grew in her” (128) but always fails. During the last attempt, feeling helpless pitted against his will she stands “like a puppet strung up by a
puppet master who had gone off to some other hobby” (301). Soon after, Guitar who observes Hagar sitting holding her breasts like rejected fruit, realizes that Hagar is hurt and the hurt comes from Milkman. As a final effort to attract her lover Hagar tries to regain her youth and charm with fine dresses and cosmetics. While coming back from shopping, she gets drenched in the pouring rain. She catches a fever that leads to her death. From a spoiled child, she has demeaned herself to a doormat woman for the sake of love.

When he is able to piece together Ryna’s story from various sources, Milkman is immediately reminded of Hagar whose “maturity and blood kinship converted her passion to fever, so it was more affliction than affection” (127). Hagar “whom he’d thrown away like a wad of chewing gum after the flavor was gone” (276-77) had given nineteen years of her life to him. Like her great-great-grandmother, she too is a one-man woman and cannot live without the man for whom she believes she was born into the world. As Grewal observes, “Sorrow links the generations from Ryna to Hagar” (73). The metaphor of flying unites Milkman with his ancestor not only in majesty but also in culpability.

Guitar, though he professes to protect black women and avenge the atrocities on them through his membership in the Seven Days, adopts a proprietary attitude towards them. When Milkman questions him about this attitude even as he complains of being exasperated by the black woman, his
response is, “Because she’s mine” (223). Duvall notes that the issue of race is bracketed momentarily and what is really at issue is the male possession of women. The Seven Days aims “in its unarticulated attempt to establish masculinity as violent mastery and manhood as the right to say what one’s women do” (88). So they are not unlike the insular Ruby men.

In *Tar Baby* Jadine, who has assimilated the ways of the white world, treats the poor women of her race with derision. In the ladies’ lounge, she meets a cleaning woman and impulsively offers her some money, calling her Mary. But the girl whispers her name “Alma Estee” (290). Jadine has unconsciously imbibed the values of the Valerian household where the servants are routinely known as Yardman and Mary.

The orphaned Dorcas in *Jazz* tries to find meaning to her life through love affairs, first with Joe Trace who is old enough to be her father and when she tires of him, with Acton, a ruthless young man. When Joe shoots her in his anger, her blood spoils Acton’s coat and he seems more disturbed by the ruin of his coat than the mishap to his girl friend. His self-centredness renders him insensitive to the tragedy that has befallen Dorcas.

In *Love*, Bill Cosey creates bedlam by his decision to marry Heed Johnson, his granddaughter Christine’s best friend, not only because she was only eleven at that time but also because she was an Up Beach girl without any education, manners, or possessions. Christine and her mother May devise means of discomfitting Heed. Only Heed’s younger sisters,
Solitude and Righteous Mourning attend the wedding, presumably because they were mourning the death of her brothers, Joy and Welcome, who were drowned in the sea. But the real reason was May who took pains to snub the Johnsons. She even objects to Cosey’s paying for their funeral, believing that they had no business to swim in that part of the ocean reserved for the resort. Even years later, the mention of Heed’s family elicits in Christine the same contempt. “That nest of beach rats who bathed in a barrel and slept in their clothes?” (89).

Christine lives for three years with Dr. Rio who refuses to divorce his wife. When he finds a new girl, Christine is manhandled out of the apartment without being allowed to take her clothes. She attacks his Cadillac in rage and is arrested. Though they allow her to go, she feels “as lonely as twelve-year-old watching waves suck away her sand castle” (91). Since none of her close friends wants to risk Dr. Rio’s displeasure, finally, she walks into Manila’s whorehouse.

