



Gender Inequality and Racial Discrimination: A Study of Marlon James' Literary Landscapes with Special Reference to Sustainable Development Goals

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 06 June 2023 Revised: 05 Sept 2023 Accepted: 06 Nov 2023	<p><i>This research paper explores the intricate relationship between gender roles and discrimination as depicted in the literary works of Marlon James, a prominent contemporary author whose narratives often dissect complex social issues. Grounded in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) - Gender Equality, this study investigates how James' literary landscapes mirror and illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of gender-based discrimination. By employing a qualitative analysis of selected novels, including A Brief History of Seven Killings and The Book of Night Women, this research discerns the ways in which gender roles and stereotypes perpetuate discrimination and inequality, impeding the realization of SDG 5. This study underscores the importance of literature as a tool for raising awareness and fostering dialogue on gender-related issues. By drawing connections between Marlon James' narratives and the global pursuit of gender equality, this research elucidates the potential for literature to drive social change and inspire action towards achieving SDG 5. Within this context, the present research embarks on a meticulous exploration of Marlon James' literary terrain, with a particular focus on his portrayal of women characters. By aligning the principles and objectives of SDG 5 with the nuanced depictions of gender roles and discrimination within Marlon James' narratives, this study uncovers implications that resonate deeply with the aspirations of sustainable development. By scrutinizing the experiences of women characters within his narratives, this study illuminates the potential for literature to reflect, critique, and inspire action towards the achievement of gender equality and the broader goals of sustainable development. Ultimately, the goal is to create a world where women and girls have equal opportunities, rights, and protections, and where gender-based discrimination and violence are eradicated.</i></p>
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	Keywords: Discrimination, Empowerment, Gender, Global Goals, Sustainable Development, Violence

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals established by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. These 17 interconnected goals were adopted by all 193 members countries of the United Nations at a historic summit held in New York on September 25, 2015. These goals are designed to address a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the world. The SDGs are intended to guide global efforts towards a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all. The constitution and adoption of sustainable development goals by united nation signifies a universal call to act urgently and address these challenges being faced by the world (Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda). SDG 5 is one of the 17 global goals focuses specifically on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As full title is "SDG 5: Achieve

Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls”. SDG 5 recognizes that achieving gender equality is not only fundamental human right but also essential for creating a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) which came into effect on 1 January 2016 is an improvement on the Millennium Development Goals (Sachs). The SDGs build upon the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but go beyond them by addressing a broader range of global challenges. The SDGs cover a wide range of critical issues, including poverty eradication, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry and innovation, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace justice, and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals. The 2030 Agenda represents a transformative vision for a more sustainable and equitable world. Unlike, the MDGs, which primarily targeted developing countries, the SDGs apply universally to all countries, both developed and developing. Every nation is expected to adapt and work toward achieving the goals within their own national contexts. A central principle of the SDGs is “Leaving No One Behind”. Sustainable development goals have been built on the universal principle of ‘leave no one behind’ (Nath 85). This means that development efforts must benefit all segments of society, particularly those who are most vulnerable or marginalized. Achieving equality and inclusion is a core objective.

SDG 5 is one of the 17 sustainable development goals established by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. SDG 5 specifically focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The full form of SDG5 is “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The key objectives are end discrimination and violence, equal rights within marriage, equal participation and representation, reproductive health and rights, and unpaid care work. The sustainable development goal 5 (SDG 5) was established by United Nations in 2015 and the main concern of this goal is to promote gender equality (Somerville and Pesantes). This agenda can be viewed as a contemporary initiative aimed at addressing women's concerns. Hirsu et al. (2019) supported this notion, asserting that this agenda places significant emphasis on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, with the goal of incorporating more female perspectives into discussions surrounding gender-related issues. According to Peake and Nyasimi (2015), this agenda has the potential to promote greater social justice and gender equality, ultimately creating an environment where all women and girls can exercise their rights free from discrimination. In summary, SDG 5, developed by the United Nations, serves as a movement designed to acknowledge the challenges obstructing women's progress toward gender equality and to promote initiatives that empower women.

Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. SDG 5 has several specific targets and indicators that countries are increased to work towards, including reducing gender-based violence, eliminating child marriage, ensuring equal representation in decision-making, and providing access to reproductive health services. It recognizes that gender inequality is a global issue that affects women and girls in different ways and to varying degrees across regions and communities. It calls for global efforts to address these disparities.

