DECOLONIZING NARRATIVES: KITTITIAN WOMEN, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION and PROTEST

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

The thesis acknowledges how women contest domination and challenges us to re-examine the subjects of our history. It centres the stories of 21 African women, who remember a popular uprising on St. Kitts in 1935. Their stories explore how these embodied narrators reconstruct a defining moment in the island’s history for insertion into the gaping holes of history that had been left for the imagination, conjecture, and a hegemonic discursive shaped by archival records. Their stories are worth remembering, demand examining and not just to be recorded for posterity. They must be accorded equal value as academic knowledge.

The use of storytelling as a methodological approach introduces the Kittitian language to text, removes the burden of colonized linguistic syntax and grounds the epistemological context of the findings and analysis. It provides new evidence of the invasiveness of coloniality and how it interlocks with Caribbean rebel consciousness to usurp decolonial exertions, discursively and institutionally. The work does not claim to provide a representative sample of the hundreds of protestors in 1935, nor do the women speak for all the citizens who were impacted by the social
unrest. It questions the processes that normalize the silencing of valuable knowledge that can only be found in the language and memories of subjugated populations.

Finally, this study reconstitutes the tellers as knowledge producers, decolonises their womanhood to reveal oomanism, and depathologizes the resistance movement. It focuses on how these culture bearers remember the protest and how they reconstruct themselves in relation to the historical event and how they reconstitute their subjectivities through their understanding of what the protest meant for themselves, their families, and communities. The study has implications for further research and knowledge production designed to decolonize Caribbean histories, to accelerate the process of healing the psychological scars and other residual effects of colonization and attests to the resilience of cultural memory.

Keywords: African Caribbean cultural forms; womanism, oomanism, indigenous research, decolonization, liberation, knowledge production, historiography, social justice education
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Dedication

Dedicated to my foremothers, the co-authors of this study, whose resilience resides in my cultural DNA: Margaret ‘Muggie’ Richardson, Florence ‘Oinee’ Hanley, Irene Hamilton, Ismay Francis, Lucille Morton, Eltruda DaCosta, Anita Ward, Veronica Byron, Florence Jarvis, Bernice Caesar, Miriam Matthew, Arabella Matthew, Lilian Williams, Marie Henry, Mary Boddie, Louisa Fraser, Iris ‘Netti” Richardson, Viola Herbert, Pricilla David, Henrietta Watson and Maud O’Garro whose stories insist on equity in knowledge production.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................ iv  
Dedication...................................................................................................................... vi  
Table of Contents.......................................................................................................... vii  

Chapter 1 Introduction ................................................................................................. 1  
   1.1 Context of the Study ............................................................................................. 2  
   1.2 Research Design ................................................................................................. 4  
   1.3 Locating Myself ................................................................................................... 9  
   1.4 The Relevance of the Study ............................................................................... 17  
   1.5 Summary of Chapters ....................................................................................... 20  
   1.6. Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 25  

Chapter 2 Literature Review: Conventional Sources and Interpretations .................. 27  
   2.1 Twentieth Century Sugar Plantation Society .................................................... 30  
   2.2 Plantation Conditions in the Slavery Afterlife .................................................... 37  
   2.3 Records of Resistance ....................................................................................... 41  
      2.3.1 Migration .................................................................................................... 41  
      2.3.2 Trade Unionism ......................................................................................... 44  
      2.3.3 Uprisings .................................................................................................. 46  
   2.4 Official Colonial Reports ..................................................................................... 49  
      2.4.1 The Governor’s Account ............................................................................ 49  
      2.4.2 Perspective of the West India Royal Commission ...................................... 57  
      2.4.3 Periodicals and Journalists Accounts .......................................................... 63  
   2.5 Historians’ Accounts ........................................................................................... 69  
   2.6 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 77  

