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**Rethinking the Female Body:
Gender and Nation in Zee Edgell's Belize**

Monica Trumbach

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Rethinking the Female Body: Gender and Nation in Zee Edgell's Belize

Monica Trumbach

This study explores Zee Edgell's literary representations of women who challenge destructive gender ideologies in Belize, Central America. My analysis focusses on the roles women's bodies play in their oppression, resistance and transformations of consciousness. The aim is to discover where sexual and political issues intersect, parallel or reinforce each other in the novels. My findings are contextualized in the conclusions of recent empirical studies on women's conditions in Belize. Considering how knowledge is constructed in Belize's material reality exposes a mutual articulation of Edgell's textual issues and the prime socio-political concerns facing women in the country today. Furthermore, it yields the understanding that the nation's political history as a British colony and its nationalist movement in the late-twentieth century were visible forces in shaping both the social conscience and the private consciousness in modern-day Belize.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the two Belizeans I love the most, my parents, who have always insisted on the value of an education.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis aims to explore literary representations of the female body that address and challenge destructive gender ideologies and the social practices to which they give rise. The focus of this analysis is Belizean author Zee Edgell's three novels—Beka Lamb, In Times Like These and The Festival of San Joaquin. Framing these novels in Belize's material reality shows the relevance of Edgell's work to particular concerns of corporeal feminism, specifically those of demystifying the relations between power and knowledge by considering the role of the female body in the formation, and transformation, of women's consciousness. All three novels deal with women's maternity and men's abdication of parental responsibility. The gender issues that this subject raises in the texts intersect with Edgell's concerns with questions of nation in Belize's struggles for independence, particularly insofar as both themes reveal the violating principles prevalent in the country's ideological structures—patriarchal and imperialistic, respectively.

At the level of systems and structures, women in Edgell's settings are granted little space of their own. Consequently, they have to struggle to redefine their "place" as women in society, just as the nation must redefine its identity as a sovereign country. In fact, the physical and psychological instability of Edgell's female characters as they endeavour to reconceive of themselves parallels the nation's instability at critical moments in its quest for independence from Britain—moments which Edgell uses to both frame and reflect her protagonists' experiences. In a Belize where people have always

accepted that “things British [were] things best” (BL 54), the nationalist movement provokes a thorough rethinking of unexamined biases—as do the personal crises Edgell’s women face. Moreover, the ideological differences that divide Belizeans’ loyalties in their fight against British colonialism reflect the discontinuities in her heroines’ strategies against gender oppression. In Edgell’s work, questions of gender and nation “revolve around a cluster of shared issues” which often intersect in her characters’ lives to challenge any distinction between the personal and the political (Grosz, Space 30-31). That is, the novels revolve around a lot of interrelated issues that speak equally to feminism and nationalism: economic and emotional dependency and repression; vulnerability, fear and the need for protection; the question of complicity with the oppressor in struggles for equality and autonomy; and (re)defining identity and responsibility through a critical overhaul of existing knowledges.

Contextualizing the gender discrimination Edgell depicts in her novels within the political frameworks her narratives provide yields meaningful interpretations of her heroines’ circumstances and an understanding of both the social conscience and private consciousness in Belize. In fact, a brief history of Belize is appropriate before approaching Edgell’s novels. Belize’s history as a British colony and the nationalist movement are visible forces in Edgell’s texts, revealing that the imperialist project’s use of class as an instrument in the cultural constructions of gender and race has influenced contemporary ideologies. Originally a British settler colony for mahogany and logwood exportation in the seventeenth century, Belize officially became British Honduras in 1862, an act postponed over the years due to Britain’s territorial dispute with Spain—and later, Guatemala—over rights to Belize’s land. Claiming ownership of the majority of

the country's prime real estate, the British Lumber Company acquired the ability to manipulate native Belizeans into labour at slave wages as their only means of economic survival. This monopoly also prevented agricultural development, which might have given Belize's indigenous populations a viable means of economic self-sufficiency. Labour movements against these conditions began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading to the founding of Belize's first national party and the nationalist agenda in 1950. In 1952 all citizens were granted universal suffrage, a significant change to the established policy of landowners, only, having the right to vote. And in 1964, Britain granted Belize the right to self-government. The country achieved independence in 1981, the year in which it joined the Commonwealth, the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Belize's small but ethnically diverse population—approximately 200,000 people today—consists of: a small segment of white elites; Creoles, with a mix of British and African ancestries; Mestizos, the European Spaniard mixed with the Mayan Indian; the Garifuna, with combined African and Amerindian heritages; and the Maya. There are also small East Indian and Asian communities as a result of indentured labourers having been brought from other countries to work in the mahogany and logwood camps. African slaves were first brought to work the camps in the early eighteenth century. And although the Maya, Belize's first indigenous population, were driven out of the country after repeated attacks on British buccaneers, thousands returned to Belize as refugees after the Caste Wars in the Yucatan, from 1847 to 1901. In Beka Lamb, Edgell writes that "...three centuries [of] miscegenation...ha[s] produced all shades of black and brown [in Belize]" (BL 11). Her texts, however, show that racism borne of the British

colonizers' white supremacist prejudices persists. And, like gender discrimination, it is articulated in terms of class issues, affirming Spivak's claim that "class is the issue that gives the lie to notions of the cultural construction of anything" (PC Critic 123).

The nationalist movement in response to colonial oppression developed factiously as a result of differing political ideologies of resistance. In Beka Lamb, Edgell addresses the pertinent issues in this debate: annexation by Guatemala, federation with the West Indies, the right to vote, starvation wages, unemployment—mainly, should citizens strive to achieve equality within the colonizer's system or reject the existing framework and restructure Belize according to the specificities of its people. In Times Like These, shows again the factious character of Belizeans' struggles for independence, though in this novel, Edgell addresses, particularly, the corruption of Belizean politicians leading the nationalist fight—that is, their pursuit of personal power at the expense of large segments of the population's basic needs and desires. And, set in post-colonial Belize, The Festival of San Joaquin, depicts political resistance to the country's elite selling large portions of prime real estate to foreign investors. These questions of nation raised in the process of Belizeans' redefining their national identity relate to other aspects of the novels, most importantly, the protagonists' (re)constructions of their feminine identities.

Edgell's fiction probes ideology, social conditions, internalization of gender oppression, resistance and self-fashioning to show how these aspects come together to affect individuals—specifically, how social practices supported by a destructive gender ideology have concrete repercussions for women, and how women try to intervene and resist the cultural norms that limit their choices and inhibit their agency. Representations of the female body are fraught with fear, guilt and shame in Edgell's work. Most often,

her main characters associate their femininity with innate disadvantage, failing to recognize that their knowledges have been sexualized to create this response to their femaleness; and that prevalent ideologies and social practices influence their own ideas and behaviours so that they contribute to reinforcing their subordinate status in Belize. Though the forms of their individual oppression differ, and understanding the situational specifics of each of their cases is crucial to assessing the success of their adaptive or resistant strategies, Edgell's heroines must all withstand institutionalized pressures that result from "the prevailing cultural belief that women's biology or their anatomy, to a large degree, dictates their place in society" (McClaurin 108). Biology as destiny is "one of the tenets of Belize's culture of gender," and, usually, Edgell's women unwittingly internalize the theoretical biases inherent in biologism to their own detriment (McClaurin 108). Not until their lives meet with crises—and not always even under these circumstances—do they examine their beliefs and become self-aware, enlightened to the fact that they have constructed their psychological and sexual identities on masculinist ideals that perpetuate a negative view of the female body, a woman's self-worth and her value in society at large.

The social, psychological, sexual and political women's issues that Edgell's novels raise speak not only to feminist theories that draw connections between female consciousness and corporeality but also to the practical, sociological concerns of women's groups in Belize today. In either case, Edgell's texts yield readings that illustrate the roles women's bodies play in both their oppression and resistance. The specific conditions in which she situates her characters to bring their uncontested beliefs into crises and enable their resistance under the most adverse circumstances inform

aspects of feminine identity, femininity, and the female social subject in Belize. In this, Edgell's narratives communicate "information about how the system operates on the individual" and, importantly, about how an individual might also operate on the system; they function, therefore, not unlike recent gender and anthropological studies on women in Belize (Hendersen 28). Moreover, Edgell's articulation of her fictional women's experiences conveys virtually the same information about "similar contradictions and continuities in their daily lives" that the actual life stories of Belizean women in Peta Hendersen's scholarly work Rising Up does (32). The challenge of the present work, then, is to integrate theory and practice into a useful analysis of Edgell's literary texts—to look at how Edgell's literary work confirms the findings of empirical studies and explore the insights its novels offer into the construction of women's psychology and physicality in Belize.

In MacPherson's study of colonial reform policies in Belize, she claims that the post-colonial state continues to relegate women to the "private sphere where they are defined by sexuality and domesticity" (Colonial Reform Policy 21). MacPherson's post-colonial critique of Belize finds that gendered strategies during decolonization and subsequent post-colonial state hegemony—between 1950 and 1981, the same period in which Edgell sets her novels—reinforced masculine authority in the patriarchal capitalist system first established by British settlers in the seventeenth century. In a system that viewed women not "as workers or citizens, but as economic and political dependents and victims of their own sexuality in need of responsible male control at the level of family and society," women's social, moral and economic problems were not attributed to the oppressive structures of patriarchal capitalism but to "their excess of sexuality and fertility, and lack

of true domesticity” (MacPherson 8-9). Given the social stigma associated with being an unwed mother in Edgell’s novels, her texts affirm MacPherson’s findings of the prevalent biases against women in Belize, biases engendered by masculinist political and religious ideologies that impose social, moral and economic penalties on sexual women, particularly those faced with dealing with unwanted pregnancies or those pressured into bearing children that they have no means of supporting. In fact, ideological pressures feed Edgell’s women’s ambivalence towards their bodies, especially in terms of the specifically female function of natural reproduction. These ideologies also imply, foster and guard negative attitudes towards women either owning or expressing sexual desires, creating negative conceptions of female sexuality that Edgell’s protagonists—like Hendersen’s narrators—often incorporate into their own subjective “realities.”

In a recent anthropological study on Women and the Culture of Gender in Belize, Central America, Irma MacClaurin acknowledges that “elements contributing to the construction of gender in modern Belize may be found in circumstances and social relations that are rooted in the country’s colonial past” (84); however, she manages to pull gender relations outside of colonial and post-colonial discourses for close examination. MacClaurin claims that, in terms of the problems women in Belize face today, “issues center around role expectation, behaviour and access to resources” (6). Her understanding of women’s vulnerability focusses not on female sexual promiscuity as the cause of women’s—or the nation’s social ills—but on women’s need for higher levels of education and more economic options so that they can gain financial and reproductive autonomy. As it stands, they become “attached to men as their most viable sources of economic survival” (McClaurin 101), entering into “economic-sexual

relationships” in which they “are unable to exert any real control over their reproductive processes” (105). MacClaurin’s research points out that “a lack of knowledge becomes a powerful tool of enculturation designed to limit women’s control over and understanding of their own bodies”; and that, in Belize, religious beliefs often constrain women’s reproductive health (305). The political and ethical realities Edgell constructs in her novels address the political and ethical realities that MacClaurin describes in her study. Moreover, Edgell’s characters’ psychological profiles and behaviours clearly support MacClaurin’s assertion that the dynamics of power and subordination created by women’s economic dependency “produce women who are [also] emotionally and psychologically dependent on men” and (109), therefore, often “complicitous in their own subordination” (111). In addition, MacClaurin states that “Belize’s inability to provide adequate employment and livable wages [for women and]...unwritten policies that penalize pregnant girls so that they lose any opportunity for schooling...[lead to] an ideology of isolation and fear of abandonment that motivate [women’s] behaviours” (115). Her observation, thus, addresses key issues in determining women’s agency in Edgell’s novels—that is, for Edgell’s heroines to develop successful adaptive or resistant strategies in response to the changing material and social conditions of a nation caught up in the fight for independence, they must not only confront immediate material concerns in their personal struggles towards autonomy, but also identify the ways in which they have been manipulated at the level of ideas.

MacClaurin’s study of the culture of gender in Belize and McPherson’s political history of the country converge in their discoveries of similar ironies—respectively, women’s exclusion “from the leadership in political parties [although women] are the

bulwark of political parties during elections” (323-24); and the lack of political attention given to women’s needs despite their activism in the nationalist movement, which placed them “at the forefront of the struggle” (8). Edgell’s texts confirm these apparent contradictions in her protagonist’s view in In Times Like These: “...politicians ha[ve] long regarded women as their traditional territory, to serve their needs and aspirations (195)—“they’re not interested in the needs and aspirations of women...” (212). Edgell’s novels “render the patriarchal or phallogocentric presumptions governing [their] contexts...visible...[and] question, in one way or another, the power of these presumptions”(Space 22)—as such, they meet one of Grosz’s definitions of a feminist text. And through her characters’ experiences, Edgell involves herself with women’s transformations of consciousness, an issue Spivak identifies as central to feminism. Thus, Edgell’s texts constitute the narratives of their own production—that is, they set up the demand for dialogue between socio-political studies on material conditions in Belize and Edgell’s textual fictionalizing of them. In other words, they present the task of displacing and undoing “that killing opposition between the text narrowly conceived as the verbal text and activism narrowly conceived as some sort of mindless engagement” (Spivak, PC Critic 120). In short, Edgell’s literary approximations of the “truth” synthesize theory and practice by writing what Spivak terms the “textuality of the socius”—“not just books...[but a manifest acknowledgment of] the possibility that every socio-political, psycho-sexual phenomenon is organized by, woven by many, many strands that are discontinuous, that come from a long way off, that carry their histories with them, and are not within our control” (PC Critic 120).

Situating Edgell's work geopolitically facilitates an investigation both of the forces that have shaped Belizean women's ideas about their bodies and sex and the structures that produce their knowledges, providing insight into how truth is constructed in Belize. In Edgell's post-colonial situations, (universal) knowledge is a guise for masculine interests that either appropriate or disenfranchise femininity. Thus, her heroines' movements are severely limited, often restricted to the point that their attempts to assert autonomy become, necessarily, distorted. In a masculinist system that aims to destroy any idea or example of woman but that of which it approves and enforces as passive, inert, dependent, silent, obedient, virgin, wife, mother—terms of female identity relevant to women's specificities emerge only out of conflict. And in the negativity with which female characters' "bodies are textualized, 'read' by others as expressive of [their] psychic interior" (Grosz, Space 35), Edgell exposes both men's conceptual supremacy in Belize and the role that "power rather than reason plays in developing knowledges" (Grosz Space 43). Physically, psychically, sexually, and representationally, the patriarchal interests inherent in British colonization and nationalist discourses have marked the female body in Edgell's Belize to produce a social category of "woman" that either contains or obliterates it. Thus, a rethinking the "nature" of the female body as a socio-cultural artifact becomes an imperative in Edgell's collective work, questioning, particularly, the prevailing notions of the maternal, in which the dynamic of socio-political and psycho-sexual oppression and resistance most often resides for her protagonists. Only through such a process of examination do her heroines come to greater—and lesser—realizations of the "possibility of other ways of knowing and

proceeding” (Grosz, Space 28), despite the accumulated forces they are up against, forces that seem to prove that their bodies determine their fates.

In this thesis, I have ordered the chapters to illustrate the progress that Edgell’s heroines make in terms of their changing levels of consciousness and agency as they struggle towards a new autonomy. That is, their abilities to exercise choice, control their lives and effect change increase as we move from The Festival of San Joaquin (1997) to Beka Lamb (1982) to In Times Like These (1991). The Festival of San Joaquin illustrates a woman’s unconscious resistance and the emerging awareness of her oppression. In Beka Lamb, though one protagonist engages in unconscious resistance, the other’s efforts to gain control over her life are determined by conscious choices. And in In Times Like These, Edgell’s main character is the director of a new unit funded by the United Nations to address women’s concerns at the level of national politics. Structuring the chapters in this way also reveals the relevance of conceptualizations of space—the significance of environmental factors in the shifting meaning of Belizean women’s physical and psychological experiences. The heroine’s movements in The Festival of San Joaquin exemplify Grosz’s claim that “the containment of women within a dwelling that they did not build, nor was even built *for* them, can only amount to a homelessness within the very home itself” (Space 122). And, although one of the protagonist’s experiences in Beka Lamb reinforces the link between women’s physical and conceptual containment in patriarchal structures, the other introduces the notion of Belizean space as a key factor in her oppression and plans to leave the country as a means of protecting her interests. Finally, in In Times Like These, the advantages that studying and living abroad bring the novel’s heroine significantly increase her ability to rethink

her female experiences and social position and to question the knowledge upon which she has structured her values.