Heed also has her one fling with a man called Knox Sinclair who has come to collect his brother’s body and accompany it on the train back home to Indiana. Reminded of her own loss of two brothers, she feels sorry for the man. They have a passionate affair for the six days he stays there. He promises to come back in six weeks when they would go away together. Heed packs away her new clothes without anyone’s knowledge and gets some money ready but he never turns up.
In *Purple* Walker’s attack on black men is all the more scathing because these men are not so much victims of the system as in *Third Life*. Now the threat of violence is not so much from the dominant group as from within and even in their limited circle of power, black men are abusive to black women. When life becomes unbearable without Celie’s protection, Nettie runs away to Celie’s new home. But Albert, still yearning for Nettie, makes advances to her. When Nettie resents them, he asks her to leave and then follows her on horseback. He tries to assault her sexually by dragging her into the woods. As Nettie manages to escape, he vows to have his revenge by never allowing the sisters to meet or communicate. Nettie leaves for Africa with a missionary couple and writes constantly to Celie. But Celie never receives the letters as they are intercepted and hidden by Albert. Albert’s cruelty is not restricted to the sisters. Harpo falls in love with Sofia and brings her home to meet his father when she is seven or eight months pregnant. Albert insults Sofia by asking her whose child she is carrying and tells her that he will never give his consent for the marriage.

Albert’s first wife is also a victim of male abuse. She is shot dead by a violent lover as she returns from church with Harpo. Harpo has frequent nightmares about his mother who has died in his lap.

Shug becomes an outcast in her own family and the community as well because she does not bother to conform to the conventional behavioural patterns expected of women. She travels all over the country
singing blues and enjoying life by smoking and drinking. She is unconventional in matters of love, too. When Shug becomes sick, the preacher takes her condition for his text and even Albert, her lover makes no protest. Only Celie is moved by the rejection.

Meridian has very bad experiences from black men and boys from her childhood. George Dexter, the mulatto who is the director of the local funeral parlour, tries to seduce her even when she is only twelve. When Meridian visits the funeral home on Saturday afternoons, she considers him generous, as he gives her candy for a swift exploratory feel. Later, when she is fifteen, he pulls her onto his lap, sucks her breast and even touches the bottom of her panties.

When Baxter is not around, she allows herself to be chased around the embalming table by his young assistant. This man uses his voice as a tool of seduction and he describes to her the act of intercourse, while holding her tight against him and grabbing her nipples. He even arranges for her to watch him seduce a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl who does babysitting for his wife. Here also he mainly uses his voice and engages in intercourse slowly, expertly, like a machine and at the end watches his partner as if from a distance, coldly pushing her away, ignoring her need for tenderness. The girl assumes for him only the status of an object. True to Dworkin’s observation that the power of owning comes from the power
of self defined as one who takes (19), he believes that because of his
deftness in sex matters, he owns the girl forever.

Dworkin also notes that childhood experiences of molestation often result in “a passivity bordering on narcolepsy, morbid self-blame, and punishing self-hatred” (58). It happens to Meridian when she becomes involved with Eddie. Since she is not yet prepared for sex, she engages in sex as often as her lover wants it without receiving any pleasure out of it. In fact, she agrees to be Eddie’s girl as it saves her from the strain of responding to other boys. Pregnancy comes as a shock for Meridian and she is forced to marry Eddie.

Being disappointed with marriage and motherhood, Meridian gives up both and joins Saxon College. In the Civil Rights Movement she meets Truman Held and falls in love with him. But he does not want a general beside him or a woman who tries to claim her own life but rather “an attractive woman, but asleep” (110). Though he sings praises of African women and calls Meridian a black queen, the beauty of his rhetoric is belied by his desire for her (Wade-Gayles 206). The black woman as goddess or African queen is one of the stereotypes black men have been fond of using. However, after a brief affair with Meridian, he gets attracted to Lynne Rabinovitz, a white exchange student, without realizing that Meridian has become pregnant. When Meridian is on her way for an abortion, she happens to see Truman and Lynne riding in a car. The
memory of their faces, laughing and looking very happy, gives her as much pain as the abortion without anaesthetic.