Chapter 3 Feminist Theorising ...................................................................................... 79
3.1 Caribbean Feminist Theorising.................................................................83
  3.1.1 On Intersectionality.............................................................................93
  3.1.2 Theorising Resistance......................................................................100
3.2 Conclusion .............................................................................................117
Chapter 4 Research Design and Method......................................................118
  4.1 The Research Design ...........................................................................119
  4.2 Storytellers’ Profiles ..........................................................................120
  4.3 Disruptive Empiricism .......................................................................128
  4.4 Similarities to and Differences from Related Studies...........................138
  4.5 Storytelling and Memory ......................................................................141
  4.6 Centering Orality ................................................................................145
  4.7 Conclusion ...........................................................................................150
Chapter 5 Subjects of the Protest – The Texture and Context of their Lives ....151
  5.1 African-Kittitian Female Bodies ............................................................153
  5.2 Household Relations ..........................................................................161
  5.3 Edwantij -The Indignities and Oppressions .........................................168
  5.4 Conclusion ...........................................................................................180
Chapter 6 Strategizing and Organizing.........................................................181
  6.1 The Political Analysis—Abba no betta dan sabba ..............................183
  6.2 Engendering Activism .........................................................................186
  6.3 Organizing for Protest ..........................................................................193
    6.3.1 Tyrant Woman Coalition ...............................................................194
    6.3.2 Praying Women Coalition.............................................................199
    6.3.3 Forceful Women Coalition .............................................................205
  6.4 Conclusion ...........................................................................................209
Chapter 7 Revisiting Protest .........................................................................210
7.1 Women and the March.................................................................210
7.2 The Confrontation.................................................................217
7.3 Sanctuaries and Protection......................................................228
7.4 The Trials.................................................................................230
7.5 Conclusion ..............................................................................243

Chapter 8 Reflections and Imaginings.........................................246
8.1 Reflections ..............................................................................247
8.2 Kittitian Language ...................................................................256
8.3 Reconstituting the Subjects: Oomanism....................................260
8.4 Pathway to Liberation—Aawe kankah.....................................263
8.5 Reimagining Protest...............................................................268
8.6 Recommendations for Future Study and Practice.......................272
8.7 Conclusion ..............................................................................273

References..................................................................................276

Appendix A Map of the Caribbean................................................295
Appendix B Witnesses at Court Trials.............................................296
Appendix C Map of St. Kitts ............................................................298
Chapter 1
Introduction

Mother, the Great Stones Got to Move

*Mother, one stone is wedged across the hole in our history*

*and sealed with blood wax.*

*In this hole is our side of the story*

*It is the half that has never been told,*

*and some of us must tell it.*

*...and we think of our children and the stones upon their future*

*and we want these stones to move.* (Goodison, 1992 p. 138)

This study explores Kittitian women’s knowledge of the civil disturbance that occurred in St Kitts in 1935. Inscribed in the women’s collective memories is a political consciousness of liberation, which disrupts the dominant narrative that privileges the rise of nationalist movements and trade unionism as central to the protest. The women’s accounts reveal experiences and knowledges of a gendered perspective that are transformative of the way one thinks about popular unrest and resistance that have directed how intellectuals can engage African populations in producing decolonizing knowledges in the Caribbean.

The study centres the knowledge of the subjugated women’s collective experiences, told in their Kittitian mother tongue. I argue that the women’s experiential knowledges reveal a developed awareness of social justice and a deep political consciousness that compelled them to participate in the resistance movement. This process advances Caribbean feminist epistemology and theorizing. It highlights the parallels of gendered experiences and activism between African
Caribbean feminist scholars and their foremothers in spaces with histories of colonial domination, exploitation, and extraction. It builds on the work of intellectual womanist activists and contributes to the discourses in decolonizing knowledges.

This work is concerned with how women remember an historical moment of protest and how they reconstruct themselves in relation to the event and less about chronicling the socio-political events of the episode. Nevertheless, it injects new material in the historiography of twentieth century Caribbean and a new narrative in understanding protest. It involves collaborative knowledge production between a racialized, colonized generation of women who experienced the event and a female researcher from a different generation who share the same cultural values and oppressions. This work, therefore, embraces Caribbean feminist Joan French’s (1988) pronouncement that “the intellectual is political” (p. 38). The declaration challenges the womanist scholar to become invested in intellectual activism which includes the process of converting to text, subjugated knowledges stored in the memories and revealed in oral format by women.