Chapter Two's examination of The Festival of San Joaquin, focusses on the main character's psychological development in order to illustrate "the power of the social order in the construction of the subject" (Smith 19). Edgell's protagonist is a poor, uneducated, submissive Mayan woman trying to rebuild her life after killing her brutal husband in self-defense. With limited economic options, a mother to support, and the need to prove that she's fit to regain custody of her three children, her task is set. Her religious attitudes and social beliefs, however, have been shaped by the expectation that women "in San Joaquin...are always to blame" when things go wrong (FSJ 18). Not only must she attend, therefore, to the immediate material concerns of survival; she must also alter her thinking in order to avoid repeating the self-defeating behaviours evidenced in her marriage—behaviours, on the one hand, based on the knowledge her female role models have transmitted to her, which she has internalized into her own subjectivity, and encouraged, on the other, by the social norms in her community where "people believe that if a man beats a woman he loves her" (FSJ 14). Though told in the first person, the levels of narration that Edgell employs in this text not only lay bare her protagonist's shattered psyche but also offer a subtle critique of her character's "normative" thinking through the point of view of her court-appointed psychiatrist. Only through exposure to another's perspective is this novel's heroine able to become critical of her own.

Chapter Three analyses Edgell's first novel, Beka Lamb. In this text, Edgell writes about nationalist politics at the beginning of the nation's movement towards independence. Situated within this context are two female high-school students facing

personal problems that center on issues of sexual and racial discrimination in Belizean culture. In their quests for self-determination, unwanted pregnancy leads to attempted suicide and insanity as a means of resistance for one young woman, yet Edgell juxtaposes these tactics with the other's internalization of the oppressor's values and complicity with the system as an effective method of achieving equality and recognition. Examined in the framework of the country's nationalist struggles, these two women's experiences reflect not only the diversity of approaches to overcoming oppression but also the need for alliances between minority groups with shared issues in a system that condones violence against them. Furthermore, it illustrates women's double colonization: in their identity as colonial subjects; and in their negation as the *insignificant other* by patriarchal institutions that, ironically, deem women's vulnerabilities responsible for the lack of "hope for the long term development of [the] country" (BL 120).

Finally, Chapter Four addresses a diasporic Belizean woman's desire to create an "alternative notion of the female subject" (Smith 149). In *In Times Like These*, Edgell's protagonist wants "to break free of certain cultural patterns...[because] she want[s] some control over what happen[s] in [her] life" (TLT 149). The novel, however, is as much about conflicting political ideologies and government corruption that can divide a nation against itself as it is about the heroine's personal transformation and struggles as a political activist trying to improve conditions for women in Belize. Both the protagonist's battle for self-determination and the country's fight for independence counter destructive ideologies that negatively influence Belizeans at the individual and the collective levels, respectively. In terms of how nationalist politics speak to gender issues in this text, though, Edgell suggests that in Belize there is no relying on the hope

that “the social conscience is in the end supposed to protect the private consciousness”
(Spivak, PC Critic 167).

CHAPTER TWO

The Festival of San Joaquin: Submission

Edgell sets her third novel, The Festival of San Joaquin, in a small town in modern-day Belize where male authority and conjugal violence are widely accepted cultural norms. Her protagonist, Luz, is a poor, uneducated Mayan woman who submits to years of abuse from her wealthy, common-law husband, Salvador. Luz thinks she deserves his violence. Her thinking in the novel undermines both her self-image and her power. In fact, she appears completely unaware that her husband is even violating her. In this text, Luz's subjectivity can be seen as a condition of her corporeality, and its formation exemplifies Althusser's process of *interpellation*—"through which the human being is constructed as a subject through its relation to the ideological practices of society" (Mowitt xiii). Luz's "fiction of her [female] identity" is brought into crises when she kills her husband in self-defense and demonstrates unconscious agency (Smith 142). But "in choosing life," she loses life as she has known it, becoming aware of other possibilities in the process (FSJ 8). The story opens with her release from the Belize City prison, where she has been held on a murder charge. Acquitted and at liberty, Luz is free to choose the kind of life she wants. She can't remember ever having had that choice before, although she thinks she must have. Her release marks only the second time in her thirty-three years that she recalls ever having felt free. The first time had occurred fifteen months earlier, the instant after she killed Salvador, a moment in which she had "felt nothing but sweet relief, [a] release" (FSJ 149).

The Festival of San Joaquin is Luz's first person account of the task of trying to reconstruct her personal identity after an event that has destabilized the very foundations upon which she has always conceived of herself. Though released from jail, Luz has lost all "sense of where, if any place, [she] fit[s] in" (FSJ 2). And her constant movement in space, thereafter, in a search of her "place" suggests that she feels alienated in her physical environment—just as she does in her body, which she states "can never feel clean enough" (FSJ 112). In fact, Luz feels "unclean...defensive, guilty and ashamed all the time" (FSJ 114). The negativity with which she perceives herself illustrates "the way in which a subject is brought into place by specific ideological formations" (Smith 21). In particular, discriminatory gender and class ideologies intersect in Luz' experiences to mutually reinforce her disenfranchisement and the powerlessness of her "sexed" status. And economic insecurity exacerbates her uneasiness in her own skin as it pressures her into compromising positions to ward off poverty. Determined to regain custody of her children, Luz becomes involved in political activism against foreign land ownership in Belize, thereby allying herself with Belize's Environmental Action Group, against Salvador's family's wealth, power and connections in San Joaquin. She sees it as "fighting for [her] children in the only way [she] could" (FSJ 140); and, indeed, her "speaking out" advances her personal struggle to win them back. It also provides her with a means of conscious agency, addressing her awakening desire to know "how to have more control over what happens in [her] life" (FSJ 118).

Luz grew up with two distinct mother figures: Sofia, her impoverished birth-mother, and Catalina, a rich woman who takes Luz, at fourteen, into her home as a companion. Despite the economic disparity between Sofia and Catalina, the examples they set for Luz

in their personal relationships with men and the beliefs they impress on her as “knowledge” mark her in much the same way: their maternal influences foster Luz’s internalization of women’s subordinate status in Belize. This occurs because both Sofia’s and Catalina’s subjectivities are structured according to the privileges of phallogocentric subjectivity and sexuality. Their legacy to Luz is one that perpetuates a woman’s physical and conceptual containment in contemporary Belizean society, but Sofia and Catalina are not solely to blame.

At close to the age of thirteen, Luz, the eldest of three daughters, has to leave elementary school in order to help support her family. Her responsibilities include cooking, sewing, tending to farm animals and walking miles, barefoot, into the village on weekends to sell tamales in the plaza square. She had intended to go to high school and then to teacher’s college before her father, Apolonio, got injured in a drunken brawl and was rendered incapable of working their leased farmland. Apolonio started the fight because a friend had insulted him, but, like most children of an alcoholic parent, Luz feels guilty, wondering “if [it] had anything to do with [her]”—her father had always wanted boys (FSJ 18). Before she turns fourteen, she acts on a suggestion of her father’s and lands a job as Catalina’s paid companion. This eases her guilt somewhat as it allows her parents “some respite from the constant worry about money” (FSJ 25). Her duties are light at first—reading, listening to Catalina’s stories, running errands—and later include work in the kitchen and garden. She has her own room in Catalina’s house and discovers “the bliss there can be in privacy” (FSJ 35). She feels extremely fortunate to have her job, especially when she sees people sleeping on benches or cement in the San Joaquin

Plaza. In her mind, this is the most a young woman in her position could hope for, and it keeps the fear of poverty her parents have ingrained in her at bay

At fifteen, she falls for Salvador, Catalina's son, and the text implies he offers her hints of marriage in the future. Unexpectedly and against Luz's wishes, however, he angrily announces one day that they have made definite plans to wed. He breaks the news to his family out of vindictiveness after learning that Catalina gave his brother, Luis, control of the family estate. He knows there will be strong objections and this knowledge motivates him—he wants to embarrass his family and satisfy his need for revenge: the class difference between him and Luz is scandalous. Naively, Luz hopes that Catalina will understand. Luz loves her, fashions herself after her and believes Catalina “care[s] for [her], even love[s] [her]” (FSJ 101). Mistakenly, especially in Belize's class-conscious society, she doesn't think of herself as a servant in the Casal home. Luis dies accidentally and the nuptials are postponed, but Luz moves in with Salvador on their wedding day, as planned—a seemingly innocuous action, but one that has dire consequences for her future. Later, he postpones their wedding a second time “without any real reason,” but she stays with him (FSJ 51). She is pregnant with their first child and still believes he will “marry [her] one day...be a good father...protect [her] from harm, and from the poverty that threatened to engulf [her] family” (FSJ 51). But Salvador neither protects her from the unidentified harm she fears nor from her family's poverty. He loses respect for her and his lack of respect turns to scorn. He becomes brutally abusive to both her and their children. In depicting their relationship, Edgell enters a space of domestic violence that isolates women and strips them of their autonomy—one that this novel's protagonist submits to with surprising resignation.

Fanon argues that the problem of oppression includes not only the interrelations of socio-historical conditions, but also an individual's attitudes toward these conditions—that it is impossible to explain a person's psychology outside of her capacity for accepting or denying a given situation (Black Skin 84). In The Festival of San Joaquin, Luz rationalizes that Salvador is “a typical man of San Joaquin, maybe in the whole of Belize, maybe in the world, for all [she] knew” (FSJ 51). Salvador's profile follows: drinker, gambler, liar, thief, financially irresponsible and violent. He locks Luz and their kids up and starves them. He beats Luz when she tries to make money of her own by sewing and won't let up until she gives him everything she's earned. He doesn't come home for days, without explanations, and Luz, never knowing what his mood will be, is too afraid to question him about his whereabouts. After a while, she “could only speak to [him] if he was in the mood to talk, which was less and less often” (FSJ 51). She rarely goes out because Salvador doesn't like her leaving the house, except on Sundays and only if he is at home and she takes the children with her. Otherwise, if he returns and she isn't there, he gets angry. Because he might come home at any time, unexpectedly, Luz doesn't join a sewing circle or the Mother's Union, though she wants to. She was raised to believe “in the words of God in the Bible...[that a woman] should obey [her] common-law husband, as [she] would obey God” (FSJ 16). Her belief as such isolates her, even reduces her to functioning like a servant at home as Salvador doesn't like her “to enter the dining room...when his friends [are] there...unless [she is] going to take in more food or drinks” (FSJ 13). She concedes that he may be having affairs and children outside of their relationship, yet she accepts this too. Many men she knew were like this. She

reminds herself that Salvador is “not the worst man in [the] area” and works harder to try to please him (FSJ 51).

Luz arrives at the understanding that the domestic violence she lives with is part of the female condition by comparing herself to other women she knows. This comparison also serves as her justification for staying in an abusive relationship for many years without complaining, endangering not only herself, but also her children. As she puts it, “most women I know go through worse things than I did. I have only to think of my mother” (FSJ 12). What more can Luz expect? What she has learned about what it means to be a daughter, wife and mother from her two role models, Sofia and Catalina, she internalizes as knowledge without recognizing the male interests with which it is invested. Consequently, her subjectivity is constructed to devalue her “sexed” position, submit to male authority, and make allowances for violence against women and other forms of gender discrimination that perpetuate masculine privilege in Belizean society. Living “in San Joaquin [where] some people believe that if a man beats a woman he loves her,” also reinforces her attitudes and behaviours that express, manifestly, men’s superiority and women’s secondary status (FSJ 14).

In Space, Time, and Perversion, Grosz discusses two models for theorizing the body. The first, the inscriptive model of corporeal subjectivity, is “concerned with the processes by which the subject is marked, scarred, transformed, and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional, discursive and nondiscursive power as a particular kind of body” (33). She contrasts this model with the psychoanalytical and phenomenological focus on the “lived” body, or the body as it is experienced and rendered meaningful. This second model suggests that the inscribed surface of a body is

not neutral—that on a psychic level it is “*always already* sexually coded in terms of the meanings each sex has for the parental generation, and for a given cultural situation (which includes class, race, and historical factors)” (36). Both of these approaches are useful in analyzing Luz’s body in terms of its identifiable meanings and functions within her social system as they allow for a broader discussion of the “sexualization of knowledges” and the effects of this unacknowledged practice on Luz’s choices and agency in The Festival of San Joaquin.

In outlining the notion of the lived body, Grosz states that psychoanalysis suggests a child’s body means different things for parents according to its sex—that sex makes a difference to the kind of body image and subjectivity available to a subject (Space 36). In The Festival of San Joaquin, Luz incorporates the social-parental meanings of her “sexed” body into her own ideas about what her body signifies; she structures her subjectivity through a process of “narcissistic identifications with others” (Grosz, Space 36). Her role models, Sofia and Catalina, have an inestimable influence on her—through observation of and interaction with them, she forms expectations of the prospects she has before her in life as a woman in San Joaquin. The knowledge they govern their lives by, however, grants primacy to male subjectivity and sexuality. By incorporating their views of sexual difference into her own developing perspective on women’s bodies and roles, Luz becomes incapable of conceiving of her body in terms that value either its specificity or autonomy, privileging phallic subjectivity and sexuality just as they do. Thus restricted by their masculinized filters which she internalizes, the way she thinks about her body limits her knowledge of it and determines how she psychologically “experiences” it—to represent of male interests .

Her mother Sofia has attitudes about the female body that communicate to Luz a number of ideas which underlie the self-deprecating thoughts Luz later patterns her behaviours on in her relationship with Salvador. The values Sofia and Luz's father, Apolonio, place on Luz's "sexed" body connote nothing but negativity about her "femaleness": sons are more desired, more valuable children than daughters; a female child must, therefore, be intrinsically inferior; a family needs male protection or will remain vulnerable. During her childhood, Luz and her father "used to pretend [she] was a boy," a game they *had to* give up eventually (FSJ 27). Aside from the impressions a child could not fail to receive and store from living out her father's fantasy in this way, it is primarily through the mother-daughter relationship that the family values are passed on to Luz. Her mother has not had any formal schooling; the greatest part of Sofia's education has come from her husband. As a result, she has developed a male-supremist mentality. Her perspective is merely a variant of her husband's: she fails to acknowledge autonomous differences between the sexes and much of what she transmits to Luz teaches her to define herself only in relation to her male partner's ideals of her—no relevance is given to distinctively female features or processes. She tells Luz that when she was born, Apolonio was happy that she "had given birth safely, but he said to her later that day, 'She is a beautiful baby, but we always prefer a boy first, no?'" (FSJ 28). After bearing two more daughters and no sons, Sofia confides in an adolescent Luz that "Papa's heart is breaking because of the lack of young men in our family" (Edgell 19). And in bemoaning her impoverished state, she tells an adult Luz, "I don't know what I have done in my life to deserve this fate...Papa always said it is because we have no sons to protect us" (FSJ 44). These messages she sends Luz about the meaning of her female

body—its lesser value—affect Luz’s understanding of her own power detrimentally. She looks to her mother for guidance, considers her a reliable source of women’s knowledge and identifies with her, but by drawing on what Sofia “knows” in constructing her own self-image Luz develops an *a priori* sense of inferiority and vulnerability by the simple fact of her sex. Being born female, she also feels guilty about disappointing her parents—the sheer, unalterable nature of her body, alone, makes her culpable.

The blameworthiness Luz experiences by virtue of her femaleness extends beyond her role as a daughter. The guilt she has assigned to her body by the meanings her parents have attributed to it emerges as a significant aspect of her functions as a wife and mother. Salvador’s actions are, of course, his responsibility altogether, but just as Luz as a child assumes the burden of responsibility for the fact of her sex, she also believes she is at fault for her partner’s violence, something, again, entirely out of her control, for which she is not accountable. Sofia’s misinformed views of her own sexuality, particularly her reproductive capacity, have much to do with this. She operates under Apolonio’s erroneous assumption that, as childbearers, women are biologically responsible for determining the sex of their children. And the consequences of this misconception about her body have far-reaching implications in their relationship. Because Sofia sees herself as solely and physically at fault for having only daughters, she blames herself for her husband’s alcohol abuse also: she whispers to Luz as Apolonio is getting smashed one day, “I have no sons, that’s why he drinks” (FSJ 17). And because she has not borne sons to protect their family, she takes responsibility for the unfortunate, impoverished state she and her husband find themselves in as well. Her reasoning follows: Apolonio cannot work because of his injury. He got hurt in a fight he started

because he was drunk and could not contain his jealousy of a friend who has five sons. She bore only daughters—he drinks because of this and harbours jealousy of friends because of this. The fault is hers. According to what Apolonio has told her about her body's reproductive functions, Sofia understands that she is wholly to blame for his substance abuse and violent behaviour; her female sexuality, specifically its procreative component, makes her so. This view of her body has damaging repercussions for her daughter as Luz internalizes her mother's "experience" of her physicality into her own sense of entitlement and responsibility vis-à-vis her body. If Sofia's body causes her to take responsibility for Apolonio's abusive tendencies and violence, through identifying with her, Luz is psychologically primed to later blame herself when Salvador starts abusing her.