Lynn Pifer notes that the chapter featuring Meridian’s love affair with Truman is aptly titled “The Conquering Prince.” This clichéd role, more appropriate to a fairy tale, cannot be played by Truman, who is called “True” by Lynne, for he is quite false (85). Truman does not use physical force on Meridian but rapes her devotion to the struggle in order to rape her body. Though a revolutionary leader, he cherishes the age-old ideal of woman as virgin. However, he has been “as predatory as the other young men he ran with, as eager to seduce and devirginize as they. Where had he expected his virgin to come from? Heaven?” (142). He actually wants a woman to rest in, as a ship must have a port, like Jude in Sula who considers Nel as the hem of his dress. Knowing that Meridian is not a virgin, Truman has gone in for Lynne who has a lot of worldly experience and is still a virgin.

Even in matters of love, the black woman loses out to her white counterpart in the black woman-black man-white woman triangle. For Truman, white women represent culture and sophistication and black women represent sensuality and intuition. According to Norman Harris, these stereotypes have clear analogies like Eldridge Cleaver’s admission that he practised raping black women to perfect his technique for raping white women, and Stokely Carmichael’s assertion that the prone position
was the only one for black women (112). However, when Truman tires of Lynne, he seeks out Meridian, willing to forget the insensitivity he showed Meridian during their time together. He cites their sexual encounter as evidence of his prowess and his power to liberate her. When he asks her to have his beautiful black babies, she starts hitting him with her book bag. Truman’s insensitivity aggravates the situation as he unwittingly further lacerates a wound that is still raw.

The relationship between Meridian and Truman is the focal point of Walker’s analysis of sexism and racism that explains the “prone” position of all women in the Student Non-violent Coordination Committee (SNCC) during the Civil Rights Movement. But it is a tragic statement on the vulnerability of the black women. Freedom for blacks is equated with manhood and black women are relegated to positions of secondary importance within the hierarchy of the revolutionary coalition. While males dominate in the formulation of basic premises, the writing of manifestos, and the devising of strategy and tactics, females are generally consigned to making coffee, typing, and providing sexual gratification for males (White 38). So these women find a contradiction between the oppression they fight within the society and their own continuing oppression in the movement. Thus Meridian explores the problem that, within the black community, the roles of oppressor and the oppressor are re-enacted between men and women, so that women must go through the same encoding and
sublimation to cope with male oppression that blacks go through to cope with racial oppression (Nadel 58).

There is another episode that explores the sexual exploitation of black women by black men activists. Meridian works as a typist for Mr. Raymonds, a retired black professor in order to find money for her education. A black activist of the 1920s, he preaches the need for protecting the virtue of black women from white men. Being a scholar on the subject, he can quote the exact number of women who have been raped by white men. However, like Truman, the black activist of the 1960s, he too does not hesitate to consider Meridian as little more than a body he has the right to fondle and exploit. Notwithstanding his old age, he chases her around the desk, though when he grabs her and attempts to rub his penis against her, she feels nothing but his hard pelvic bones. Only his infirmity prevents a rape of Meridian. Still, he tries to force her legs apart and get her to the floor. She pretends to be ignorant of his intentions, as she badly needs the money.

Meridian is forced by her fellow students to join the revolution and even be ready to kill for it. But she is reluctant to give her assent and her truthful answers make her an outcast. She becomes the victim of psychological political aggression (Callahan 223). Finally, though she concedes the necessity of violence when she can imagine noble black male heroism in the figure in the stained glass window of the country church, she
personally encounters no such males, nor does she experience revolutionary violence. The men in her world only seek to exploit her as a woman. Bernard W. Bell is of opinion that the implied author encourages the reader to see most of her black male characters of the novel in the limited category of the “low-down dirty dog” that impregnated Wild Child (262).

Josie in Third Life earns her living as a prostitute. Prostitution is the ultimate expression of hatred and envy of the female body by male persons. Exploited as an object for use, a commodity for sale, and a form of entertainment or sporting activity, prostitution exemplifies the status of women in patriarchal societies. As sex becomes equated with power and autonomy, woman becomes the “other,” an alienated being who has no control over her body. Thus the female experience is thoroughly disregarded.