1.1 Context of the Study

This research focuses on the resistance activities of protestors for the period of January to May 1935, when descendants of the enslaved in the colonized Caribbean (See Appendix A) erupted in grass roots uprisings in the region, with Antigua, the Bahamas, and St. Lucia being the exceptions. In St. Kitts, two days of street protests and violent clashes dominated British officials’ reports and historians’ accounts of that time. Racist colonialism, with its multifarious manifestations of patriarchy and gender oppressions, meant that mainly Black populations remained in a perennial survival mode and heightened vigilance, enduring physical
psychological and emotional stresses. During the 1930s, survival, resistance, and resilience were conceptualized as a cyclical mode of existence for the oppressed populations in St. Kitts.

The storytellers involved in this study experienced the conditions in the 1930s. They described months of subversive activities, which included strategic planning, collective leadership styles, and organizing interwoven with work groups and domestic activities. They utilized communication networks between human settlements, involving visiting companions and children, and they sought to influence the outcome of court trials of protestors by boycotting of jurors’ businesses and serving as witnesses. Their stories highlight a distinctive, gendered approach to the protests and the outcome by documenting incremental victories for the protestors, which disrupt the conventional narrative of the event. These stories fill the gaps that exist in the dominant version of the history.

During the period, British-born, local government officials collaborated with a handful of disenchanted, underpaid, white sugar plantation managers and civil servants and imposed a repressive regime of racialized capitalism to control the mainly Black population and to legitimate forced servitude, equivalent to enslavement. Kittitian historians Probyn Innis (2005) Whitman Browne (1992), and Glen Richards (1993b), whose works have provided much of the background to the protest, identified instances of sporadic, insulated uprisings on sugar plantations, conflicts between new immigrants and the majority African-Kittitians residents, and localized, individual acts of defiance prior to national protest. By these accounts, suppression by the authorities, the police, local militia, and court system was swift, brutal, and unrelenting, but the resistance persisted. However, their discussion of the protest, which they defined through masculinist, nationalist tropes and Eurocentric organizational underpinnings, failed to establish the resistance as persistent liberation activism by the descendants of the enslaved.
Similarly, 1935 when the resistance occurred nationally, Britain responded instantly with warships and troops, which perennially patrolled the Caribbean Sea, to effect a bloody suppression of the protest. While the archival records and historical accounts provide evidence of a military success, the storytellers’ oral accounts provide alternative narratives of continued strategizing, independent and group victories, and moments of defiance after the British forces withdrew and the protest declared ended. These oral accounts have not been recorded or recognized in the official accounts.

The social upheaval of the period has become an example of a successful resistance in the region’s modern history since the Haitian revolution at the dawn of the nineteenth century. It permeates folk culture, politics, and Caribbean integration theory and serves as a common element that defines the identity of Kittitians. A review of Caribbean histories on the period established that the chain of national unrest in the 1930s originated in St. Kitts, yet there are no accounts that provide in detail what occurred on the island. The dearth of existing written documentation on the event can be attributed, in part, to the colonial tradition of housing official state documents in Britain, inadequate resources to be allocated to research, the scant attention paid to preservation of documents on the island, and a major fire that destroyed the archives, main public library, and court records in the 1980s. The three facilities were housed in the same building for economic efficiency, with disregard for the safety and security of the materials. The women’s stories collected for this study can contribute to the rebuilding of archival sources and inform future generations about the struggle and resistance of these women.

1.2 Research Design

In this study, I proceed, in compliance with the institutional format, with the literature review to identify what had been written about the protest and the gaps that exist. I was confronted with the

I widened my search to the Caribbean in general and recognized that the protest in St. Kitts occupied a sentence, footnote, or a paragraph in the writings of renowned Caribbean labour historians, Nigel Bolland, Richard Hart, Franklin Knight, and economist Sir Arthur Lewis. These authors wrote profusely about the 1930s rebellions, as well as in the work of other Caribbean historians, such as Fraser (2013), Johnson (1987), Thomas (1988), whose nationalist agendas addressed the protests from a political perspective of the period. Reddock’s (1994, 2005, 2008) and Macpherson’s (2007) Marxist feminist histories inserted the visibility of women in the 1930s protests in Trinidad and Belize, while reinforcing the nationalist political agenda ascribed to the protests by mainstream historians. Their work served what Mohammed (2003, p. 111) described as the “add women and stir” phenomenon rather than address the interpretative difference that gender could have made to the protest.
The histories of the Caribbean protest produced by Caribbean historians are grounded in Marxist analysis; from C. L. R. James’s (1938/1989) Africa-centred based arguments on the Haitian Revolution in *Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Walter Rodney’s (1981) *A History of the Working Class Guyanese People 1881-1905*, to Shepherd’s (2012) feminist interpretation “Petticoat Rebellion? Women in Emancipation in Colonial Jamaica.” The bias may have been consequential to the inherent oppositional grounding of the theory, or as Reddock (2006, p. 20) proffered, the bias is conveniently “a greater acceptance of Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses.” However, this bias negates the complex relations of a colonized, racialized, gendered society. Its macro constituencies disallow theorising from personal stories and mute the opportunity for decolonizing methodologies.