Luz's psychic conditioning does not, however, come about solely as a result of what she experiences living with her mother. Her eight years with Catalina also has important effects on her developing subjectivity. In particular, by being exposed to Catalina's wealth and social position, Luz learns that class does not factor as an issue in gender discrimination in San Joaquin—although later in her relationship with Salvador, the class difference between them certainly reinforces his power and her subordination. Catalina may enjoy exceptional economic standing in her community, but in her relationship with her husband, Pablo, she cannot escape subordination in her role as wife. Luz infers, therefore, that the female body is a sexually coded constant in women's oppression. Catalina describes to her feeling "like a prisoner in my own home" (FSJ 33). Pablo "laugh[s] at the books she read[s]" in attempting to educate herself (FSJ 30). Like Sofia, she hasn't had much formal education or access to information on how to obtain one: she

tells Luz, “I had wanted to be a scholar of some kind, but in those days I didn’t know how to go about it. So I became a businesswoman instead” (FSJ 29). Pablo goes away for stretches of time without giving Catalina explanations. He has “one or two other households” that she is not privy to (FSJ 29). When he finally leaves her for good and without warning, Luz knows that if Catalina “was quiet in those rooms [now], it was from choice, not because she had been silenced as before, by a look, a word, or a gesture; not because she had been dismissed by the flick of a light switch” (FSJ 99).

In observing Catalina’s interactions, the church’s negative influence on Luz—its male-biased attitudes towards women—emerges. Commenting on Pablo’s disappearance, the family priest offers the abandoned Catalina the following advice: “Pablo was not a bad man Catalina, we all know that. He was always extremely generous to the church. We will all miss his support. And it seemed to me that he had been a good husband and father, these past years?....Now I ask myself, why did he leave? People do strange things. Perhaps you should search your heart, Catalina, perhaps the answer is there” (FSJ 91). His suggestion insinuates, presumptuously, that Catalina may somehow be responsible for Pablo deserting his family. By advising her to reflect on this possibility without even the slightest hint of admission that, as a husband and a father, Pablo’s actions were highly irresponsible toward his wife and children, he absolves Pablo of accountability in the break-up of this marriage and, in doing so, implies that if any guilt is warranted in this situation, it is likely Catalina’s to bear—she needs only to identify it. His insidious finger pointing as such verifies for Luz, who witnesses the exchange, the truth of what her mother preaches—“Here in San Joaquin we [women] are always to blame, Luz Marina, whether we do or we don’t. It must be our fate, a part of

the good and the bad of our lives as daughters and mothers” (FSJ 18). Despite Catalina’s money and power, she, like Sofia, is somehow at fault for her husband’s deviant behaviour—*she* must have done something wrong for him to run off as he did without so much as a word to anyone. This notion that men’s unjust and irresponsible behaviours are caused by women’s failures defines Luz “experiences” of what it means to be female well before she actually conducts herself accordingly in her role as Salvador’s wife.

Although Edgell doesn’t provide specific illustrations, the text strongly suggests that both Sofia and Catalina are physically abused by their partners. Luz admits as much when she describes Sofia’s situation as worse than hers with Salvador. Because Salvador’s behaviours and attitudes toward Luz virtually mimic his stepfather’s interactions with Catalina, the likelihood that his abusive tendencies follow Pablo’s example also becomes highly plausible. Edgell all but confirms this when, after suffering years of conjugal violence, Luz reflects that “Catalina would be forced to admit that [now]...my knowledge of the world, in certain sad and terrible ways, has equalled her own” (FSJ 29). Luz “experiences” her materiality through Sofia and Catalina’s “lived” bodies. She constructs her own body-schema based on the information she gathers from them as primary sources of female knowledge, but the perspective she develops as a result contains both her mind and body in spaces defined by notions of male privilege. Until she learns that the possibility of other ways of “knowing” herself and understanding femininity exists, she remains trapped. By integrating what it means to be a woman to Sofia and Catalina into her own expectations of life as a wife and mother—and because of what her “sexed” body thus signifies—she becomes literally and psychologically bound by her sexuality, a female condition affirmed in the family values she grew up

with and socially sanctioned by institutions that she reveres, the church in particular. So much validates the subjugated roles she plays out that it comes as no surprise that she, herself, is unable to recognize when she is being violated by the very systems that she believes sustain her.

Luz's subjectivity develops as a condition of her corporeality. Socially inscribed messages about her status as a woman in San Joaquin amount to her being at a disadvantage, and her body is at issue in determining this. The examples with which Sofia and Catalina provide her seriously undermine the way she sees herself in relation to men, but can we blame her role models outright? How their bodies have engaged with institutionalized violence against women has determined how they "read" Luz's. If they have been complicit in passing on to their daughter's generation values that perpetuate women's oppression, it is only because they don't suspect that the knowledge they have of their own bodies has been "sexualized," structured according to male subjectivity. In reducing the meanings and functions of the female body to its representation in the prevailing, masculine model available to them in San Joaquin—a model they believe to be universal because of its pervasiveness in their community—they fail to recognize the (unjust) constraints imposed on them in the process. As such, how they sexually differentiate themselves from their male counterparts precludes their conceiving of the female body as "congruous with but independent of men" (Grosz, Space 36). And to understand their corporeality in terms that would allow them to articulate their femininity, autonomously, they would need alternative representational systems to counter the disavowal of women's physicality inherent in the "neutrality" of what they

“know” and what they teach Luz. In short, like Luz, they need to be shown another perspective through which they might gain the ability to be critical of their own.

Luz stays with Salvador for approximately ten years, a period over which the severity of the physical and psychological abuse he inflicts on her and their children increases progressively. As his cruelty intensifies, so does her servility. The submissive role she plays from early on in their relationship contributes to creating the dangerous power imbalance between them, one that Edgell doesn't fail to explore. Luz's obsequiousness is evident from the start: on her wedding day she averts her eyes from a flower about which she is superstitious because Salvador dismisses her concern as nonsense, telling her to “forget about it...[to him] it's not important anyhow” (FSJ 3). Although she believes in omens, she acquiesces, “not wanting to spoil [his] mood” (FSJ 3). Later in the novel, she admits that she “seldom felt it necessary to prove [herself] right in what [she] then considered to be small matters, especially if it meant having an argument with [him]” (FSJ 11). Arguments usually led to fights after which he would leave, and she was “desperate for him to stay by [her] side” (FSJ 51). But even as small matters grow into issues that have grave consequences in terms of her physical and psychological well-being, as well as that of her children, Luz's submissive behavioural patterns persist, becoming only more exaggerated in light of the circumstances. Because she knows no other way of interacting with Salvador, she continues to defer to him in every aspect, neither confronting him about his abusive behaviour nor challenging his “authority” to brutalize his family.

The dynamic established between them—one she has been complicit in creating—leaves her little to no room in which to maneuver. Psychologically, she's defeated. She

believes that the situation, as it has developed, is her fault. She feels guilty and blames herself for the abuse, knowing “that in some way [she] had offended him [and] it was a punishment, but for what [she] had no idea” (FSJ 14). That she fails to recognize the extent to which she is being violated by Salvador or his culpability in this regard emerges as one of the most perplexing and alarming aspects of her psychological make-up. She cannot distinguish the fact that he is accountable for his actions or entertain the possibility that she deserves to be treated with respect. There is no introspection on her part in the text about either the degradation she subjects herself to by staying with him or the injustice of his conduct. Unable to see that their relationship has degenerated to an intolerable state, she simply continues to function inside of it, finding ways to cope with his violence as if she had no other option. She teaches her kids to defend themselves, as she always tries to, and keeps up her guard. She goes into denial, pretending not to notice things because she has become “very much afraid of [Salvador’s] rages, not only for [herself] but for Feliciano, Teresa, and Eduardo” (FSJ 67). Fear guides her; it’s deeply ingrained in her psyche. From an early age, she has been conditioned by it.

In effect, fear functions as Luz’s *modus operandi*, determining her actions throughout most of the novel. She fears poverty, God, Salvador, losing Salvador, losing her children, life without a man to protect her in a community in which epistemic violence against women prevails. Her practice of subverting her desires in favour of pleasing Salvador is rooted in her fears and becomes more pronounced over time. The text offers examples of Luz, initially, trying to express her ideas to him, but she eventually abandons such efforts altogether. She would bring up her concerns about Catalina’s objections to their impending marriage or the fact that she still felt like a maid and thought she was still

being treated like one, ignored by his family and friends—valid issues considering their history and the class difference between them—but whenever she attempted to articulate her anxieties, he would, invariably, tell her to “forget about it.” Luz begins to feel silly, impractical, as if her concerns are really meaningless. She loses self-confidence. Instead of trusting her instincts, she always assumes first that “perhaps Salvador is right; it is something to think about” (FSJ 128). Because he tells her she is crazy to “place sentimental ideas over money,” she, reluctantly, lets him sell a small piece of land that her parents had bought with their life savings and given to her as a wedding gift (FSJ 7). She never sees a penny from the sale.

Luz starts reacting to her own needs and desires in much the same way that Salvador does, readily dismissing them as unimportant or ridiculous—in effect, she internalizes his belittling criticism of her. Acknowledging her wants and needs might mean incurring his disapproval or, worse, inciting his anger, so she stifles her natural impulses or denies them altogether. She stops asking him “when [they] would get married, although [she] still wished for it with all [her] heart. It was always on [her] mind but [she] never asked, especially after [she] noticed he enjoyed listening to [her] beg” (FSJ 13). Even if she knows he’s lying about something that’s important to her, she suppresses her desire to question him and find out the truth as she fears what it might lead to. Luz does this consciously at first. On one such occasion she thinks he has thrown out the precious wedding gown she was saving, but Salvador “was drunk so [she] knew better than to start an argument with him” (FSJ 14). When she raises the subject, he instructs her to “forget about it,” so she resigns herself to leaving the issue unresolved—and though she constantly wonders about it, she never brings it up again. Undoubtedly, she fears his

reproaches and violence, but the text also implies that she might rather not face the discouraging truth; that way, she can continue living in denial, as she had been in airing out the dress every Saturday for years after her lost wedding day, dreaming “of the day it would return” (FSJ 11). After a while, however, Luz doesn’t bother to seek reasons to justify not asserting herself; her silence simply becomes a habitual response. Salvador’s abuse conditions her so that she sees any attempt to engage in dialogue as either potentially dangerous or futile. Repression becomes a subconscious psychological defense mechanism in her interactions with him, ingrained in her behaviour, but by repressing herself constantly, she becomes so disconnected from her needs that she can no longer so much as identify what’s important to her—her repeated failures in trying to articulate her ideas to him leave her, virtually, unable to articulate them for herself.

Luz reaches a point where she can “think of little but Salvador’s wishes” (FSJ 51). Accepting responsibility for his abuse so that he doesn’t have to, she shapes her subjectivity to suit his interests entirely. As such, she judges herself against an ideal of woman that he defines, remaining unaware of the injustice of her oppression. An ability to discern her boundaries and, hence, his violation of these, would, effectively, reconstitute her perspective and undermine the power she grants him. As it stands though, for the most part, Luz is perspectiveless, having no features, value or cognizance specifically her own. Her “knowledge” reflects Salvador’s interests primarily and is invested with his masculinist biases. Whatever her needs, desires and ideas, she gives his precedence; essentially, she acts out them, materially. Thus she affords him every advantage—physical, psychological, intellectual—and, herself, none. What she requires, wants or believes is obliterated in this process, her individual consciousness displaced. She

becomes a mere representation, the physical counterpart to his conceptual supremacy—her body, pleasures and desires reduced to versions or variants of his (Grosz , Space 38). Her thoughts and behaviours epitomize a religious tenet she upholds: “the man is the head to which the woman’s body is united” (FSJ 16).

In discussing the inscriptive model of corporeal subjectivity, Grosz argues that the “body can be regarded as a kind of *hinge* or threshold: it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body’s outer surface” (Space 33). In Edgell’s narrative, social laws, morals and values inscribe Luz’s body to produce in her a subjectivity that accepts physical violence as a natural part of her relationship with Salvador, and her behaviours textualize her body so that it can be “read” as an expression of this subjectivity. Luz’s body is beaten and confined as part of its function as Salvador’s partner. That she considers this normal shows that she has been socialized to value her physical self very little; it also indicates that existing social codes condone the epistemic, coercive nature of her relations with her partner. In effect, Luz’s physical compliance with Salvador’s abuse “corporealizes” the ideological biases of the male-dominated society in which she lives. Her movements within this context signify, materially, her psychological acceptance of the institutional powers that mark her body as subordinate to a man’s, and the meanings, values and norms that her behaviours, thus, produce, she ingests further into her “feminine” repertoire.

In examining the effects on Luz’s consciousness of what her body undergoes, the childbearing function she fulfills factors preeminently in a discussion of how her body is socially inscribed to contribute to her oppression. In living up to her religious belief that

“women should be fruitful,” bearing children that she has no means of supporting represents another coporealized form of masculinized institutional power that she has internalized (FSJ 16). (In remaining obedient to Salvador, her battered body is but one incarnation of the church’s misogynistic ideals of women.) Following the church’s teachings that a woman has a moral obligation to bear children imposes a physical imperative on Luz that, when realized, creates a situation in which her disadvantage in relation to Salvador increases: as her financial dependence on him grows as a result of having three children, so does her vulnerability and his power. Pregnancy, childbearing and motherhood weaken her already tenuous position in the relationship and negatively affect her perspective in decision-making processes, the choices she makes and the choices she thinks are available to her. Despite her parents’ admonitions, she stays with Salvador after he postpones their wedding a second time *because* she is pregnant and, therefore, thinks she needs his protection. Later in the text, after leaving him for a second time, she goes back to him *because* he offers to pay for expensive, medical care that one of their sons requires, care that neither she nor her parents can afford. Notwithstanding that the reason she left him at this juncture was because she believed he was responsible for the “accident” that put their eldest into a coma, she returns to him again, telling herself, in customary denial, that “he seemed so sorry for his actions” (FSJ 70). Impulses rooted in fear and a sense of helplessness feed her notions of having no other option, so she compromises herself further, thinking of her children.

Satisfying the church’s requirement of motherhood leads to conditions that Luz feels she has less and less control over. In effect, her reproductive and financial choices have been determined primarily by what has been “written” on her body by regimes biased in

favour of male-superiority. By acting in accordance with social norms and religious laws as such, Luz loses autonomy and develops an outlook that further predisposes her to behavioural patterns that speak to her subjectivity as being defined by men for their advantage. Her movements give meaning to women's secondary status in her social system and mark her consciousness with defeatism. How she experiences her body, physically, reflects the role that power plays in the development of her subjectivity. She also defines her social position and constructs knowledge based on how she experiences her body psychically. Both the "stuff of her corporeality" and her conceptualization of her body are, therefore, relevant considerations in a discussion of her perceived powerlessness (Grosz, Space 31).

Grosz asserts that "power requires knowledges of bodies and behaviours in order to remain effective and 'in play'...Bodies are thus essential to accounts of power and critiques of knowledge" (Space 32), and this text exemplifies her claim. What Luz knows about her body represses her on every level—psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and physically. She experiences something extreme, though, that few people do: she kills her abusive partner in self-defense. What she learns about her body as a result is that she is not vulnerable—she can protect herself—and that her sexuality does not warrant her taking responsibility for a man's behaviour. A prison psychiatrist informs her correctly: "...when there are no sons, it's not the woman's fault" (FSJ 45). Through the voice of this character—surfacing throughout the novel in Luz's thoughts—Edgell offers a critique of Luz's view on her gender role in Belize and presents her with the possibility of a way out of her psychological confinement. That is, Luz internalizes the voice of the doctor into her own reasoning, giving us momentary

glimpses of her capacity to see other perspectives and her emerging awareness. In one such instance, she asserts that “[t]hrough the doctor, I am beginning to understand that, often, I see what I want to see...” (FSJ 49). The doctor calls into question Luz’s belief that if she “had been a perfect wife and mother,” her life with Salvador would have been a dream, reminding her that they have already established “[his] unreliability in financial matters” (FSJ 46). And she doesn’t let Luz “dwell on the material things that were, for a brief while, so much a part of [her] life with [him]” (FSJ 46). Salvador’s social and economic superiority only fed Luz’s infatuation, her inferiority complex in their relationship and her, already, willing submission to male authority. Small interventions, but these things bring Luz’s internalized presumptions about her body and female responsibility into crisis and lead her to question her sources as well, making consciousness of her oppression—the first phase of resistance—possible.