When her father at a party disowns the pregnant Josie, none of his friends intervenes on her behalf, though many of them have sexually exploited her. Her mother thinks of the first love-making between her daughter and her daughter’s teen-age beau, and the scarcely disguised rape that followed from everyone else. Christian draws attention to Walker’s analysis of the difference between society’s view of Josie’s lovers, who are encouraged to express their manhood through their sexuality, and its punishment of the woman who succumbs to them (“Everyday Use” 63). Brownfield too uses Josie to avenge his father who has been her earlier
love. He also accommodates Lorene, often moving from the mother’s bed to the daughter’s, and making them fight over him. He preys on them and hurts them.

Mem has been born of an exploitative relationship when her father, a big Northern preacher who comes South to preach revival services falls in love with her mother. When Mem’s mother becomes pregnant, he goes back to his legitimate family, causing the poor girl to be put out of her own house. Josie takes her in till the child Mem is born, and she dies soon after.

Mamie Lou Banks is a washerwoman who has eight children fathered by different men. The elder five children have left for the North. She resentfully thinks about a friend of hers who got married to one the daddies of her children.

Gloria Naylor’s Women consists of seven stories, each about a woman resident of Brewster Place, the “bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the sixth district and the managing director of Unico Realty Company” (1). Here Naylor shifts the stigma of illegitimacy from the illicit sexuality of single black women to the illicit partnership between government and commerce that has created the ghetto (Fraser 95).

The last story, called “The Two,” is about Lorraine and Theresa, the lesbians staying at Brewster Place. Theresa is the more dominating member of the couple, while Lorraine, meek and affectionate, longs to be
accepted by the other residents. But the other women only look at them with hostility because they have violated the code of heterosexuality and are considered deviant. Women like the prying Sophie consider them a menace to the black community of Brewster Place. To begin with, the other women have been pleased with the girls, as they pose no threat in stealing their husbands from them but later, hearing the scandals, they imagine the worst. At the tenants’ meeting, Sophie objects to Lorraine’s taking notes and insults Etta who takes Lorraine’s side. Sophie’s “finger shot out like a pistol, which she swung between Etta and Lorraine” (144), silencing Etta with the insinuation that one who supports a lesbian may herself have such tendencies.

Lorraine feels sad and lonely when she and Theresa are alienated by the women who are themselves outcasts. Lorraine and Theresa, the educated and articulate lesbians are compelled to forfeit jobs and apartments in search of a secure place free of homophobia. But they are misfits in Brewster Place where they have no label other than “The Two” and remain outside the mothering extended to other women. Lorraine forms a friendship with Ben, the drunken old caretaker of the building.

Bad as the response of the women is, it is nothing compared to what they are to suffer from the males of the community. Heterosexuality is perceived to be the keynote of male power and any deviation from it, for example, in lesbianism cannot be tolerated. As Wade-Gayles observes, to
be a woman is to be legitimized in a relationship with a man by being a mother, a wife, and/or a lover. To be outside these roles brings censure from the community (234). So Lorraine and Theresa pose an explicit challenge to the prevailing sexual status quo, especially from the point of the black male who feels helpless in a white-dominated society.

C.C. Baker and his friends, the thugs of the locality, consider the alley at the end of Brewster Place as their private property. The alley is a dead end within the dead end of Brewster Place and there is no fusing or accommodation of the two genders. The gang always moves in a pack, as they need the others continually near to verify their existence. C.C. Baker knows only one way to deal with women other than his mother, “to please or punish or extract favors from them by the execution of what lay curled behind his fly. It was his lifeline to that part of his being that sheltered his self-respect” (161-62). True to the norms of patriarchal society, they believe in “the real-life deployment of the penis as a weapon” (Brownmiller 11).

Naturally, in a community of frustrated black urban young men, the lesbian provides an easy scapegoat. C.C. Baker first waylays Lorraine in the company of Kiswana, a black woman activist but soon realizes that Kiswana is too smart an opponent for him. She also happens to be the girlfriend of Abshu, a black activist leader. So he tries to regain the lost prestige by verbally attacking Lorraine who he recognizes by instinct as the
weaker of the two. He calls her dyke, butch, freak, bitch and lesbo and derisively warns Kiswana that she might try to grab a tit. He gives vulgar threats of aggression. As Rollo May observes, obscenity “gets its power from using of words to do violence to our unconscious expectations, to destroy our mooring posts, and to undercut relationships we are used to” (72). Her submissive nature gives him the confidence for victimizing.