Gender Roles And Discrimination in Jamaica

Gender inequality remains a significant issue in Jamaica, despite progress made in recent years. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, is a pervasive issue in Jamaica. High rates of violence against women have been a concern, and efforts are ongoing to address this problem through legal reforms and awareness campaigns. Gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as racial and social economic disparities. Women from marginalized communities may face compounded challenges related to both gender and other aspects of their identity. Efforts to address inequality in Jamaica include legal reforms, educational initiatives, and advocacy campaigns, organizations and civil society groups are actively working to promote gender equality and women’s rights. However ongoing efforts are required to overcome deeply ingrained societal norms and challenges related to economic disparities and violence against women. Achieving gender equality in Jamaica will involve comprehensive efforts across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, the workplace, politics and literature. Literature plays a vital role in advancing sustainable development goals (SDGs) and addressing global changes related to sustainability. Literature, including novels, poems, and essays, has the power to raise awareness about pressing issues related to the SDGs. Through storytelling, authors can bring attention to topics such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and gender discrimination, making them accessible to a broader audience. Literature can also highlight innovative and sustainable solutions to global challenges. Authors can depict characters or societies that

successfully address issues such as renewable energy adoption, conservation efforts, are inclusive development practices, inspiring readers with potential pathways to sustainability.

Literature has a history of challenging societal norms and promoting critical thinking. Authors can use their works to question and established practices and beliefs that hinder progress towards the SDGs. This can lead to discussion and debates that drive change. Contemporary Caribbean literature primarily focuses on violence as a societal phenomenon, it is vital to recognize that violence often disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including women. Caribbean literature's potential to illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of violence and its impact on women becomes particularly significant in addressing and challenging gender discrimination within the context of these narratives (Scafe). On the other hand, researchers also play a pivotal role in advancing the sustainable development goals SDGs and addressing global challenges related to sustainability. Researchers have a significant role to play in advancing the SDGs by generating knowledge, advocating for evidence-based policies, monitoring progress, collaborating across disciplines, engaging with communities, fostering innovation, and raising awareness. Their contributions are essential for addressing the complex and interrelated challenges of sustainable development on a global scale. Researchers have looked at the publications on SDGs at a global level and identified major focus areas, countries and collaboration patterns among authors (Bautista).

The ongoing quest for gender equality, akin to the struggle against racial prejudice, demands the implementation of comprehensive policies and collective endeavors to cultivate a more equitable and inclusive society. In Rashmi Mittal's article, "Gender Equality in Educational Institutes: How Institutes can be more Gender neutral," the importance of gender sensitization is evident. It involves modifying behavior and fostering empathy towards all genders, promoting respect and equality. Universities play a crucial role in ensuring a safe and neutral environment, aligning with constitutional guarantees of equal status and opportunities for all citizens.

Marlon James, a Jamaican-born author known for his intricate and socially engaged storytelling, explores issues of gender inequality and discrimination faced by Jamaican woman in several of his novels. His works offer a window into the complex lives of female characters who grapple with the societal norms and constraints placed upon them due to their gender. These characters are multidimensional, navigating a landscape marked by poverty, violence, and limited opportunities. Marlon James masterfully explores the intersectionality of these issues, depicting how race, class, and gender intersect to shape the experiences of Jamaican women. By anchoring his narratives in Jamaica's rich cultural and historical context, he sheds light on how gender roles and discrimination have evolved over time, reflecting the harsh reality faced by many Jamaican women. Furthermore, he exposes the harsh realities of gender-based violence, highlighting the vulnerability of women to abuse with in a society grappling with these issues. Throughout his work, Marlon James challenges traditional gender stereotypes and offers alternative narratives that question and redefine gender roles in Jamaican society. While his female characters confront discrimination, illustrating their strength and capacity to challenge and overcome societal barriers. Through his storytelling Marlon James makes a significant contribution to discussions surrounding gender equality and discrimination in Jamaican society, inviting readers to engage with and reflect upon these complex issues. Sustainable development goal 5 (SDG 5), focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, finds resonance and complexity in Marlon James portrayal of woman characters within his literary works. His narratives are a lens through which the multifaceted challenges and aspiration of women come to life. These women characters often defy convention, challenging deeply ingrained gender norms. Their stories highlight the importance of giving women the autonomy to define their identities and roles, aligning with the core principles of SDG 5. Moreover, these characters exhibit remarkable agency, resilience, and determination in the face of adversity, emphasizing the need to empower women to make choices about their lives, a central tenet of the goal. Yet, Marlon James does not shy away from depicting the stark reality of gender-based violence, thereby underscoring the urgent need to eliminate such forms of discrimination and abuse, a critical target of SDG 5. Furthermore, the diversity within his female characters, reflecting various backgrounds, social economic statuses, and sexual orientations, Mirrors the multi-dimensional nature of gender inequality, aligning with SDG 5's aim to address discrimination in all its forms. Through these literary portrayals, Marlon James indirectly advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment, contributing to the broader conversation and awareness surrounding SDG 5, while providing a rich tapestry of experiences that underscores the strength, resilience, and diversity of women's Journey in the pursuit of gender equality and empowerment.