How Luz imagined her body and experienced it physically had been determined by “sexualized” knowledge, privileging male interests, that she internalized. What the psychiatrist knows and shares with Luz, however, forces her to reconsider her unexamined assumptions about “woman,” assumptions that the doctor’s views contradict. Thus, Luz’s recent “education” casts her into self-doubt. And Edgell doesn’t suggest that Luz embraces this new uncertainty—Luz states “my old life seems to be continually at war with this new one, and I often feel very disoriented” (Edgell 88). Nevertheless, the battling ideological configurations that she tries to reconcile enable her to evaluate the (universal) truths upon which she has constructed her subjectivity—her body need not be considered the prime determinant in her oppression. “Knowing” her body in a different way gives Luz the power to be critical of her own attitudes and the singular vision of

woman her culture nurtures. It also implies an opportunity for her to choose between perspectives and possibly reconceptualize her body “in terms relevant to women’s specificity” (Grosz, Space 37).

Luz becomes aware that she has choices, and in this there is potential. This is the best Edgell’s realism offers. She neither delivers nor promises a tidy, lasting transformation for her heroine. She leaves readers, instead, with a sense of the magnitude of the task before Luz and the difficulties entailed in her challenge to recognize the relations between power and knowledge—those internal, often invisible influences that have conditioned what she knows and guided the nature of her reasoning.

CHAPTER THREE

Beka Lamb: Resistance

Attempted suicide can be seen as the ultimate act of human despair, a disavowal of our corporeal existence in favour of anything but what may lie ahead in the physical world. The extent and scope of an individual's unmitigated desire to cease participating in a world that appears hostile can really only be matched by the remarkable adaptability of the human body, mind and spirit in rising to the challenges of survival, however difficult such a process might be. In Beka Lamb, Zee Edgell explores both of these extremes. Set in Belize City against the backdrop of political instability with nationalist fervour at its height, she gives us two high-school students, Beka and Toycie, fighting for self-determination. For them, achieving independence means having the freedom to measure themselves in terms of their own interests, but their bodies become problematic in their struggles: they are discriminated against doubly—on the bases of both sex and race—in a culture that has institutionalized white, male supremacist ideals as values of the highest moral standards. Their stories illustrate just how deeply entrenched misogynistic practices and racial prejudice can be in Belizean society—how they can effectively erase a woman's specificity by undermining her attempts to assert her distinct value in an environment that seeks only to categorize “woman” and “Creole” in terms of monolithic masculinist and racist definitions imposed on these identities by British colonization and upheld pervasively throughout Belize.

Marked and subjugated according to sociopolitical and psychosexual assumptions made about their natures—assumptions based solely on their physical characteristics—

Beka and Toycie risk annihilation of the self. They hazard “breaking down,” being relegated to lives in the disenfranchised communities of single mothers and unskilled, domestic labourers in Belize City. Toycie’s fight against such marginalization illustrates Grosz’s claim in Space, Time, and Perversion that “bodies, under certain circumstances, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices” (36). Toycie’s resistance to the fate allotted her by her unwanted pregnancy inspires her younger friend Beka—albeit through fear—to generate a new perspective, one that enables her to draw important connections between a woman’s corporeality and her vulnerability, thereby increasing her awareness of the precariousness of her own situation. As a result, Beka rethinks her attitudes towards her education and, correspondingly, modifies her behaviour in a conscious effort to gain control of her own destiny. In doing so, she overcomes a racial stereotype by which Creole people are often judged in the novel, one that views their potential to succeed as limited, in spite of the new opportunities that social change has granted them.

In the text, Toycie and Beka use vastly different strategies to get what they either want or need. While this affirms Spivak’s claim in The Post-Colonial Critic that “there is no discursive continuity among women” (57), it also calls into question her assertion that “in order to intervene one must negotiate...the more vulnerable your position, the more you have to [do so]...” (72). Despite the vulnerable position in which Toycie finds herself, she rejects the sociopolitical structures that violate her freedom to create the kind of life she envisions for herself—that is, she refuses to negotiate with, or live in, a system that denies her right to autonomy; yet she manages to influence change. Beka, in comparison, identifies a workable strategy within the existing system. Her success by

this means, however, involves developing a tarnished view of her own Creole heritage. In the process of their struggles, both heroines, in effect, surrender essential elements of their nature in the fight. In this, the “most forceful and challenging” aspect of the novel emerges—mainly, the text raises the question of complicity, allowing for an examination of the “claim that one’s struggles are inherently impure, bound up with what one struggles against, that one reaffirms its power even as one struggles” (Grosz, Space 62).

I.

Toycie naively trusts her boyfriend Emilio when he tells her that nothing will happen if they experiment sexually, and that in the event that something untoward occurs, he will marry her. She knows nothing of sexual matters and gets pregnant, but she doesn’t want the child and neither does he. He reneges on his promise to marry her because he has his education, future and religious conscience to reckon with. Beka had warned her: “Pantias scarcely ever marry Creole like we,” but Toycie rejected the notion that racial differences could limit her relationship’s potential (BL 47). Belize’s class system ranks her inferior to Emilio because she is Creole, and he is Mestizo—Creole origins lie in a combination of African and European ancestry and Mestizo’s in a mix of Mayan Indian and Spanish heritage. In a social hierarchy structured on colonial prejudices, Toycie’s colour and race reduce her value. And, because of Emilio’s superior social standing, an accidental pregnancy like hers commonly creates suspicion in that it is perceived as a Creole woman’s intentional, sly attempt to “raise her colour” (BL 47). That Toycie comes from a poor, makeshift family “without resources...no strings to pull when their children get in trouble” doesn’t help her situation (BL 119). Her pregnancy, thus, also means certain expulsion from the Catholic girls’ school she attends, which her guardian, Aunt Eila,

works “from morning to late night” to send her to (BL 120). Eila wants to give Toycie opportunities that the majority of Creole women before her generation never had. Education is the new, all-important privilege to which her niece not only has access but through which she has already proven her excellence. And it is Toycie’s only hope—the thing that will enable her to create a new space for herself in Belize, one different from that to which she sees women in her community confined.

In a society in which abortion is neither legal nor available and one in which, for “moral” reasons, young girls are not permitted to continue school after becoming mothers, Toycie loses her chance to graduate from high school as a result of her unwanted pregnancy. At 17, her hopes are dashed and her future virtually decided by her childbearing state, a physical condition over which she has no control—absolutely no means of rectifying in Belize. Like the Creole women before her, she will have to struggle as an uneducated teenage single mother with no lucrative prospects, raising an illegitimate child without financial or emotional support from its father. She will bear full responsibility for the fruits and consequences of her *and* Emilio’s sexual activities. He will emerge unscathed from the incident, retaining the privilege of continuing his Catholic education, thereby further developing his intellectual abilities, increasing his career options and earning power. Beka’s father appeals to the principal of St. Cecilia’s for leniency on Toycie’s behalf, stating what is both obvious and unfair about the double standard that the school system upholds: “[Toycie] alone is not to be blamed for this accident, and Mr. Villeneuve’s son will not be expelled from school” (BL 119). His appeal, however, fails as Sister Virgil cites her conscience and public opinion as pressing considerations that would never allow her to let Toycie finish her final year, regardless of

her high academic calibre. Sanctioning the idea that the weight of responsibility for and the consequences of sexual activity rests solely on a woman's shoulders, she sums it up succinctly when she expels Toycie: "In cases like this, we believe it is *entirely* up to the modesty of the girl to prevent these happenings" (emphasis added, Edgell, Beka 119). Catholic school rules exonerate Emilio from responsibility for his sexual behaviour for reasons that, apparently, require no explanation. He is simply not subject to the same penalties that Toycie is. He remains free to "build [his] conceptual and material worlds," while the system relegates her to the role of "guardian of the private and interpersonal" (Grosz, Space 121), in spite of her desperate desire to create an autonomous space for herself, one in which she, alone, decides where and how to live.

This uneven dispensation of punishment for premarital sexual activity privileges men at the expense of women and exposes the masculinist foundation of Catholic ideology. Furthermore, it functions as a sexist manoeuvre that capitalizes on sexual difference with an aim to devalue femininity, targetting that which diverges most from maleness, specifically a woman's reproductive capacity—it is this bodily difference that situates Toycie at a disadvantage relative to Emilio. Bearing the distinction of carrying their child, the burden of responsibility and the consequences therein are assigned to her maternal body, effectively stripping this uniquely female function of any positive attributes in Belizean society. Thus religious practices negate the primacy of a woman's body: Catholicism's "male (cultural) productivity supersedes and overtakes female (natural) reproduction" (Grosz, Space 106).

Implicit in the Catholic values that find Toycie culpable yet fail to hold Emilio accountable for the child they conceived is a "deep and unrecognized investment in

phallogentrism” that disavows the maternal (Grosz, Space 106). This violent erasure of the contributions of women positions the sexual and reproductive nature of the female body as the foundation of Toycie’s social and financial disenfranchisement in the novel. She, who Edgell first presents as “gaily optimistic...brave ...encouraging to others...lively with the anticipation of tomorrow’s promise,” becomes another example of moral degradation—merely another “fallen” woman in the Creole community—after her body reveals her sexual nature (BL 117). Emilio, the father of the child, himself denigrates her for having sex with him now that she is pregnant, making her “feel ashamed and dirty” for what *they* did (BL 110). Toycie confides to Beka: he said “he could never marry anybody who played around with him like I did, because if I can do it before marriage, after marriage I would do it with somebody else and his mamacita would collapse if he married somebody that wasn’t a virgin because she’s so religious and brought him up to be a modest Catholic boy” (BL 109). That religious principles support Emilio in denying his responsibility to Toycie and their baby and conveniently cloak his fear of female promiscuity and sexist attitudes in what he presents as devotion to his faith exemplifies sanctioned misogyny in Belize’s cultural climate. Furthermore, it testifies to the fact that the Catholic ideal of female virtue originates in both men’s fear of female sexuality and their efforts to contain it.

Edgell gives us the sense that Emilio’s life will continue as planned, virtually untouched by the fact that he has fathered a child. In fact, the text implies that in Belize he might actually be esteemed for his premarital sexual conduct, whereas Toycie is harshly judged and punished for hers. In Nurse Palacio’s explanation of Toycie’s

circumstances to a distraught Eila, Edgell hints that getting Toycie pregnant may have put a notch in Emilio's macho belt:

Men and boys about here, married or not, pursue certain young ladies, especially the pretty ones, ambitious and proud like your Toycie. After they catch them... they start treating the girls like dirt, confusing them. The girls get desperate because they've lost their virginity and they try to prove their constancy to one man by forgiving the bad treatment. Many girls wind up pregnant. This makes the men *somebody* in the eyes of their friends, it gives them status...." (BL 135)

That Belizean men build themselves up by reducing and mistreating women, and that sex provides both the means of and justification for their doing so evidences violence against women in the misogynistic practices Edgell depicts in Belizean society; and that a woman's complicity in sexual relations—that is, the mere articulation of her sexual desires—leaves her open to censure, if not injury, attests to an extremely hostile environment for sexual women, in particular, in to society depicted in Beka Lamb.

On the surface, the position Toycie finds herself in affirms what Sister Virgil preaches: "We women must learn to control our emotion. The rate of illegitimacy is quite high and has been high for a long time... women will have to decide for a change in their lives, otherwise they will remain vulnerable" (BL 120)—and Beka buys into this after she sees what happens to her friend. The nun's explanation, however, serves better as an example of Catholic ideology's willful repression of women's natural instincts—their sexual desires, in particular— than a reliable guide for a young woman's self-actualization. Her statement obscures the obvious: Toycie's "trouble" resulted from a lack of education about sex and her body's reproductive system—and the religious

response to her pregnant, unwed state—not from some female deficiency in ability to control emotion. What Toycie didn't know made her susceptible, not her actions in and of themselves. She didn't know what Beka learned from her mother, that "...if the sperm from a man touches your vagina, sometimes it can go into you and become a baby" (BL 109). Her Aunt Eila couldn't tell her; she has no knowledge about sex—"No man ever approach me for any such reasons...with my crooked body none would, so I couldn't tell Toycie much on that score. If her mother had been here, she, maybe, could have said" (BL 135). Thus, despite being one of the first generation of Creole women with access to a secondary school education—something the text indicates took members of the Creole community "generations of humiliation and sacrifice...to get"—Toycie remains at risk of having her life "break down" in the very same way that her mother's did: by getting pregnant with an unwanted child because she doesn't know how to control her body's reproductive system (BL 42). (Caught by the same "trouble," her mother left a two-year old Toycie with her lame sister Eila, who *wanted* a baby, and started a new life elsewhere.) Toycie has neither access to information that could teach her protective measures nor means by which she might exercise choice once she's pregnant.

The Catholic standard of no premarital sex precludes educating St. Cecilia's students about sexually responsible behaviour. Keeping young women ignorant about sex and how their bodies function, yet making them liable to penalties should they become pregnant as a result of their lack of knowledge, benefits the church's agenda: if a woman doesn't know how to avoid unwanted pregnancy, the probability of her suppressing her sexual desires increases. Thus, what Sister Virgil refers to as the necessary change that will improve Belizean women's lives and make them less vulnerable—that is,

suppressing their emotions—has little to do with taking positive action or obtaining knowledge that would truly enable a woman to gain autonomy in choosing how she wishes to govern her life and express herself. Instead, it speaks to the church's continued attempts to manipulate and coerce women. In this novel, a young woman can either abide by the Catholic, male-imposed ideal of the virgin bride or face social ostracism and financial oppression. Either way, she is repressed.

The Catholic church functions as the agent of Toycie's oppression. Its gender politics reduce her to her body, attributing to it "biologicistic characteristics [that] amount to a permanent form of social containment" (Grosz, Space 48). Toycie's sexual "transgression," in effect, negates her upstanding character and capacities, and the particulars of her family life; in short, the system totally disregards her specific history in formulating a response to her infraction of school rules. She is judged and sentenced solely on the basis of her physical condition. That she is pregnant and unwed comprises the extent of "relevant" information on which Sister Virgil condemns her. The nun's logic implies that Toycie's body is proof enough of her guilt, and her guilt alone. Toycie's pregnancy demonstrates that she has violated the restrictions that the Catholic church imposes on premarital sexual conduct, whereas Emilio's body manifests no such evidence; therefore, Toycie, alone, deserves punishment. In this system, not surprisingly, Emilio denies his responsibility without compunction and regards Toycie, too, in terms of this singular physical characteristic she now displays, one which, apparently, erases her desirable qualities and renders her unworthy of his long-term commitment. His religion privileges him to do so. In the interest of defending his moral standards, he can, justifiably, dismiss her with a clear conscience as quickly and as permanently as Sister

Virgil does when she expels her. In both personal relationships and at the institutional level, therefore, Toycie's pregnancy brings on biased presumptions about her nature that depersonalize her and divest her reproductive body of its value and distinction.