But verbal abuse is only the mildest of all the harm they are capable of. The punks get a chance for revenge to their heart’s content the same evening when Lorraine, returning home late and alone, decides to take the short cut by the street back of Brewster. When Lorraine enters the alley, she also enters the male domain, which is their “stateroom, armored tank, and executioner’s chamber” (170). Seeing the boys and sensing danger, she begins to run. A hand shoots itself around her mouth, and her neck is jerked back and Lorraine finds herself on her knees, “surrounded by the most dangerous species in existence—human males with an erection to validate in a world that was only six feet wide” (170).

C.C. Baker, with obscene threats, takes the back of her head and rubs it over the crotch of his jeans. Thus he links voice and gender transgression (Fraser 101). The boys derive pleasure from inflicting physical pain on her, again exemplifying Dworkin’s contention that male pleasure is connected to victimizing and hurting. C.C. Baker slams his kneecap into her spine, his nails cutting into the sides of her mouth. Two of
the boys pin her arms, two wrench open her legs, while C.C. tears at her clothes. He brings his fist down on her stomach to keep her still. They gang rape Lorraine who can only utter the word, “Please.”

Laura E. Tanner observes that in rape, the violation is not only physical and sexual but also an appropriation of the victim’s power of speech as well (575). Lorraine’s resigned silence is not a passive absence of speech but a desperate struggle to regain the voice stolen from her through violence. The nicety of the polite word of social discourse – “please”—emphasizes the terrorism of the rape. The sixth boy who uses Lorraine stuffs a dirty paper bag into her mouth, and stifles her feeble voice. Lorraine’s voice has no effect on the barbarous male circle.

Lorraine is subjected to such a horrible experience that she loses full consciousness of all that is taking place. She is unable to tell when the different boys change places because for her “it was all one continuous hacksawing of torment.” Her thighs and stomach have become so slimy from her blood and their semen that the last two boys sodomize her after propping her head and shoulders against the wall. After they finish and stop holding her up, her body falls over like “an unstrung puppet.” One of the boys expresses fear that Lorraine may remember them but C.C. callously laughs it off saying, “Your dick ain’t got no fingerprints” (171). Thus that they do not consider rape in itself wrong provided they escape
uncaught. They step over her and run out of the alley, leaving her to lie there helplessly the whole night.

Naylor’s graphic description of the brutal attack denies the rape any connection with sexuality. It is depicted only as a legitimate tool. Further, the narration works to reverse the action of penetration by moving from the tearing pain inside of her body outward (Fraser 101). The rape serves as a negation of Lorraine’s experience and is narrated in negative terms. She is “no longer conscious of the pain in her spine or stomach. She couldn’t feel the skin that was rubbing off her arms from being pressed against the rough cement,” she “couldn’t tell when they changed places” and she “didn’t feel her split rectum or the patches in her skull where her hair had been torn off” (171). Thus negation of voice negates experience as well.

“Recognizing that pain defies representation, Naylor invokes a referential system that focuses on the bodily manifestations of pain – skinned arms, a split rectum, a bloody skull—only to reject it as ineffective” (Tanner 578) because it pales into insignificance when placed against the “pounding motion that was ripping her insides apart” (171).

Tanner makes the point that at the end of the representation of the gruesome rape scene Naylor disentangles the reader from the victim’s consciousness and Lorraine is again reduced to the status of an object – “her mouth crammed with paper bag, her dress pushed up under her breasts, her pantyhose hanging from her thighs” (171). Again, in the last
sentence of the chapter Naylor deliberately jerks the reader back into the
distanced perspective that authorizes scopophilia defined by a voyeuristic
dynamic (Tanner 579)—“a tall yellow woman in a bloody green and black
dress, scraping at the air, crying, ‘Please. Please’” (173).