His novel *The Book of Night Women* is a powerful work of historical fiction that explores the lives of enslaved women in 18th century Jamaica. While the novel primarily focuses on the brutalities and hardships faced by these women under the institution of slavery, it also touches upon several themes related to gender and power dynamics, aligning with the principles of SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. The narrative unflinchingly depicts the harrowing gender-based violence and sexual exploitation faced by these enslaved women, underscoring the urgent need to combat such abuses, a central focus of SDG 5. Remarkably, amidst their dire circumstances, some of the female characters in the novel exhibit resilience and agency. They forge bonds of solidarity and resistance against their oppressors, shining a light on the strength and determination of women in the face of unimaginable adversity – a theme closely aligned with the empowerment objectives of SDG 5.

Furthermore, *The Book of Night Women* delves into the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by these enslaved women, including the racial, gender, and class-based inequalities that compounded their challenges. This intersectionality reflects the multidimensional nature of gender inequality addressed by SDG 5, which recognizes that the struggle for gender equality intersects with other axes of discrimination. Marlon James provides a platform for the voices and experiences of enslaved women, whose narratives were historically silenced. This commitment to representation and voice aligns with the SDG 5 principle of ensuring women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making. The novel also delves into feminist themes, showcasing the struggles of women who resist societal norms and patriarchal structures. Through these alternative narratives, it challenges and redefines traditional gender roles, echoing the principle of SDG 5. The protagonist of the novel, Lilith serves as a poignant representation of the gender inequality and discrimination faced by enslaved women in 18th century Jamaica. Lilith's narrative arc illustrates the harsh realities that women like her endured. As a victim of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, she epitomizes the urgent need to address these issues, central to the objectives of sustainable development goal (SDG 5). Analyzing Lilith's character in the context of SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls, reveals the profound injustices she and other women like her endured, highlighting the urgent need for gender equity.

Throughout the novel, Lilith and other enslaved women are subjected to horrific gender-based violence. The novel's setting on an eighteenth-century Jamaican plantation reveals the harsh reality of this period, where discrimination against women took a notably physical form. During this time, women endured egregious acts of racism, including physical and violent abuses such as whippings, tortures, and rapes. These brutalities serve as stark examples of the severe and gender-specific discrimination faced by women in that historical context, shedding light on the deep-rooted injustices they endured (Moreno 43).

One of the most harrowing incidents is Lilith's rape by a white overseer named Mr. Liverpool. This traumatic event underscores the brutal reality of gender-based violence that enslaved women endured. Lilith's experiences are shaped by intersecting forms of discrimination. Her racial identity as a black woman and her enslaved status compounds the gender-based oppression she faces. For instance, she is subjected to both racial and gender-based derogatory slurs and violence by white men. This novel also indirectly highlights economic disparities. Enslaved women like Lilith are forced to labor under grueling conditions, while their enslavers profit from their work. This economic inequality underscores the broader gender disparities in economic opportunities and financial autonomy addressed by SDG 5. Despite the brutality, Lilith and her fellow women form close bonds of sisterhood. They support each other emotionally and, in some instances, engage in acts of resistance. An example of this is when Lilith and her friend Circe plan an act of retaliation against Mr. Liverpool, demonstrating their agency and determination to fight back against their oppressors. Lilith's action aligns with the empowerment objectives of SDG 5, emphasizing the importance of providing women with the resources and opportunities to assert their rights and agency in challenging circumstances. Her character challenges traditional gender roles within the confines of her oppressive environment. Her determination to resist and protect her fellow women, despite the immense risk, defies societal norms. Her actions resonate with the feminist discourse within the novel, which seeks to challenge and redefine gender expectations. Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* emerged as a powerful vehicle for confronting historical discrimination against Jamaican women, illuminating their previously marginalized histories and challenging enduring cultural stereotypes, highlighting the persistent discrimination women face, even in the face of progress, and offering a profound exploration of the ongoing struggles of Jamaican women for agency and autonomy (S. 17).

It is evident that black women faced not only humiliation from their white masters but also from their fellow black men, enduring a lifetime of violence and trauma. Inspired by the successful Haitian revolution, black individuals sought their identity and freedom through revolt. Amidst the pervasive violence, black women were urged to fight against trauma, challenging societal judgements based on attire and appearance. By discovering their own identities, they aimed to change their fates and experience freedom. Although they found pockets of happiness amidst hardship, the message conveyed is that both black and all women should not passively accept patriarchal oppression but instead strive for their own liberation in society (Sophia. E 005)

Marlon James gives voice to Lilith and the other enslaved women, allowing their stories to be heard. This representation is essential in a society where their narratives were historically silenced. Lilith's character serves as a vessel for these voices, aligning with the SDG 5 principle of ensuring women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership and decision making. These incidents from the novel paint a vivid picture of the gender inequality and discrimination faced by Lilith and other enslaved women. Their resilience, agency, and determination to resist in the face of extreme adversity underscore the importance of addressing these issues, aligning with the goals of SDG 5 to eliminate gender-based violence, empower women, and promote gender equality. By analyzing Lilith's character in the context of SDG, this study provides a deeper understanding of the historical and contemporary challenges faced by women. Lilith's unwavering spirit emphasizes the importance of advancing the goal of SDG 5 to create a more equitable and just world for all women and girls.