Edgell creates a situation in which Toycie feels hopeless. St. Cecilia's denies her the education she needs to better her circumstances and to challenge social practices that homogenize Creole women according to racial and gender stereotypes. And the larger political framework offers her no alternatives. No structural support systems exist to provide services that either recognize or meet her specifically female needs; in fact, this possibility is so remote in the masculinist society that Edgell constructs that she doesn't even acknowledge its non-existence in the narrative. Far from considering, much less addressing, women's concerns as valid, the male-dominated culture Edgell depicts in Beka Lamb only decries what is uniquely feminine, what "men cannot explain, cannot articulate or know..." (Grosz, Space 124). In desperation, Toycie cries, "I don't want it, Beka. I don't want it," but short of attempting a home abortion or killing herself she has no option but to have the baby (BL 109). The thought of being forced alone into "rocking the cradle," of having no say in choosing motherhood, sends her into convulsions (BL 170). Suddenly, she's slotted into a life far from the one she imagined, one that will follow a predictable pattern of domesticity, disenfranchised labour and perpetual poverty. Consequently, she will be confined to dwelling in what Grosz aptly describes as a "space of duty, of endless and infinitely repeatable chores that have no social value or recognition, the space of affirmation and replenishment of others at the expense and erasure of the self" (Space 122). Institutionalized gender discrimination has successfully eliminated other possibilities. Uneducated, pregnant and unwed, Toycie

sees nothing before her that might allow her to realize her intellectual potential or the ambitious goals she dreamed of pursuing—and, for this, “there could be no consolation” (BL 117). “Dull resignation” overcomes her (BL 120). The incomprehensible injustice of the system she inhabits is revolting to her—some “incredible nightmare” from which she cannot escape (BL 120). And without political or economic resources with which she might fight the judgements made against her, she has no recourse but to submit to the fate allotted her. But Toycie doesn’t. Even as her life “breaks down” she finds ways to resist the future to which her physicality has seemingly bound her.

II.

If a woman’s body can function as the site of her oppression, it stands to reason that it may also operate as the site of her resistance. That is, sexist values can be subverted by the very instrument they have declared inferior, and the body can articulate desire—as it can domination—in a number of ways in even the most repressive systems. Edgell moves precisely in this direction in Beka Lamb. Finding herself intellectually, psychologically and socially contained, Toycie manages, nevertheless, to express her opposition to the life assigned to her on the basis of her sexual difference, and her resistance manifests itself in her body just as her oppression does. The personal costs, however, are high and irrecoverable, but not incurred in vain. In a process that ends in her death, Toycie exhibits behaviours that spur Beka on to a new state of awareness, one that makes her effective in asserting change when her turn to battle discrimination rooted in body politics arises.

Toycie confines herself indoors, physically enacting the psycho-social containment her body has made her subject to in Belize: “She wouldn’t leave the house during the

daytime and avoided any contact with Beka...the only times Toycie went on the street was after sunset, when Miss Eila's bad foot was aching and stiff, to empty the slop bucket" (BL 124). Engaged in this mean, solitary task, the only activity for which she forces herself out of the house, Toycie conjures up the first image Edgell provides of hardworking, impoverished Eila: "...Miss Eila limped her way to the waterside, a slop bucket heavy in her right hand" (BL 1). Poignantly, it also indicates the kind of life before Toycie now, in contrast to the dynamic future she once envisioned. She had vowed, "I'm going to live right da seafront" on one of those beautiful streets where "...few real Belize people, rich, in-between, or poor lived..." (BL 15)—she imagined she would occupy new ground for a Creole woman in Belize. To her despair, though, she seems destined to a life identical to that which generations of uneducated Creole women have submitted—a monolith, the antithesis of how she sees herself. Powerless in the face of an uncompromising system, she withdraws into depression and isolates herself. Her enclosure in "physical space is not entirely different from the containment of women in men's conceptual universe..." (Grosz, *Space* 123). Male imperatives have effectively destroyed the identity she has constructed of herself, restricted her mobility, obliterated her future as she conceived it and imposed on her, in its place, a stifling role that she stubbornly resists.

The limited definition of life with which the system leaves Toycie means nothing to her as it cannot accommodate the terms by which she measures herself. Desperate, she attempts suicide. Edgell doesn't state this definitively, but the text strongly implies it. Toycie is rushed, unconscious, to a city hospital where she loses the baby and "her sense of reality" (BL 132). Eila wonders, "Toycie gone to that bridge over and over. How you

think she managed to fall down? I can't think of a way unless she was dizzy...she complain sometimes that her head swings" (BL 129-30). Edgell's elliptical pause denotes Eila's want of a reasonable explanation for Toycie's fall and, although Eila comes up with a possible answer to her question, her moment's hesitation casts further suspicion on Toycie's intentions where doubt already exists. At this point in the novel, in Eila's asking the question, Edgell points to what she would have us believe. Was Toycie reclaiming control of her life by trying to take it? Did she wish to eradicate the instrument of her oppression in order to liberate herself? That the event could give rise to such questions, in itself, reveals something disturbing about the context in which it takes place: the possibility that self-annihilation might be Toycie's only means of asserting autonomy under the circumstances in which she finds herself speaks to horrendous conditions for women in Belizean society. It illustrates not only the total oppression Edgell's character is struggling against but also the intensity of her desire not to be subjugated by it.

In the masculinist environment that Edgell presents, "...a woman has nothing but her body" (Spivak, PC Critic 27). Toycie, therefore, uses hers in the only ways she can. Being the sole means available, it becomes *the* weapon in her resistance, allowing her to manipulate her situation—albeit not always consciously—and affect changes that she couldn't achieve otherwise. The measures she takes, however, are as extreme as the sexist practices that robbed her of her student status and social respectability—of her future possibilities. Her refusal to accept her reduced state manifests itself in her (implied) attempted suicide. Although she doesn't succeed, she modifies her body to her liking in that she miscarries as a result of the trauma. Thus, in the attempt, she "finds" a

means of ridding herself of the unwanted child where there was none before. Physically, though, Toycie's body remains intact and, as such, she must continue to function within a system that has coded it as morally degraded because of her premarital sexual activity. She will not submit to this mean definition of herself or to the life to which it relegates her. She goes mad. And in her madness, she gains license to create her own, alternate reality and to choose the role she inhabits—the material reality of an unjust system no longer limits her. Insanity, essentially, frees her from being confined to an existence she disdains.

At the hospital, she becomes “generally uncontrollable”; she “rolled, fought and struggled...It took four nurses and an orderly to restrain [her]” (BL 132). This image of Toycie locates both the site of her oppression and her struggle in her body. It also shows that the power of institutional forces outweigh all of her efforts in the fight. As Toycie's body is held down, it constitutes what keeps her down, but, paradoxically, it also provides the means by which she expresses her resistance. In a psychotic state, she re-creates elements of the life she wants: “She imagines she's at school and keeps asking when the recess bell is going to ring” (BL 132); demands silence because, as Beka realizes, “she was pretending to study” (BL 134). In Belize's Mental Asylum, continually re-enacting her role as a student, Toycie, in a manner of speaking, fulfills her wish to continue her education, in that her delusions allow her to act out a very real desire. The issue of conscious choice aside, Toycie reconstructs herself in terms of her own interests. That her strategies develop out of her desperation or the delusions of her impaired mind doesn't impact on the fact that the conditions she brings about by “employing” them accommodate distinct features of her identity, those on which she hinged personal

success and individual freedom: that is, she remains childless and, as far as she knows, continues studying, gaining knowledge that will enable her to make her mark in society. To achieve this facsimile of the life that she wants, though, Toycie disowns all that society has left her with: her body-mind. Tragically, only in doing so does the nature of her body seem to work for instead of against her, enabling her to regain a sense of control, however illusory, so that she can express herself as she desires. Thus, just as Toycie's body constituted her weakness before, its fluctuations following her marginalization articulate her power to define herself according to her own values. Her tactics appear self-destructive, but the options available in her position leave her with little choice: she either submits to a life that is abhorrent to her or escapes it, whatever the costs.

III.

If Toycie's strong intellect, uninhibited imagination and "insane ambition" made her potentially problematic in a culture that expects women and Creoles to remain in subordinate social positions, it follows that Belizean institutions would exert strenuous pressure on her in their efforts to maintain the status quo (BL 34). Because Toycie's sexual conduct does not adhere to a male model of female virtue, the establishment has the ammunition it needs to suppress her; she's coded unwed and pregnant in a monolithic sweep that denies all aspects of her specificity, reducing her "identity to sameness" (Grosz, Space 54). The system attempts to do the same to Beka—to erase her distinctiveness by using her body against her.

At St. Cecilia's, Beka's upbringing—and that of other native Belizean students—"is exaggerated into what [is] perceived to be vulgarity, defiance, ingratitude, lack of

discipline or moral degradation” (BL 112). Expected to acquire “the art of suppressing segments of her personality,” she must shed characteristics that distinguish her as deviating from the white-male supremacist values on which the school’s standards are founded (BL 112). Her physical blackness, in itself, places her at a disadvantage in this regard, although this represents an aspect of her individuality that she has no control over. Furthermore, she is a woman, and the immutable fact of her body speaks for itself in a system as sexist as it is racist. What Beka confronts in this novel, therefore, is not altogether different from what Toycie struggles against: discrimination on the grounds of her body.

Unlike Toycie, Beka has a family: a mother, father, brothers and a grandmother, all of whom live with her. Neither her parents nor her grandmother have had a formal education, but they are well informed, opinionated, socially conscious individuals, which, in the context of Belize’s nationalist movement, means that Beka is raised in a rather politically-charged household. Her father, Bill, is a British loyalist. He’s worked hard in the colonial system to give his family a decent life and is apprehensive about losing all that he’s earned, should the present system collapse under the force of the country’s movement towards independence. Beka’s grandmother, Ivy, on the other hand, is a passionate activist in the nationalist struggle. Her political ideology decries Britain’s centuries-old exploitation of Belize’s natural and human resources, causing Beka to question the truth of her assumption that “things British [are] things best” (BL 54). In addition, Ivy’s strong conviction that Belize is ready for self-government, juxtaposed with her son’s reservations on the matter, creates a virtual microcosm in the Lamb home,

one that reflects the novel's concern with the issue of national unity and its importance in the fight against British colonialism.

Edgell draws Beka as a below average student with a penchant for telling lies, who has already been suspended from St. Cecilia's once and who failed her last school year. What was to be Toycie's graduating year marks Beka's final chance to prove that she deserves an education. She, too, has a lot to lose if she doesn't pass; her father won't pay for her to repeat again—"it'll be the washing bowl underneath the house bottom for her then and no mistake" (BL 21). Beka doesn't want a life confined to domestic labour, so she realizes the value of a diploma from St. Cecilia's; owning one, she can at least get a good clerical job. But she has difficulty meeting the levels of conformity that the school demands and cannot seem to "help herself" (BL 90). She instinctively questions a priest when he threatens students with eternal damnation. Citing women as the cause of chaos, he preaches, "...we must mortify the flesh...[or] be damned to everlasting hellfire. Remember the story of Eve. As young ladies you must walk always with an invisible veil about you so as not to unleash chaos upon the world. God, in his infinite goodness, gave us the Blessed Virgin to erase the memory of Eve, and to serve as an example to the women of the world" (BL 90). Beka attempts to engage in a dialogue with him: she proposes that "...it's nature that produces chaos, Father, and women *and* men are part of nature..." but the exchange ends badly (emphasis added, BL 91). Intuitively, she knows that being a descendant of Eve—and of her sex—neither renders her body deserving of punishment nor obliges her to hide her true nature, but in a system that righteously absolves men of responsibility for social ills in theory and in practice, suggesting male accountability is perceived as blasphemous. Furthermore, Beka compounds her mistake

of challenging the “infinite wisdom of Mother Church” by having the audacity to bring her Granny Ivy’s advice into the discussion, suggesting that it might be better to simply “do the best [she] can and not worry too much about living in heaven or hell for the guilt might frighten [her] crazy” (BL 90-91). Immediately, she realizes that she has gone too far. Frustrated with herself, she “felt like smashing her fist straight through her desk. She began to fear there was something within [her] that was spoiled, something that caused her to continuously do and say things against her own best interests” (BL 91). Her tendency to think for herself and challenge religious theory promises only to jeopardize her future at St. Cecilia’s. Consequently, she grows wary—tense and silent as she starts to distrust of her own nature.

Beka’s assertiveness, her argument in defense of women and against the sin of femininity, and her claim that men share equal responsibility for what nature produces indicate to school authorities an undesirable, rebellious disposition instead of a healthy inclination and the ability to think critically. Sister Virgil suspects that she may be a heretic and suspends her; her racist assumptions lead her to the immediate conclusion that Beka’s “home life [is] such...that it [is] doubtful whether [she] should be educated at a Catholic school” (BL 91). Beka recognizes that her efforts to express herself can only hinder her academic progress, so she alters her approach to one of self-repression. As such, she manages to suppress her natural instincts and, to her relief, to passively accept her religious indoctrination. On leaving Father Nunez’s class in the new term, she takes comfort in thinking “So far so good...I didn’t concentrate, but at least I didn’t say anything (BL 92). As a situational solution to her problems, Beka’s submission to the oppressive rules of conduct at St. Cecilia’s actually functions as a form of her resistance

in that her conformity enables her to proceed towards her goals from a position of decreased vulnerability. But the larger narrative structure in which Edgell frames her characters' movements provides a constant reminder that her heroines' actions are determined not by choice but by necessity. The "compromises" that Beka makes are not really compromises but concessions that admit her defeat. The establishment remains intact and rigid — and the terms for her participation therein are, finally, non-negotiable.

Upon observing Toycie's total inability to prevent losing access to an education and her subsequent devastation, Beka starts to develop a sense of both the power patriarchal institutions wield and the hostility directed towards women in Belizean culture. This growing awareness scares her and, consequently, motivates her to work relentlessly towards achieving academic success. She suffers from a new "fear that if ever again she stopped working at her lessons...something terrible would happen," and concentrating on schoolwork becomes the only means of alleviating her anxiety (BL 143). She enters an essay contest and works diligently on her submission, despite her grandmother's warnings that she is "wasting precious time trying to win...Who ever heard about any black girl winning so much as a pencil at that convent school?" (BL 151). Still, something deeper nags at her—Beka "suspect[s] that her nurture was such that her life would break down" no matter how hard she tried (BL 147). And by looking at the lives of women in her community, she identifies a pattern that seems to testify to this inevitability:

Now, let's see, on this street Miss Flo had a daughter named Miss Glory, and Miss Glory had Miss Ruby, that's the one with the face bumpy like pineapple skin, and now *she* has three daughters. Then there's old Miss Boysie in the alley

and she has a daughter named Miss Prudence, and Miss Prudence has two daughters and one son...then there's Miss Lucretia, that's Dotty's maid, and she has three sons and one daughter, Miss Hortence, and she is pregnant; and then there's Miss Eila's sister who had Toycie and went to America and never came back and then...." (BL 145)

Edgell gives us a sense that Beka awakens to the fact that women's reproductivity is at issue here—from earlier references in the text we infer that these women are all single mothers with children by one or more men. More specifically, the novel implies that a lack of control of their reproductive systems—that which Toycie confronted—constitutes the primary means by which women become and continue to be marginalized in Belizean society. Edgell diminishes the positive aspects of Beka's having gained this insight, though, with the negative view Beka develops of her Creole heritage as a result. From her evaluation of the situation, Beka assumes that, having been raised in the same Creole traditions as the other women, she, too, will fall subject to their fate and be rendered disenfranchised and undifferentiated in the system. She saw it happen to Toycie. In Beka's mind, Toycie became indistinguishable from another female outcast, Vellor: "Vellor's face melted into Toycie's, Toycie's face merged into Vellor's and then Vellor became Toycie, as she had been..." (BL 128). Consequently, Beka starts to view her Creole background with suspicion—much like Sister Virgil—and determines to (re)shape herself in an effort to avoid the fate to which she thinks her upbringing has consigned her.

Beka cannot see that the marginalization of women in her community is a product of institutionalized racist and sexist practices in the colonial structures she inhabits. Instead, she considers Creole women's sexual proclivities to be their weakness, thinking precisely

the way a repressive patriarchal regime has taught her to think. She adopts Sister Virgil's conviction that Belizean women need to control their emotions, and resolves to control her own, accepting that her vulnerability lies in her propensity to act on how she feels instinctually—questioning a priest's authority by impulsively voicing her alternative opinion in class has already put her at risk at the Academy; following her sexual intuition would too. Abiding by the religious notion that her feminine nature requires restraint if there is to be any hope for her—or “for the long term development of [her] country” (BL 120)—Beka also determines never to fall in love; in fact, “just thinking about Toycie and Emilio [hurt] her stomach like after a good dose of senna leaves” (BL 170). As she has seen, loving a man can lead to women's lives breaking down in ways that are irremediable, and she suspects that being Creole has already predisposed her to this eventuality as it is. The only other option Beka can imagine to “prevent her own life from breaking down” irrevocably, is leaving Belize (BL 82). She thinks that in going away, she would be able to “pick up the pieces, glue them together, and start all over again” should she get pregnant before marriage (BL 147). Toycie's mother did; she reconstructed her identity that way. Toycie tells Beka “she went to America when I was two and has never come back. She's married to a man in Brooklyn who doesn't even know she has me back here.” (BL 59). Beka plans on leaving as a precaution. Her fears confirm that Belize is an unforgiving environment for single mothers. Its sociopolitical structures leave these women no space in which to (re)create themselves: they are permanently stigmatized.