The literature review included archival sources. Contemporary newspapers provided journalists’ impressions on the protest, and I obtained local and British government official reports. I retrieved online copies of the Hansard with transcribed debates of the British Parliament, documents used to inform the West Indian Royal Commission Report (WIRC, Moyne et al., 1945), and the published report by the Commission. The WIRC reported on the findings and recommendations of a Commission of inquiry mandated by the Colonial Office, an independent agency of the British government.

The written histories of the protest relied heavily on the archival sources produced by officials. Academics involved in producing knowledge have had to rely on government documents held in libraries in Britain that are deemed reliable historical evidence for the legitimization of scholarly work. The opportunistic manipulation of the terms *working class*, *labour history*, or *grass roots history* shed new light on the protest, but the mode of producing the knowledge remained marginal to the protestors whose perspectives this study values.
The review of literature revealed three major deficiencies that this study sought to address:
(a) the scarcity of sources, (b) the imbalance in the reliance on Eurocentric archival sources and colonized epistemologies, and (c) the absence of the perspective of the protestors. To generate the data, this study relied on narratives of the protest that I obtained from the survivors’ stories, many of whom were traditional storytellers. Therefore, storytelling became the methodological anchor of this work. The data were a collection of stories, with their methodological appropriateness cemented in the auto ethnographical works of Brown (2009) and Mucini (2010). Onuora (2015) utilized the “Afro Indigenous tradition of story-telling and telling stories” (p. ii) and proffered that the African mothers’ bodies “offer a particular and valuable pedagogy” (Michalko, as cited in Onuora, 2015, p. 12).

I was first introduced to the story of the protest in St. Kitts through stories that my maternal grandmother told to me during the times that I spent with her, assisting with domestic chores, which included hair braiding. I especially preferred storytelling while I braided her hair, for I could control the time the storytelling lasted, and disruptions of the session would be minimal. Storytelling has become an acceptable method of data gathering in qualitative research. It is especially useful to obtain information from populations that are conversant with the format, and it is especially effective in gathering minute details to obtain reflective comments from the tellers.

The stories of 21 Kittitian women, aged approximately 72 to 91, informed this study. Their oral, ancestral proto language is my first language, which facilitated ease of translation. Their stories reveal to the reader a shift in understanding the dynamics of the period. It is their stories of resistance to patriarchal colonialism, gendered oppressions, and their expressions of lived feminism that offer new insights to a defining moment in Caribbean history.
The work does not claim to provide a representative sample of the hundreds of protestors in 1935, nor do the women speak for all the citizens impacted by the unrest. However, it questions the processes that normalize the silencing of valuable knowledge that can be found in the memories of subjugated populations and offers a methodology that reconstitutes their subjectivities through their understanding of what the protest meant for themselves, their families, and communities.

The intention was to uncover perspectives that previously eluded historical research on the topic and to introduce Kittitian women’s knowledge production into academia. This experiential accounting could be lost if not preserved. I obtained the storytellers’ verbal permission to make the information gathered accessible to the Kittitian public, by donating the tape recordings, notes, and copies of this study to a public library and the main archive on the island.

The narrators, some who passed on before the completion of the study, are survivors of an episode that academics have considered as seminal in Caribbean civilisation. I decided not to use pseudonyms, and with the women’s permission, I use their names as collaborators in this exercise of knowledge production to honour their agency and legacy. Where possible, their actual words in the vernacular they spoke have been incorporated and translated. Their language, although meant to be exclusively oral, has been captured devoid of euro-linguistic rules of lexicology. Where possible, Allsopp and Allsopp’s (2003) Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage is referenced to provide consistency in the spelling of some words. However, there are inconsistencies in the spelling.