Early in the morning, Ben who has been drinking and swinging
from side to side, comes into Lorraine’s field of vision. She manages to
raise herself and throws a brick at him to stop his swinging movement. She
brings down the brick again and again, smashing his skull. Thus in the
post-traumatic state, she kills the only true friend she has due to the chaotic
nature of her mental faculties. However, Matus finds in the deadly eruption
of her self-assertion the irony of Lorraine’s killing the father who has failed
his own daughter (131).

Rape is an assertion of male power and the gang-rape is an attempt
to force the lesbian back into a patriarchal power structure. It is a threat
against all women to act as autonomous persons. The ganging up and the
subsequent rape are efforts to maintain the patriarchal hold over the female
who is expected to be subservient to the male. Men feel jealous and even
fearful of female bonding.

Through the gang rape of Lorraine, Naylor indicates the climate of
street violence that has become a feature of urban poverty and connects it
with the violence at the centre of the American ruling bureaucracies.
Lorraine’s entry into the alley causes the anger of seven teenage boys to
erupt into violence. The urban gangs find no wide fields or deep forests to conquer, no boardroom to dominate in order to prove their success. The “dwarfed warrior-kings” (169) rendered impotent in the race for power, assert their manhood against helpless victims like Lorraine who becomes an accessible scapegoat. Awkward notes that male abusiveness suggested in the other texts of the novel prefigure the misogyny and homophobia involved in the gang’s brutalization of Lorraine. So he suggests that in such a culture, even the abhorrent attitudes of the gang seem almost logical (“Authorial Dreams” 57).

A similar situation occurs in Morrison’s *Love* that supports Brownmiller’s contention that one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a gang of marauding men (14). Romen, Sandler’s grandson waits for his turn to rape a girl called Pretty-Fay as the last of a group of seven. Three have left as soon as they are finished and Freddie and Jamal sit watching Theo taking seconds. But here the ending is different. Romen steps forward to take his place but he only undoes the knots of the shoelaces binding the girl’s hands. He then wraps her in the spread she was lying on and helps her get out of the place. However, Romen becomes a joke and loses the friendship of the gang. They ignore him for two days and beat him up on the third day.

Mattie Michael, who acts as an umbrella figure for many of the characters in *Women*, has been a victim of sexual exploitation. Mattie’s
naïveté makes her ripe for seduction by the smooth-talking Butch Fuller who repels and attracts her. Even after several rebuffs, he is persistently after her. In spite of the fact that she has no love for the man, the scent of sugar cane in the field where they meet, makes her yield to him, though unwillingly. Butch Fuller abdicates any responsibility for his role in Mattie’s first and only sexual encounter.

The pregnant Mattie goes to her friend Etta Mae Johnson whose independent spirit has taken her to the streets. But after a few adventures, Etta thinks of settling down. The opportunity presents itself when she attends the Canaan Baptist Church. Impressed by the charismatic guest speaker for the night, Reverend Moreland T. Woods, a widower, she is quick to use her charm and captivate him. She is flattered by his offer to take her out. But Woods is a seasoned hypocrite whose survival depends upon knowing people, knowing exactly how much to give and how little to take and he thinks: “Let her win a few, and she would be bankrupt long before the sun was up” (71). So the relationship turns out to be a one-night affair and Etta returns home with her dreams all shattered. Though a preacher, Woods is a worldly pleasure-seeker. So Etta is destined to be exploited and be a pawn for Moreland who relegates women to a position where they will be no freer than the antebellum slave women visited periodically by the master (Saunders 111).
Cora Lee, another resident of Brewster Place, develops an obsession for baby dolls and as an immature teenager, is exploited by boys who promise to show her the thing that felt good in the dark. Cora is excited to learn that she could have a real baby in place of dolls. So she stops going to school when she has her first baby. Her intentions to resume her studies are thwarted by the arrival of more babies.