The system conditions Beka quite effectively, properly deterring her from exploring sides of herself that might lead either to the articulation of her sexual desires independent

of the church's approval, or the development of her intellectual ability to challenge masculinist knowledges that the establishment upholds as indisputable truths.

Essentially, sanctioned misogyny in Belizean society divests her of potentially powerful character traits and a vital aspect of her femininity. And, in disavowing these in order to make progress, she becomes complicit in her own gendered oppression. Paradoxically, in this manner, Beka undermines the system's prejudiced, preconceived notions about Creole people's potential by earning distinction for that which had previously diminished her in its structure—the very fact of her Creoleness. That is, she becomes the first black girl to win an essay contest at St. Cecilia's, proving even to her grandmother that "...things can change fi true" (BL 1). As such "...she has made a beginning..." even though it was fear that motivated her to succeed—the fear of "breaking down" as Toychie did (BL 167).

IV.

The strategic value of the tactics that Beka and Toychie use to resist their oppression cannot be considered in absolute terms. That is, their actions must be acknowledged as contextual for any evaluation of them to yield sound conclusions. It would be a mistake to assume that the strategies they employ are either useful or valid in all situations or that, *because* these strategies enable them, they are correct (Spivak, PC Critic 146). As Granny Ivy advises Beka—in confessing to her that "Toychie's first trouble caught me too, and I turned to rocking the cradle"—"there are ways and ways" (BL 170). In other words, no two women need necessarily adopt identical responses to institutionalized oppression. Ivy's theory of resistance speaks to Spivak's claim that in the project of feminism "the prime task is situational" (Spivak, PC Critic 58). Furthermore, the text

exemplifies this notion in the disparity between the methods that Beka and Toycie “choose” in order to gain a sense of control over their lives—that is, both of their methods prove to be—to some extent—successful in opposing their individual forms of oppression, but *neither* method would be either appropriate or effective if applied to the other’s case: Beka’s complicity with the system would serve Toycie no purpose in her pregnant condition; and Toycie’s attempted suicide and subsequent insanity don’t point to the only viable options for Beka. As such, the novel provides an apt illustration of Spivak’s assertion that “when a situational solution is then theorized as a theoretical solution, then...there is a problem” (Spivak, PC Critic 149).

Beka’s resistance takes on a socially commendable form. She works within the system, contributing to its preservation and is rewarded with unprecedented recognition for her achievements. Thus, she penetrates racial biases and carves a new space for herself and, potentially, others like her. By accepting the establishment’s terms, she claims her right to equality in its structure. In contrast, Toycie turns her back on everything. Her behaviour, though, makes a difference, too, in terms of influencing positive change. She intervenes in Beka’s life by forcing her friend into the painful awareness that certain aspects of her femininity make her extremely vulnerable in a powerful and hostile masculinist regime. And, although Toycie’s resistance tactics are tragically self-destructive, in rejecting the limits to which the system tries to confine her, she, at the very least, exercises a measure of autonomy. Notwithstanding this, in reading Toycie’s initiatives, a tension emerges shaped by the question of whether or not her actions could be interpreted as complicit with the system she opposes. Her attempted suicide could be construed as either a triumph in that it articulates her unqualified

rejection of the structures of violence she is obliged to inhabit, or a failure in that it represents her complete submission to the systematic practices that aim to negate her. Correspondingly, her insanity, even as it liberates her from “dwelling” in the structures that have violated her, could also speak to her continued involvement in patriarchal power relations in that, as her only option, it affirms the power of the oppressive regime she resists as much as it communicates the strength of her determination to live life on her own terms. While the assertion of complicity does not constitute a “claim of [Toycie’s] conscious collusion,” it draws attention to the complex nature of resistance in this text (Grosz, Space 62). Toycie’s actions can be understood as either her victory or her defeat—or both. In short, a reductive assessment of Edgell’s characters’ actions is not appropriate.

Contextualizing Beka and Toycie’s experiences in the larger framework of the country’s political tensions facilitates Edgell’s exploration of theories of resistance at the level of systems and structures. Beka and Toycie’s different approaches to their personal crises reflect Belizeans’ factious political views on the nationalist struggle—promoting either complicity with or rejection of oppressive colonial structures—and demonstrate two types of resistance, each with distinct politics: the right to equality and the right to autonomy. Beka’s success involves negotiation and illustrates that “the right to equality entails the right to be the same” (Grosz, Space 54). She must conform at St. Cecilia’s. Toycie’s “struggles for autonomy [entail] reject[ing] the terms by which equality is measured and...defin[ing her]self in different terms” (Grosz, Space 54). These differences in Beka and Toycie’s practices reflect the differences in Bill and Ivy’s political views on issues in the nation’s fight against colonization. Bill’s loyalist

perspective suggests complicity is warranted—that “by negotiation one tries to change something one is obliged to inhabit, since one is not working from outside [and that] to keep one’s effectiveness, one must also preserve...structures—not cut them down completely” (Spivak, PC Critic 72). His theory speaks to Beka’s practice and Belizeans’ right to equality in the colonizer’s system. In his opinion, “the British band of colonialism isn’t the worst [Belize] could have” (BL 7). Ivy’s ideas espouse a “politics of difference” as does Toycie’s resistance, implying “the right to define oneself, others, and the world according to one’s own interests” (Grosz, Space 54). She tells Beka that “people like us don’t like the British anymore” (BL 54). She wants an independent, self-governed Belize—to see her grandchildren “growing up in [their] *own* country” (emphasis added, Edgell, Beka 152). Like Toycie, who believes that she can never become the person she wants to be in the existing system, Ivy believes that Belize will never have “a chance to become something” under British rule (BL 152). In Ivy and Bill’s ongoing “dialogue,” the text suggests that, as with Beka and Toycie’s practical forms of resistance to racial and gender oppression, political theories and forms of resistance to colonialist oppression differ too; and that the sometimes divisive “differences” in practice and in theory are not at all dissimilar. Opposition to British, patriarchal and racist structures can be expressed in a number of ways and by means that mutually articulate each other.

In this novel, Edgell shows resistance efforts against colonial, gender and racial oppression in Belize. Her depiction of these, however, suggest that any alliances between these movements have “no prior necessity” (Grosz, Space 54); and that alliance is needed because forms of oppression are connected, but such alliances have to be sought, thought

through, pursued—they don't just happen. Furthermore, one resistance ideology does not necessarily include or address other oppressive forces. Specifically, Beka's struggles against racism are not necessarily politically allied with Toychie's "feminist" struggles; and the nationalist struggle will not necessarily overcome forms of racist and sexist domination.

In Beka Lamb, both Beka and Toychie supersede the limitations imposed on them by racial and sexual prejudice in Belizean society. By locating Toychie's resistance in her body, Edgell subverts its significance so that her character's physical condition becomes precisely that which enables her to transcend the harsh, immutable reality she confronts. In Beka's situation as well, Edgell maintains the relevance of her heroine's materiality as Beka moves from a position of confusion, fear and vulnerability to one of increased stability and confidence. The human costs in these processes, however, remain problematic as Belize's cultural constructions of gender and race emerge from the violating principles of colonization, and the power of these presumptions are ultimately expatiated in the bodies and minds of the colonized.

CHAPTER FOUR

In Times Like These: Vigilance

In Times Like These is as much a novel about one woman's personal transformation as it is a critique of Belize's nationalist politics. Edgell sets her story in 1981, a pivotal time in the country's struggle for independence, depicting Belize as a house divided against itself—a nation held back by destructive political and gender ideologies that fail to recognize the needs of its populace. Through her focal character, Pavana, Edgell addresses issues that point to corruption at the heart of what was once an idealistic vision of social and political sovereignty. She also weaves a series of continual flashbacks throughout the novel to flesh out her heroine's specific history, thereby showing not only how a subject's past informs and intervenes in her present, but also how distinctions between the past and the present can be used to measure progress.

A flashback scene opens the book: Pavana on an operating table in London, 1968—she's about to have abortion but panics at the last minute, unable to go through with it. Pavana is an upper middle-class Belizean who has gone abroad to study, falls in love, finds herself pregnant, doesn't have the abortion she says she will, and hides this fact from the twins' father, Alex. He's a wealthy Belizean, also at school in London—a member of Belize's elite with ambitious political aspirations that inspire Pavana to expand her social consciousness. Marrying her in response to this unwanted pregnancy, however, is not on his agenda; he believes himself more sophisticated than that. Twelve years after their affair, having achieved moderate success working in international development and foreign aid, Pavana returns to Belize with their twins and (re)discovers

both Alex and her country as she eases into her new position as Director of a new Women's Unit in the Ministry of Community Development.

In Space, Time, and Perversion, Grosz argues that if “bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their *matter and form* be rethought, but so too must their environment and *spatio-temporal* location” (84). In leaving Belize to study in London, Pavana removes herself from the physical realities that have historically posed a threat to the quality of Belizean women's lives. In the environment in which she grew up, the social thinking of gender alienated and devalued women, in that the ideological significance of women's “sexed” position implied not only vulnerability but also moral and intellectual inferiority. Institutional neglect, widespread gender discrimination, and epistemic violence against women—in the form of both emotional and physical abuse—all contributed to creating, in Belize, a material reality that validated and sustained a negative view of the female body and women's sexuality, one that sees it both as a trap, and as dangerous and disruptive. Prevailing masculine conceptualizations of women denied, in particular, the maternal its rightful status by making women's reproductivity a prime source of their vulnerability, both morally and economically. Men held no responsibility for illegitimate children. In cases of unwanted pregnancies, women were to blame while their male partners remained beyond reproach—that is, only women's intentions and character would be called into question under such circumstances. Edgell offers a telling example of this practice and its devastating effect on one woman in Pavana's childhood memory of Junie Silver, an impoverished young mother who interrupts the grand wedding ceremony of the well-respected man who fathered her child: “...holding aloft an infant who was howling...taking her revenge...in rage, defiance and fright...she shouted above

the tolling bells, 'Here is your baby, Edward Kelly. God will never give you another!'...[then] "the very instant Mr Edward Kelly's eyes met hers, [she] stabbed her baby through the throat with a pair of scissors" (TLT 11-12). Following the incident, a neighbour, Mrs. Erline, lectures the distraught Pavana, immediately giving the benefit of the doubt to Edward Kelly—"...[t]he baby may not be [his] at all, now that I think about it...although I wouldn't be surprised if [he] had been kind to her. Many people mistake kindness for love..." (TLT 13). Not even for a moment, does she consider the powerlessness that Junie Silver must have felt to have been driven to such an act.

Frustrated, often desperate, in a system that fails either to recognize women's contributions or to address their specific needs, women in Edgell's Belize are left "with seemingly inoperable roots of anger, rejection and isolation" for which no rational means of expression, or recourse, exist (TLT 3). The "horror, cruelty and sadness" Pavana remembers of women's attempts to assert themselves in a socio-political structure that ignores them captures their treatment by an oppressive masculinist regime—one that not only shows no interest in what its female constituency wants but also aims to destroy any idea or example of woman, save that which it approves of and enforces (TLT 14). And what Pavana discovers upon returning to Belize is that "the lives of women have improved very little in spite of all the sweat and money they've put into the total independence effort" (TLT 65). In her new capacity as Director of the Women's Unit, Pavana conducts workshops and broadcasts a Weekly Forum on Radio Belize to discuss women's contributions to the nation's development. One such broadcast airs an interview with a mother of ten:

My mouth is a little fast. So my husband has to punish me sometimes, but I deserve it. He punishes me because he loves me. He's not like some who beat their wives for little or nothing, especially when they are drunk. My husband says I talk too much. He likes a quiet woman. I keep trying to improve my ways.... We have five daughters and five sons. God sent all our daughters first, which made my husband very unhappy with me. He and I, well we'd both hoped for a boy or two first. Everybody wants that, don't they? (TLT 209-10)

Evidently, the influence of the prevailing gender ideology in Belize has made this woman blind to the injustices enacted against her; a lack of knowledge about her body also factors into this process, in that she accepts the blame for producing female children. In addition, her internalization of male attitudes actually makes her complicit in her own oppression. She assumes without question that girls, and by extension women, are of secondary value to society, submits to her husband's "authority" on how she should behave, and blames herself for the violence against her—violence that this passage indicates is both widespread and accepted in her community of women, virtually a cultural expectation. Edgell also offers another example that attests to this kind of cultural climate in Belize in the character Lynette. Upon meeting Pavana for the first time and discovering that she is a single mother too, Lynette comments with startling flippancy—"[t]hat makes two of us...although I'll bet you weren't raped" (TLT 247-48)

The seeming indifference with which she views such a tragic violation of her person indicates a tacit resignation to violence against women in Belize, particularly that which a servant, like herself, might have expected from her employer. Moreover, one woman's

conclusion that Lynette must have “entice[d] the old man” further confirms the idea that, in this setting, women alone are to blame for their problems (TLT 248).

If, as Grosz posits, “the explorations of conceptions of space and time [are] necessary correlates of the exploration of corporeality,” then Pavana’s move to London—that is, the change in her environment—might also be expected to alter her perception of her body. London gives Pavana choices and controls that women in Belize don’t have. She goes to university there and has career options and access to abortion—advantages that stimulate her desire to be a conscious agent of change. Pavana wants to believe that she’s different from Belizean women. The novel, however, shows that both her very sense of self—and her unconscious—have been marked and shaped by the political and ethical realities of Belize’s patriarchal, capitalist system. Her susceptibility to the same detrimental attitudes towards sex and the female body, with which Belizean women are forced to contend, persists, despite her movement in space. The distance between London and Belize does not free her from experiencing her body in terms of the sexual politics rooted in Belize’s colonial past and nationalist present—that is, her specific history insinuates itself into her alternative notions of a new female identity, especially in terms of her sexual self-image. In London, Pavana doesn’t display, as she thinks she does, “...the ease with which it is sometimes possible to depart from one’s values” (TLT 1). Instead, she appears to be still very much “cut from the same cloth” as her less fortunate counterparts at home. Although her spatial shift empowers her, in effect, to oppose that which has conditioned her, the forces made visible in the text illustrate that Pavana maintains suspect tendencies—tendencies that her unwanted pregnancy, in particular, induces her to display.

Compared to Edgell's other heroines, Pavana is extremely fortunate. She believes that "a woman should have the right to decide whether or not to have a child" and is positioned to exercise her right to this choice (TLT 147)—a luxury she wouldn't have were she in Belize and not London. Yet how she deals with the consequences of her decision to have the children that neither she nor Alex planned reveals that underlying her liberal, pro-choice stance and feminist activism, are values invested with unexamined gender biases that contribute to her taking a decidedly masculinist view of certain women's issues. Specifically, her beliefs and behaviours betray negative, male conceptualizations of women's sexuality and the female (reproductive) body—particularly insofar as these define social and parental responsibilities.

Pavana unwittingly perpetuates a tenet of Belizean culture that places women at a distinct disadvantage, one that Edgell fully explores in both Beka Lamb and The Festival of San Joaquin—that is, that women are, ultimately, responsible for inappropriate male behaviour. First, Pavana blames only herself for her unwanted pregnancy and assumes full responsibility for raising the children. Second, she blames Alex's abandoning her on another woman. And third, she hides her pregnancy; thus, she grants Alex a clear conscience—denigrating her maternal body with this tacit acknowledgment of its unacceptability—and, therefore, carries the burden of shame for their illegitimate sexual activities alone, as if it were a part of her womanly function. Pavana has internalized masculinist values into her psychic structures. She remains, however, unaware of the male biases activated by what she calls her false pride and fails to recognize that the assumptions that motivate much of her reasoning have been "sexualized." In addressing this aspect of the novel, an examination of "the effect of ideological interpellation on the

unconscious” becomes possible (Smith xxx)—exploring the notion that “some force outside of consciousness sets consciousness in motion, activates it, and thereby shapes its inner character” (Mowitt xix). This dynamic in the text can be accessed most directly by focussing on the shift between what Edgell’s most forward-thinking and autonomous female protagonist believes, and the conflicting identifications she has formed, those which constitute the bases of her socio-political functioning.