Transcribing the recordings and drafting quotations for inclusion in the study proved more difficult than identifying willing narrators to participate in the storytelling during the research.
The rich oral histories, captured in a previously unscripted language, cast a new lens on the fulcrum of the 1930s decolonizing ferment. The language has neither precedent nor academic admission into scholarly writings, but it is relevant for the decolonizing mission of this work and my intellectual liberation. Johnson (2007a) provide a format for the inclusion of subjugated languages in the body of the text and the translation in the footnote. Waterfall (2010) advocated for the development of a format to include the original language in the main body of the text that assigns equivalence to the languages and disrupts the hierarchical structure in the use of languages in academic scholarship. The aesthetics of equity in Waterfall’s recommendation is especially significant for incorporating into this work the Kittitian language, which colonisers have pathologized as pidgin or broken English.

Much has changed in the academic arena, as the intellectual activists using decolonizing methods contest and continue to be contested. Giving voice to producers of subjugated knowledges has been challenged by theorists concerned with relations of power in standpoint theory and the plurality of feminisms. Scholars involved in afrocentric knowledge production, decolonizing academia and finding the space for new knowledges are involved in the struggle for liberating the colonized mind, as are activists involved in everyday resistance towards the goal of liberation of the body from various forms of oppression. No doubt, future scholars shall improve upon this work in methodology and enrich the historiography decolonizing methodologies and theories in academia.

1.3 Locating Myself

I identify as an African woman who was born in St. Kitts. I was assigned a Shakespearean first name and Anglicized last names which are evidence of my colonized Caribbean existence. Several generations of my ancestors, including my mother, father, and grandmother whom I
knew, were employed as manual labourers in the sugar industry, which was the origin of the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean. In 1997, I began collecting women’s stories on the civil disturbance that occurred in St. Kitts in 1935. I wanted to explore how they perceived their roles in the events to understand how they made sense of the historical moment and to record it in textual form, for their perspectives had been occluded from the accounts that I had read. I approached the project, equipped with listening skills obtained from childhood learned from my immersion in an oral tradition. I had learned to listen keenly for information and to understand, in preparation to repeat accurately, what I had been told. They were the same skills that contributed to my success in a parallel world of formal schooling. I learned to keep both worlds of learning separate to gain the approval of the elders and that of colonial institutions, skills most students in the colonized spaces perfect.

I have struggled with finding convergence of the two parallel lines of learning and my material existence. I felt as comfortable with the colonial curricula as I did in my immersion in the informal oral culture. I could transfer learning from schoolroom to the home, which seemed more accommodating and hybridized than transferring home knowledge to the unilineal classroom learning environment. My bifurcated scholarly existence became more poignant, as the discursive practices of the academy militantly rejected a convergence of knowledges. By 2017, intellectual activism within the institution, especially within the Department of Social Justice Education, led by professors, Njoki Wane, George Dei, Sharon Rattan, Ann Lopez and Eve Tuck, whose discourses challenge the institution’s Eurocentric biases, has created spaces for new forms of indigenous knowledge production.

My foremothers have been producing knowledge for centuries. They make sense of what occurs by using different tools and experiences than the historians and authors of contemporary,
conventional, scripted documents. Using a language layered with analogy, double entendre, and subliminal messages, they pieced together the purpose and meaning in their stories, while as a researcher, I struggled to form a collective narrative that tells a single story that progresses in the format of my Eurocentric learning. I unsettle the narrators’ “mode of experience” (Smith, 1999, p. 44) and story-telling method in the decolonizing, discursive frame of academia. Albeit, the work provides the reader with an alternative perspective and new insights on how women in St. Kitts experienced the historical moment.