In his Booker prize winner novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, the portrayal of gender inequality and discrimination is a central theme, especially in the context of the complex and often violent world of Jamaican gangs and politics. Analyzing the treatment of women characters in the novel through the lens of sustainable development goal 5, this study finds some instances that illuminate the pressing need for gender equity. One poignant incident in the novel involves Nina Burgess, a woman caught in the crossfire of political violence. Her harrowing experience in the novel begins with her kidnapping, an incident that exposes the horrifying reality of gender-based violence in the context of Jamaican gang warfare. Her abduction is not an isolated event but rather a chilling representation of the broader issue of violence against women, which seeks SDG 5 to combat. Throughout her captivity, Nina faces not only physical violence but also psychological trauma. She is subjected to dehumanizing treatment at the hands of her captors, enduring not only the physical pain of her ordeal but also the emotional scars that result from such an experience. This portrayal underscores the urgent need to address and eliminate gender-based violence, as advocated by SDG5. The goal emphasizes the importance of creating a world where women and girls can live free from violence and fear. Nina's story also reveals the systemic challenges that women face when seeking justice and support after experiencing gender-based violence. In the novel, she struggles to find assistance and protection, reflecting the real-world barriers that many survivors encounter. This aspect aligns with SDG5's focus on ensuring access to support services, legal recourse, and a safe environment for survivors. Nina's ordeals intensify as she lives in constant fear of sexual violence during her captivity. This fear is a haunting reminder of the pervasive nature of gender-based violence that women face, not only in the novel's setting but also in many parts of the world. It underscores the urgent need to address and eliminate such violence, as emphasized by SDG 5. The goal seeks to create a world where women and girls can live without constant threat of sexual violence and harassment. Her fear of further violence and her determination to escape her tormentors leads her to make a life-altering decision: she migrates from Jamaica to America. Her migration reflects the lengths to which women may go to seek safety and escape gender-based violence. This choice also sheds light on the importance of addressing the root causes of violence against women, including socioeconomic and environmental factors, which are also considered by SDG 5. Nina's journey to America is fraught with challenges, including the difficulty of leaving behind her homeland and adapting to a new culture. Her story illustrates the need for comprehensive support systems to assist survivors of gender-based violence in rebuilding their lives and pursuing opportunities for empowerment, which are central to the objectives of SDG 5. Marlon James' character Nina Burgess is portrayed as a complex woman facing challenges, with her fight against male domination signifying a positive shift in women's subjectivity as she transforms from a sex object into an independent figure, offering sympathy and highlighting the resilience of women amid discrimination, emphasizing empowerment within gender-based struggles (Yeni 656).

4. Conclusion

In summation, this research paper has embarked on a profound exploration of gender roles and discrimination as intricately woven within the literary landscapes painted by Marlon James. Through an exhaustive analysis of his literary masterpieces, notable the book of night women and a brief history

of seven killings, the multifaceted and often unrelenting challenges faced by women in societies riddled with inequality and discrimination have been laid bare. The pages of Marlon James' novels have unveiled a stark and unapologetic portrayal of gender inequality, proving that as a storyteller, he does not flinch from exposing the complexities and harsh realities of this issue. The characters he breathes life into, such as Lilith and Nina Burgess, serve as powerful vessels through which we gain insight into the indomitable spirit and unwavering resilience of women grappling with adversity. Moreover, by anchoring these literary voyages within the framework of sustainable development goal 5 (SDG 5), this study has skillfully elucidated profound connections between fiction and the real world. Marlon James' narratives resoundingly emphasize the Imperativeness of addressing and dismantling issues such as gender-based violence, economic disparities, and discrimination- central themes interwoven into the very fabric of SDG 5. As we pause to contemplate the implications of James' literary opus for the pursuit of SDG 5, it becomes vividly apparent that literature holds the power to be a force of reckoning. By granting a voice to marginalized characters and amplifying their stories, authors like Marlon James contribute decisively to the broader discourse on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In essence, this research study has underscored the inherent potency of literature to serve as a mirror, reflecting the stark realities of gender inequality and discrimination that persist in our world. It further attests to literature's boundless capacity to ignite transformative change, compelling us all to labor collectively towards a world in which women and girls can thrive, free from the shadows of violence, discrimination, and inequality. This remarkable journey aligns irrevocably with the principles enshrined in SDG 5, drawing us closer to the realization of an equitable and just society- a world where every woman and girl can reach for the stars and claim their rightful place.

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