Pavana wants Alex to marry her when she discovers that she is pregnant with their child. He told her they would get married one day, but when she challenges him with this reminder, it becomes clear that he considers “her pregnancy a deliberate and cunning manoeuvre” (TLT 107), implying that she is “scheming and spiteful” (TLT 109). The perceptions with which Toycie’s unintended pregnancy is greeted in Beka Lamb do not fail to resonate here, though Pavana’s negotiating position appears far more secure than Toycie’s ever stood a chance of being. Their points of weakness, nevertheless, converge on the same issue: having had premarital sex, neither woman can possibly “measure up to the standards [a Belizean man] require[s] in a wife” (TLT 109). Alex makes Pavana two offers. He offers to pay for an abortion or to set her up in a small house outside of Belize City where she and their child would comprise his second household. She chooses the abortion. He’s against it. He tries to persuade her to accept the latter “practical arrangement” (TLT 149), arguing that “[m]en with second homes are commonplace in Belize...Look at all the women we know who thrive in that system,” but Pavana stands her ground (TLT 110-11). Her vision of herself, however, goes well beyond being a secondary appendage to a successful politician; she also admits, frankly, that she’s “[t]oo proud...to prove that [she’s] cut from the same cloth as most of the unmarried women at

home” (TLT 111). Alex regrets her decision and wishes that they could “reach some kind of compromise” (TLT 112), but when Pavana cannot go through with the abortion, she doesn’t tell him. She resists negotiating an alternative arrangement with him, one that might be acceptable to them both. She calls what motivates her behaviour “pride,” but elements of both guilt and shame clearly factor into her final decision as she bases it on the idea that she “felt she now deserved, perhaps always had done, whatever fate chose to mete out to her. She’d have to take it on the chin [alone] and survive somehow” (TLT 153). Although Pavana’s belief “that a woman should be prepared to face the consequences of [her] choice” may be admirable in its intent (TLT 147), that her application of it necessarily precludes calling Alex on his paternal obligation suggests that questionable gender role expectations underlie her conviction .

Pavana apparently assumes that she is, ultimately, responsible for the unwanted pregnancy. By choosing to take full responsibility for the consequences of her and Alex’s sexually irresponsible behaviour, she, in effect, absolves him of his responsibility as easily as he, initially, “felt absolved from any responsibility other than the two offers he made her” (TLT 107). The fact remains, though, that he admits to her that he, too, should have “been more careful to avoid” this accidental pregnancy (TLT 111). Not only does Alex acknowledge his culpability in the matter, he also maintains his desire to find a suitable compromise, even after she rejects his offer of setting her up as his mistress in favour of an abortion. Pavana states that she “would never have been able to request nor accept money from him for [the children’s] support. False pride or not, it had been a *value*, without which she would have felt a continuing loss of self-respect, given the educational advantages in life she had had. Alex had not, after all, forced her to do

anything she had not wanted to do. She had given freely of herself, and the children were the result of that decision, her choice..." (emphasis added, TLT 147). Her reasoning raises the following questions: Does her *value* serve her advantage? If not, what is the ethical imperative underwriting this "value"? And why does the issue of force versus consent factor into her criteria for examining the issue of paternal debt? That Pavana would feel degraded to ask Alex, at the very least, to help financially support their children indicates that she holds a prejudiced view of male responsibility for unwanted offspring. More precisely, she doesn't seem to feel that Alex has any real obligation to the children he has fathered. Her response, thus, situates both her and Alex in the "ideologically determined social spaces" that Belizean culture has maintained historically for men and women (Smith 12)—spaces that en-gender patriarchal fictions of male/female parental identities which assume that women are solely responsible for the biological production of children.

In voluntarily accepting that she, in effect, has no right to claim financial support from Alex, Pavana assumes the role of the unprepared single woman who, upon finding herself pregnant, must fend for herself and her unwanted children, alone, as a matter of course. Thus, she replicates a patriarchal model of maternal debt that renders many pregnant, unwed women in Belize powerless. Unlike the women in Belize, though, she has options that she can explore to avoid taking on this role—including talking to Alex—but she relinquishes them. Her pride is the issue. She sees her choices as a method "of self-protection, of survival, of trying to continue becoming the person she wanted to be" (TLT 148). She wants control of her life—to "break free of certain cultural patterns" (TLT 149). It seems contradictory, then, that the principles on which she bases her

actions towards these goals uphold the selfsame masculinist values that traditionally subordinate women by binding them, alone, to the task of nurturing. In fact, the justification Pavana provides for her decisions supports conceptual biases that define women primarily by their sexuality, the physical manifestations of which engender meanings that produce double standards for men and women in Belizean culture—standards by which young women “assume both the moral and economic responsibilities of children born outside of marriage” (McClaurin 106).

In Pavana’s belief that Alex’s responsibility falls short of her own because *she’s* carrying their children, her susceptibility to “normative” patriarchal thinking that privileges men at women’s expense becomes evident. Pavana, however, avoids acknowledging the degree of “interaction between ideological practices and [her] subjective existence” (Smith xxx). Consciously, she doesn’t own the male values that guide her reasoning. She claims that her educational advantages stimulate her pride, which she can, apparently, only recover by releasing Alex from paternal obligation. Her logic implies that the newly equipped, educated young woman has no valid reason *not to* take full responsibility for illegitimate children. But there is a false idea of modernity behind Pavana’s superficially progressive ideals of a new feminine identity and women’s increased autonomy here, one that is inspired by gendered strategies in Belize’s colonialist and nationalist discourses that continue to relegate women to positions of economic disadvantage and moral inferiority. Pavana believes that knowledge has given her the power to act independently and, in one sense, of course, this is true. But her values are derived from biases in hegemonic practices that reinforce women’s secondary status in Belize—and her resulting behaviour attests, to some extent, to their validity. In

this, a conflict emerges inherent in her attitudes that at once show both her desire to change existing social relations, and her replication and, thus, reinforcement of them. And in her violent reaction to Helga, the woman Alex chooses to marry, Edgell presents another such case in point.

When Alex fails to pick Pavana up after her appointment at the clinic, as promised, she returns to her apartment, bitter, blaming herself for his rejection of her—“What needs [of his] hadn’t she filled?” (TLT 151). He doesn’t call, so, frustrated, she goes to his apartment, looking for him, but he’s not at home. She then checks downstairs at her rival’s place. Helga doesn’t know about the intimate relationship Pavana and Alex have shared or about Pavana’s pregnancy. She invites Pavana in to wait. Inside, Pavana sees Alex’s possessions; it appears he has moved in. Jealousy and rage fill her, but she tells herself “[be] angry with yourself, with Alex, but not with Helga” (TLT 152). Then she notices a diamond ring on Helga’s left hand that Helga confirms, proudly, Alex gave to her. At this point, a “madness” overcomes Pavana that, even years later, she still fails to comprehend. Helga had been showing her a book from which Alex was teaching her English pronunciation—“Pavana wrenched the book in half, tearing the pages to shreds and, standing up, deliberately flung the pieces all over the carpeted floor...she saw Helga’s face flame with horror and distress, her face crumple and the tears flowing down her cheeks as she bent to pick up the scattered fragments of her precious *Little Prince*. Pavana grabbed the lapel of her robe so hard that it tore open, tugging hard at the pale blue nightgown until it ripped open from shoulder to waist. As Helga raised her arms in self-defense, Pavana grasped her cruelly by the hair and gave her a stinging slap across

the face. She didn't even notice the door opening until she heard Alex's shout" (TLT 153).

As Edgell shows readers, unsparingly, in Beka Lamb and The Festival of San Joaquin, women in Belize are often blamed—or blame themselves—for their men's behaviour, and Pavana, like Edgell's other heroines, has been exposed to such social processes growing up. Consciously, Pavana knows that she shouldn't be angry with Alex's fiancée—Helga is not to blame for his betrayal. Nevertheless, the legacy of the psychical structures with which she has been raised override her rational thinking. The articulation of Pavana's "unconsciousness and its formations" (Smith 19) in her assault on Helga not only asserts the power of specific masculinist ideological premises in the construction of her subjectivity, but also evidences the violence against women in Belize's socio-political practices that targets women as guilty so as to grant men impunity. Tellingly, when Alex breaks in, stops the fight and throws Pavana out of the apartment, she doesn't utter one word of reproach to him. Instead, she merely skulks away, ashamed. As such, an undeserving Helga pays the price for his deception. And the fact that Edgell has her do so at Pavana's hands only testifies to the extent to which "the relation between subjectivity and the social order" damages women both physically and psychologically (Smith 19), particularly insofar as the "mediating function of the unconscious" dictates her protagonist's behaviour in this scene (Smith xxxi).

Edgell reveals much of the mechanisms behind the social processes that exonerate men from blame for their misconduct with women in this "moment" and in the events that, subsequently, unfold. Importantly, Pavana unleashes her anger, unjustifiably, on Helga first. Second, she turns it on herself in that it finds another outlet in her self-

condemnation: after the incident, she recognizes only the reprehensibility of her conduct and, thus, resolves to handle the pregnancy and its consequences alone. She believes this is “the least [she] could do to make up for what [she’d] done” (TLT 155)—a form of self-inflicted punishment. Appalled by her own behaviour and consumed with shame, Pavana’s focus becomes what she owes Helga. And the question of what Alex owes her disappears in the process, a significant turn of events, but not a surprising one. Even though now, more than ever, Alex owes her, at the very least, an explanation, she dismisses the issue of his debt resolutely. The irony of this move on her part is that the discovery that incensed her in the first place was that *he* had, obviously, intentionally mislead her with false professions of love and a disingenuous promise of marriage. Her anger at him becomes so twisted, so misdirected in its expression, though, that it actually results in her decision to free him, entirely, of all obligation towards both her and their children. Alex, therefore, the individual most deserving of censure in this triangle, receives none. Preoccupied with her own guilt, Pavana loses sight of his culpability altogether.

The psycho-social device that displaces Alex’s blameworthiness onto Pavana—and, less permanently, onto Helga—relies on expounding female weaknesses and ascertaining guilt therein; and Pavana’s actions speak to it routinely and unprogressively, typifying the masculinist approaches that ensure the preservation of male superiority exposed in Edgell’s novels. In effect, Pavana aids Alex in evading both his moral and economic responsibilities to her and his children. He maintains an untouchable, elevated status of sorts in that her interactions with him—or lack thereof—imply that he is beyond reproach. Her assault on Helga and the resulting fixity with which she resolves that she

now deserves whatever struggles life as a single mother brings reflect an itinerary in social laws designed to protect men from accountability at women's expense: when Alex's dishonesty comes to light, it is Helga and Pavana who suffer materially—Helga in terms of bodily harm, and Pavana in that she resigns herself to the economic hardship of raising two children without any male support.

Pavana's willful attempt to reason her way out of directing her hostility at Helga, nevertheless, indicates a glimmer of awareness that she is developing, which is at odds with her ideological influences. The origins of this conflict—one that exists “not between [her] experience and ideology, but *within* [her] ideological experience” (Mowitt xv)—remains, however, a mystery to her: “Afterwards, for many years, she had tried and failed to understand—and still couldn't understand—what madness took possession of her in that moment”(TLT 153). Unable to see the connection between her attacking Helga and the ideological underpinnings that compelled her to do it, Pavana cannot explain her behaviour. Specifically, it appears to contradict with what she believes she thinks. Were Pavana able to trace her unconscious motives back to the underlying beliefs that incited her to blame Helga for Alex's misdeeds—in spite of the rational voice inside her head warranting the unfairness of such a conclusion—she might have acquired insight into the meaning of her actions in Helga's flat. The experience, then, despite its internal contradictions, might have rendered itself “readable” to her. She might have discovered that a negative view of women at the core of her unconscious drives destabilized the positive image of “woman,” of herself, that she was working on cultivating.

Though Edgell hints that Pavana may have the potential for increased self-awareness, at this point in the novel Pavana's false pride obstructs her in achieving it with

any level of clarity. In fact, it manipulates her into performing further actions that, instead of reflecting progressive attitudes towards women's bodies and their ability to act in their own best-interests, and autonomously—as she intends them to—only subvert her power in terms of these criteria. Despite what Pavana would like to believe, the oppressive ideological influences of a patriarchal regime remain very much in play in her further interactions with Alex; that is, she continues to cater to his privilege and rely on his authority to define the appropriate standards for her behaviour.

Pavana goes to see Alex and Helga off on their honeymoon cruise—to wish them well, casually, as if nothing untoward had ever happened between them. While saying goodbye, she conceals the fact that she is still pregnant under the bulk of a winter coat. In retrospect, she speculates that her motivation for going was that “she wanted [Alex] to believe that she was just fine”—thus, satisfying her pride by making a final, graceful exit(TLT 115). She also reasons that she hid her pregnancy to compensate Helga after the shameful way she treated her. In Pavana's ruminations, however, the text indicates that her actual motives were quite different from those she articulates. It suggests that she goes because she wants to regain Alex's approbation by proving to him that she has undergone a transformation. To this end, she puts on a “virtuoso performance to demonstrate how broadminded she had become...[to convince him] that, in spite of their former intimacy, she had grown so sophisticated, so civilized that she could laugh, joke and wish them well”(TLT 115). A friend calls it “masochistic”(TLT 114). Evidence also points to her hiding her pregnancy because she feels ashamed of what she believes it signifies—that is, that her sexual naivete led to her victimization and that, as such, she remains as unprogressive as young unmarried pregnant women at home, despite the

material advantages she has had. In addition, exposing her condition might cause trouble for Alex, too, and she needs his approval to regain her self-esteem.

Pavana's actions, as a result, neither make her feel proud nor provide Helga with appropriate recompense. After the good byes, she admits that if the friends that had joined her "were to be believed, she had succeeded; her pride had been amply served, *for all the good it had done her*" (emphasis added, TLT 115). In this slight admission, Edgell grants Pavana an inkling of the fact that her motivations may not be properly aligned with her needs—a possibility that Pavana seems more open to considering later in the novel. After all, there is something peculiar, if not perverse, in her pride functioning to relieve Alex of suffering any guilt for his hurtful actions—and Edgell subtly offers that, on some level, Pavana senses this. Pavana's act alleviates Alex's anxiety but does little to improve either her spirits or circumstances. It merely illustrates that she has fallen prey to yet another theoretical contrivance that serves male advantage, under the guise of modernity. And keeping Alex's paternity a secret from Helga functions to much the same purpose, in that the practice of keeping women ignorant has always been a means of securing male privilege. Pavana's hiding her pregnancy from Helga actually protects Alex's interests, not Helga's: it prevents him from having to face any consequences for his reckless infidelity, and her from making a well-informed decision about the man she has agreed to marry.

Pavana's posturing in seeing Alex off suggests that she needs his male approval to feel validated—to confirm that she has made progress. And in concealing her pregnancy to get it, she actually disavows her maternal body, proving that, though her pride may be false, the shame she is "carrying" is quite real. But if Pavana's self-image depends on

Alex's approbation—his positive vision of her—then she measures herself in terms of *his* ideals, which not only reinforces his authority but invests her perceived self-worth with the masculinist biases that he owns and from which he benefits. This doesn't qualify as progress in terms of her desire to illustrate an enlightened woman's advancement or a liberated approach towards defining herself as autonomous, but her pride renders her unable to reflect on either her motives or her behaviour with enough honesty to bring the unexamined gender biases in her cultural coding into crisis. As such, the text illustrates that, though Pavana may interpret the pride that motivates her as self-interested, the process by which she defines her "self interests...cannot be considered [a] wholly conscious activity...[as her self interests are] continually crossed by unconscious components...desires, memory, repressions, anxieties" (Smith 157).

Pavana's education and life abroad grant her, in effect, both financial independence and reproductive control of her body: she need neither negotiate nor accept an unfulfilling compromise with Alex, as a result of her pregnancy, because she doesn't have to fear either becoming economically dependent on him or living in poverty—as her only alternatives—should she choose motherhood. Moreover, whether or not she gives birth to his child is entirely her choice. In this, Pavana has overcome "the most common means of exercising gender power" used to control and subordinate women in Belize (Hendersen 284). She has made remarkable progress towards a new autonomy. Still, Pavana cannot conceive of her unwed, pregnant body or of premarital sex apart from the ideological significance that these things hold in the Belizean social consciousness—that is, she hasn't integrated, or fully appreciated, the implications of her new location and its corresponding material options. Apparently, she hasn't gained anything of value

psychologically, emotionally and, to some extent, intellectually, from occupying a new physical space.