Over the years, Cora becomes the unwed mother of seven children whose fathers do not assume much significance for her. Only two of her babies, Sammy and Maybelline, are fathered by the same man. But he abuses her physically for her slovenly ways. “A pot of burned rice would mean a fractured jaw, or a wet bathroom floor a loose tooth” (113) and she still carries the scar under her left eye because of a baby’s crying. Another man in her life, Brucie’s father, had promised to marry her and take her off Welfare, but he vanishes from her life on the pretext of going for a carton of milk. The physical and psychological abuse inherent in any sort of lasting relationships makes Cora settle for shadows that visit her at night and leave unobtrusively before the children wake up.

In *Hills* Luther’s threat to evict Laurel Dumont from the house is based on legal effects. Sandiford draws attention to the formal terms of the interview that explicate the radical points of view of two conflicting myths. Luther’s language is “formal, legalistic; the voice is monological, basing its authority on the text of the divorce papers sent from Mr. Dumont’s lawyer
and on the same language of the Tupelo Realty Company’s mortgage
covenant” (125). Laurel denies any validity to Luther’s claims. However,
when she realizes the void in her life, she puts an end to it by diving
headlong into the empty swimming pool. Luther never makes an attempt to
save her.

In Café Eve remembers a girl who has had the name of the cigarette
Lucky Strike spelled out on the inside of her thigh with a lit cigarette butt
in order that she would remember to get the right brand of cigarette next
time. Eve gathers that it must have “taken him a good hour to spell out the
name of those cigarettes because the letters were so evenly matched and
she had full, sorta bell-curved thighs” (81). The girl also tells Eve how she
has left this sadistic man for another who gets her pregnant before he goes
back to his wife. Such incidents remind the reader that the lot of black
females is not much improved from the days of slavery when they were the
victims of sexual exploitation, and mutilation that Spillers calls
“hieroglyphics of the flesh” (67).

Peaches finds her beauty a curse. She encounters sexual advances
from her father’s friends at an early age. The first overt experience is from
the choirmaster who tries to molest her. Like Seneca in Paradise, she
always finds herself singled out by men and sexually exploited in all sorts
of places—in the cloak closets after school, behind the prayer altar, under
the druggist’s soda fountain, against the coal furnace in the Girls’ Club, in the back of milk wagons, in deserted streetcars, and shadowed doorways.

Feeling responsible for the men’s attraction, Peaches leaves home and starts working. But she goes on having lovers and problems. Finally, she lives with a cripple who is a gambler. When he finds her still going with other men, he puts her into a magnificent apartment. Still noticing her absences, he presses his razor against her throat and quietly tells that he would make her watch her next man die. She lives like a prisoner for two weeks and cuts under the right cheekbone to the left side of the chin with a beer opener. She goes out of the hospital to go where she pleases.

Jesse Bell, who has married up into the King family finds herself in an unenviable situation like Heed in Love. People still think of her as the tramp from the docks. Some of her husband’s friends make advances towards her and then bad-mouth her. Uncle Eli hates her from the very beginning and never misses a chance to slight her family. He knows about her lesbian friend. When the dyke club is raided, he sees to it that her name hits the newspapers and digs up her special friend as well.

In the novels of Morrison, Walker, and Naylor black women and girls are often subjected to violence by black men as individuals and at times by outrageous gangs. That means that racism alone cannot explain the vulnerability of the black woman. They are victims not only on account of their race but also of their gender. The community that should support
the beleaguered individual often ignores the pleas for help and sometimes indulges in malevolent acts of violence. The weak and the innocent are more vulnerable to such violence. Those who are different from the majority are threatened with ostracism and scapegoating. Milder forms of ostracism are seen in derision and ridicule. The black males sexually exploit black women as lovers, eve-teasers, rapists, and killers. Even those who profess to protect the honour of black women only exploit them.

It is still worse with their younger folk. The female children are often oppressed and sometimes sexually exploited. They are not spared on account of their innocence and helplessness. The ascendancy of such an attitude would make the female child’s life unsafe even in her own home.