In hiding her pregnancy, Pavana reveals that a “significant aspect of [her] personhood is a sexual identity shaped by [the same] secrecy, anxiety, distrust and ambivalence” that McClaurin claims confronts women in Belize (297), and which Edgell exposes most prominently in the shame and fear with which her female characters often view their bodies as a consequence of sexual activity. Though Pavana tries to feign otherwise, her view of female sexuality has progressed little beyond the narrow confines of the classic madonna/whore dichotomy. Driven by the religious ideology that pervades both Beka Lamb and The Festival of San Joaquin, she assesses her worth, as well as her intellectual and personal power, negatively, on the basis of her sexual conduct. Pavana concludes, ruefully, that she was Alex’s whore—“and a cheap one at that”—upon realizing “that Helga had kept herself inviolate, and [because of this] he continued to treat her like a madonna” (TLT 125). Furthermore, because she slept with Alex to hold his interest—though “she didn’t like doing these things, being that way” (TLT 124)—Pavana sees herself as not only cheap but also ignorant, unlike Helga, who she identifies as “so smart” (TLT 112), and the Virgin Mary, as “so intelligent” (TLT 2). Pavana believes that these two women can “negotiate [with men] from a position of strength,” whereas her sexual liason with Alex has stripped her of her bargaining power (TLT 112). As a result, she sees her maternal body as evidence of both a lack of moral and intellectual character, and her powerlessness.

Pavana’s reading of her body harbours presumptions rooted in its “socially identifiable meanings and functions within [Belize’s] social system” (Grosz, Space 35).

She hasn't reconceptualized her physicality to account for the context of her new surroundings in London, a material reality in which her self-sufficiency and access to resources can, effectively, alter the power dynamics in male/female sexual relations. Her psychical structures inhibit her from engaging with meanings as they exist in her current environment and, therefore, from realizing the possible psychological, emotional and intellectual benefits. As a woman who has made autonomous choices, why should she continue to imagine that her pregnant, unwed form taints her as a whore? The contradictions between the actual values by which Pavana judges herself and the casualness towards sex that she projects as a mark of her newly developed sophistication reflect a "shifting intersection of multiple interpellations" resulting from her spatial repositioning (Mowitt xiv). The way in which her body has been textualized in Belize conflicts with her ideas about the "self that she [is] trying to become" in England (TLT 155).

Pavana comes to realize that she is not different from other Belizean women, as she had "wanted to be" (TLT 149). Years later, when she returns to Belize, she encounters women who recognize parts of themselves in her—Lynette is one of them. In addition, her return evokes the childhood memory of Junie Silver, by which the text illustrates Pavana's connection to the female identity against which she has defined herself. Lynette was raped by Alex's father, in whose employ she remained as a servant for years afterwards, raising Stoner, the child resulting from the assault. She shows Pavana the well-stocked shelves in her small shop, attesting, bitterly, that she "made old man Abrams pay through his big, lump nose, believe me" (TLT 248). Her attitude implies that she was entitled to some form of compensation because she had been forced into

having sex. It also subtly informs Pavana's rationale in her assessment of her situation with Alex in London. Specifically, it may explain why one of the reasons she decided, finally, that she could not justify asking him to help financially support their unwanted children was *because* their sex was consensual. Lynette initially treats Pavana with disdain because of their obvious class differences. She admits to her, "...you look so high-minded, speak so nice, big school teacher and all...that for no reason I get jealous. I think maybe you think you better than me" (TLT 249). Lynette softens, however, in identifying with Pavana upon discovering that she, too, is a single mother and that, furthermore, the father of her illegitimate children is old Abram's son, Alex. She asserts their solidarity, then, claiming "[w]e're the same kind, you and me...we're in this together...we cut out of the same cloth," illustrating that this specific, shared feature of their femininity binds them together (TLT 248-49).

If single motherhood constitutes part of Pavana's Belizeanness, with which her countrywomen can identify, in Pavana's imagination it also represents a woman's potential deterioration. Having grown up in an environment in which women's lives can take tragic turns as a result of an unwanted pregnancy, Pavana fears the manifestation of the vestiges of this feminine heritage in her own mental instability when, frustrated and desperate, she loses control of her senses, momentarily, and physically attacks an innocent Helga. Far from affirming the creative vision she has of herself, her actions in this regard confirm her likeness to her counterparts at home, particularly those single women who go mad as a result of the powerlessness they feel after being abandoned by their babies' fathers. As a child, Pavana witnessed Junie Silver stab her baby to death—the woman goes insane and eventually kills herself by drinking rat poison in an asylum.

Pavana “learned” this experience of womanhood early. Not surprisingly, then, having been caught in the same kind of “trouble” that brought on Junie’s demise, Pavana is seriously unnerved by the “madness that took possession of her” in Helga’s flat (TLT 153). In fact, she claims it “change[s] [her] completely” (TLT 155). The text suggests that the incident impressed upon Pavana a need of which she was previously unaware—that is, the need for vigilance. After the event, she grows cautious because she “never wanted to lose possession of the self [she] was trying to become, ever again” (TLT 155). Upset by her own irrational, inexplicable behaviour, she develops a strong desire for conscious self-control. She deems it necessary if she is to successfully differentiate herself from the negative images of Belizean women she has formed through her vicarious childhood experiences of the single mother.

Back in Belize Pavana discovers that “after years of trial and error...most of the ‘demons’ labelled nurture, values and attitudes, were within herself, and refused to be banished by one giant blow. They reared up at unexpected moments, demanding exhausting mental encounters which she usually lost”(TLT 293). Consequently, she interprets her relationship to Belize’s cultural values and beliefs from a position of increased self-awareness, in that she realizes that constant vigilance is required. Inspired by misconceptions of spatio-temporal distance, she had developed a false sense of confidence in London, blithely assuming that a different location, over time, would free her subjectivity from the ideological influences of her past. Back home, she recognizes that, although space and time away from Belize have equipped her to oppose the oppressive structures of the nation’s patriarchal regime, these elements, in themselves, do

not assure her victory in her battle for self-control—part of her larger quest for self-determination.

Pavana returns to Belize, with her children, at a time when political unrest is rampant throughout the country. Belizean-Guatemalan tensions are dividing nationalists' loyalties, giving rise to protest marches, workers' strikes and riots in the streets. In her new capacity as Director of a newly established Women's Unit in Belize's Ministry of Community Development—a financially independent, UN-funded initiative in response to the Decade for Women—Pavana's experiences with politicians verify Spivak's claim that there is a historical "tendency of ignoring women in revolutionary protocol" (Spivak, *PC Critic* 99). She meets with a lot of resistance in her struggles to improve conditions for women because she's fighting for a cause that the men in power deem both unnecessary and irrelevant to the nation's development. As such, Pavana receives little bureaucratic support. The Minister's interpretation of her unit's mandate focusses on training "women to be better wives and mothers, [as] an extension of the [existing] Home Economics Unit" (TLT 134). He can't see what more Belizean women could want and becomes annoyed at talk of "better health services, training, jobs, shelter, food, programmes to enhance women's self-esteem, and a greater awareness of their own potential" (TLT 133). He identifies these things with "women's liberation," something that women in Belize don't need because, in his opinion, they "are free to rise as high as they please, if they wish to do so [which he doesn't] believe they do" (TLT 133). Furthermore, Pavana's non-partisan approach hinders her as the current government's real interests lie in "the mobilization of women on [their] behalf," not in addressing Belizean women's concerns (TLT 86).

The year is 1981. The text accounts that Belize has been self-governed for twenty-five years. The country is on the brink of independence. Before Britain relinquishes control of the colony, however, a longstanding border dispute between the British and Guatemalan governments must be resolved—a term agreed upon by the British and Belizean governments as a prerequisite of independence. Towards settling Guatemala’s claim that it inherited rights to Belize’s territory from Spain, the British and Guatemalan governments have recently signed a document in England called the Heads of Agreement—an agenda outlining the subjects for future discussions between Britain, Guatemala and Belize that the Belizean cabinet is set to vote on signing. Rumours about government corruption—that politicians are selling out the nation’s sovereignty to Guatemala—are inciting fear, anger and confusion among the population. Allegations suggest that Guatemala would fail to recognize Belize as an independent state if the agreement were signed; and without British troops stationed along the border, Belize would be left vulnerable to a Guatemalan invasion. Public opposition is demanding that a referendum be held, but the ruling party, of which Alex is a leading member, won’t risk a “No” vote as this would “force the government to resign and call an election” (TLT 145). He and his colleagues are anxious—they want to be the ones to lead Belize into independence.

Pavana first sees Alex again when he’s participating in a pro-government march to rally support for the Heads of Agreement. Alex’s visibility is meant to reassure Belizean citizens that his party can guide the country safely and securely into independence; and that the furor being generated by dissidents derives from unsubstantiated fears that Belize cannot govern itself and, therefore, must continue to rely on Britain. Pavana also meets

Alex's estranged half-brother, Stoner Bennett, again. He's Alex's father's illegitimate, unacknowledged, son—the bastard child that resulted from old man Abram's rape of Lynette. He went to school with Pavana and Alex in London and has always had political leanings himself. He and Alex once shared a commitment to providing an alternative to Belize's two dominant parties, whose "seasoned politicians...had grown cynical, corrupt" (TLT 144). As young leaders, their ideologies of black power and socialism had "inject[ed] a new spirit into the country, a new awareness of political alternatives," but the establishment condemned Stoner's "faction as racist [and Alex's] as communist" (TLT 141)—they posed a serious "threat to the status quo" (TLT 144). Pavana had once hoped that their two groups could "combine forces, to overcome personal ambition and ideology, racial, class and economic barriers" (TLT 143). Upon returning to Belize, though, she finds Alex "helping to consolidate a power that [was] becoming absolute" (TLT 142), and Stoner a leading figure in opposition to him and a radical in the fight against the Heads of Agreement.

Ironically, twelve years after the events in London, the issue of Alex's paternity again poses a threat to Pavana. Having known of her predicament in London, Stoner draws the likely conclusion that Alex is the father of her children and uses this information to further his cause. His organization kidnaps the twins and holds them for political ransom, demanding that Alex resign. Thus, Pavana becomes a pawn in their political manoeuvres. Importantly, the circumstances again render her vulnerable in relation to Alex—that is, once more she needs his "guidance and protection" (TLT 122), in this case, his political clout to help her get her children back safely. Time and space have not guaranteed her a "triumphant return" (TLT 293). Nevertheless, the text

provides evidence of significant changes in Pavana's thinking, so history does not repeat itself.

Pavana goes to a rally at which Alex is scheduled to speak as she hasn't succeeded in reaching him by a number of other means. She's feeling desperate about her kids. She makes a placard with the message, "URGENT. MUST SEE YOU. LISA, ERIC IN DANGER. PLEASE HELP," which she holds up in front of him when he comes on stage (TLT 266). At this point in the text, she has told him that the children are his—Stoner's threat to create a scandal with his knowledge of Alex's paternity made it impossible for her not to—and Alex has greeted the news rather well, being a widow and regretting not having had any children with Helga. Pavana knows that Alex reads her message before he begins his speech. After an amazing performance, however, he's "hoisted on to the shoulders of a group of men, once more their hero, and carried through the cheering crowd to his vehicle...He never looked back" (TLT 270). The scene resonates with another quite like it in London, one in which Pavana—who is desperately clinging "to the thin hope that Alex still cared enough about her to reverse his decision [not to marry her]" (TLT 106)—is forced to go and hear him speak at the West Indian Student's Union because he's too busy to meet with her. As she listens to him talk, she's impressed by his "enthusiasm, such a sense of mission... he had been [a stimulating] mentor" (TLT 106). Alex walked away without looking back on that occasion, too, after refusing, once more, to marry her; "and she didn't follow him, although she wanted to..." (TLT 112), but she could have wept for "the loss of her faith and trust in him" (TLT 112). In Belize, again, Alex leaves Pavana when she really needs him. This time, however, she feels no personal loss and, "[d]etermined not to let him get away," follows him home.

Like his party's supporters, she's already disenchanted. She mourns now not for herself but for her country, "knowing that his speech had been less than honest...[wondering] what had Alex become in [the people's] eyes...and she utter[s] a brief moan, a small elegy for something iridescent which had been lost a long, long time ago" (TLT 271).

At Alex's house, Pavana finally gets the marriage proposal she had wished for twelve years before, in London. It comes, however, at a time when she recognizes that her "values have changed" (TLT 283) and that she neither wants nor needs even the best that he can offer her (TLT 284). It comes, also, on the heels of his sexually assaulting her, an assault that Pavana manages to stop by whispering "calmly, deliberately into his ear, 'Are you going to rape me, Alexander Joseph Abrams, like your father raped Stoner Bennett's mother all those years ago?'" (TLT 281). Though Pavana's strength may be no match for Alex's physically, she uses what she knows to stop him as effectively "as if his breath had been punched out of him"(TLT 281). As such, her knowledge supersedes her physical vulnerability. And *she* leaves *him* "in a state of shock..." (TLT 282)—he has learned not only the disgusting truth about his father, but also that Stoner, a man he has treated with disdain, is his half-brother (TLT 185).

Stoner and Alex grew up together as boys, the servant's child and the master's son—"Alex was always [Stoner's] role model" (TLT 184). He encouraged Stoner to join him in London, so Stoner saved his money in order to follow him there. As with Pavana, the class difference between the two of them contributed to a one-way flow of respect and admiration in their relationship. In fact, Stoner admits that he "literally worshipped not only [Alex], but his entire family, for what [he] took at the time to be their kindness to [his] mother and [him]" (TLT 183). In London, though, Alex, Stoner claims "distorted

the truth, when [he wasn't] telling outright lies, [and used] his prestige and rhetoric to swing votes" to get Stoner expelled from the Independence for Belize Committee (TLT 201)—because of their ideological differences, Stoner had tried to undermine his bid for re-election. Back in Belize Stoner attempts, unsuccessfully, to reason, persuade, even threaten Alex into a show of solidarity with the people: he wants Alex to advise cabinet—against his party's line—to hold a referendum on the Agreement, or to resign as his resignation "would strengthen the union's negotiating position, and could influence the vote in the House" (TLT 201). Stoner is a poor man, a bastard with no "concessions to influence" (TLT 198). Alex doesn't see him as a threat but as merely "a messenger *bwoy* for the opposition" (TLT 198). Stoner, however, intends to do whatever he *has* to—his Action Committee plans "to overthrow the agenda by any means necessary" (TLT 186). Like Pavana, he feels betrayed, "disappointed at [Alex's] abandonment of their once mutual political vision" (TLT 159). And, also like her, he's disillusioned, knowing that Alex would not only betray him "time and time again...[but] is about to betray his country, wrapping himself in the flag, pretending he believes [the Agreement] is right for Belize, all for the sake of power" (TLT 185).

Alex's betrayals of both Pavana and Stoner link issues of gender and nation in this text—that is, his behaviour with both of these characters suggests parallels in the notions of male privilege and political responsibility that the novel addresses. Alex misleads both Pavana and his constituents and then dismisses either of their needs when faced with problematic situations—situations that, in particular, threaten his ambitions. His destructive ideologies of gender and class and the corrupt use of his political power, in effect, doom both his personal and public endeavours to failure. In a drunken lament to

Pavana—who rejects him—he acknowledges his defeat. Having lost his idealistic, post-colonial vision of an independent Belize, he poses the rhetorical question: “Remember those years in London when we believed we were destined to pioneer a new breed of men and women in the Caribbean?” (TLT 279). She, however, has already concluded, with “overwhelming sadness and despair that the brilliant vision, which Alex had once symbolized for so many, had diminished, disintegrated into what seemed to [be] merely a hungry quest for power at any cost” (TLT 158-59). And that in this quest, his government had divided Belize against itself by disenfranchising the country’s women and its underclasses.

Pavana’s initial resistance to a life as Alex’s mistress reflects Stoner’s—and the Belizean people’s—resistance to the Agreement. And through their interrelated connections with Alex, Edgell articulates a critique of class, gender and nation in this novel, suggesting that at both the private and public levels, Belizeans are refusing to accept conditions that compromise their visions of themselves. Thus, the questions that the text raises concerning Pavana’s struggles to define herself autonomously intersect with questions of nation, particularly Belize’s right to govern itself and its people’s right to define the means by which it will do so.

In In Times Like These, Edgell depicts Belize as a nation divided. Colonial reform policies have not improved conditions for women and the underclasses who are fighting to be recognized in a system that ignores them. ^{and} The ruling elite continue to put their self-interests—class and gender privileges—before the good of the nation, whose backbone is comprised of the very people that their governmental practices fail to acknowledge. As a nation struggling to define itself independent of its colonial history, this novel asserts that

Belize will remain vulnerable as long as the country's women and underclasses remain so within its social and political structures.

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