I recall the stories that my late grandmother had told me about the “tutties chobl [1930s unrest],” which had indicated that there was an incompleteness of the story; hers was in many ways far more interesting than what I found in the literature. She had recalled that three men had been fatally shot and that Britain sent warships. She was emphatic that the members of the Moyne Commission, which had conducted an inquiry into the causes of the disturbance, did not hear from those who suffered most. She had raised five children on her own; the penultimate child, Ruth, was a product of rape by a rich landowner. Shortly after her daughter’s birth, she relocated from the nearby island of Nevis, following a devastating hurricane in 1928 that left her homeless, to find work in the sugar cane fields on St. Kitts. She described the working and living conditions as inhumane and unjust, but she got a “shoor shillin [secure income]” every week and a ready room [accommodation] provided by the proprietor of Belmont Estate, and for that, she said she was grateful. As a sugar estate employee, she used the name Meree Sherriff on one estate, Miriam Williams on another. She generated additional income on the weekends as a huckster of root tubers and vegetables, which she bought and resold in a trading process known locally as “ton-han [turn-hand],” supplemented by crops that she cultivated on a tiny lot in the backyard space that she shared with other tenants. Her story of industry is very similar to the
narratives captured in the data, and it is the women’s collective memories that validate the knowledge produced by this study.

The histories related through storytelling sometimes conflict with the dominant West Indian and European histories, so I expected to encounter differences in the focus of events and interpretation of the period of national unrest that occurred in January 1935. I had not anticipated that the women would introduce a contesting narrative. Since then, I have continued to record the life stories of women, especially older women whose life experiences span many decades and whose wise counsel and remembrances could reveal the continuities between the present and the past and how these histories can increase our knowledge reservoirs.

This study is the product of almost two decades of struggle to find space in the discursive practices of academia in a settler country to produce knowledge that centres rural, racialized, female knowers from a colonised country of exploitation. Like my foremothers, I continue with their memories, the struggle to liberate the knowledge of Kittitians of African descent from the repressive discursive practices in academia that discount and obscure our reality in which we negotiate the multiple terrains of knowledge production.

My study called for an analysis of the formation of subjectivities in a specific geographical and historical context and for a framework that provides us with the possibilities of understanding how resistance is articulated through these social arrangements. By delineating how relations of power insinuate themselves in complex configurations, I hope to further identify strategies for challenging coloniality. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012a) describes coloniality as “an invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after direct colonialism has ended” (p. 1). He listed four pillars that he adopted from Mignoli, which he
described as processes that operate to maintain the imperial North as a superior power and the south is subjugated. Ndlovi Gatsheni explains,

> The first is control of economy which manifests itself through dispossession, land appropriations, the exploitation of labour, and control of African natural resources. The second is control of authority which includes the maintenance of military superiority and monopolization of the means of violence. The third is control of gender and sexuality which involves the re-imagination of ‘family’ in Western bourgeois terms and the introduction of Western-centric education which displaces indigenous knowledges. The last is control of subjectivity and knowledge which includes epistemological colonisation and the re-articulation of African subjectivity as inferior and constituted by a series of ‘deficits’ and a catalogue of ‘lacks’ (p. 2).

It is a structural, world systems theory that has merit, in that by exposing the underbelly of global structure of domination to the subjugated, it opens the possibilities for discursive and practical opportunities for decolonization, rather than the fatalistic determinism of traditional world systems theory.

I am cognizant of Inderpal Grewal and Caplan’s (1994) appeal that “it is imperative for us to examine new forms of subjectivity that are radically different from this European imperialist subject that is binary constructed and essentialist” (p. 233). The emergent approaches will require what Mignoli (as cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012) described as “epistemic disobedience” (p. 19): a term he used to describe Franz Fanon’s revisit of the question of “What is a negro,” which disrupted the essentialist Eurocentric biological framework, by introducing culture and psychoanalysis as relevant to reveal a holistic understanding of persons of African ancestry.

scholars, such as Ng (1995), Razack (2001), Tuhawai Smith (2012), Wane (2013), and Waterfall and Maiter (2003). Storytelling is fundamental to this work and remains an essential element in the work of Caribbean feminist writers, whom Campbell (1994) predicted would “create an intellectual culture away from the consciousness of the elite mode” (p. 3).

The theoretical framework is feminist. It is located within Black feminist thought produced by scholars who identify as Caribbeanists working in the region and its diaspora. The framework is informed by an approach made famous by African-American feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins (1990), in which the Black feminist scholar participates as an outsider-within, a branch of standpoint theory that recognizes the power relations of the researcher and researched. Yet this framework affords the researcher the fluidity to move between positionalities. It is the process of converting hidden truths held precariously as personal memories and transferred orally to scholarly text, which is recognized as a more tangible form of preservation. Scholars have applied this method to the ongoing process of liberating subjugated knowledges (Henderson, 1992; Spivak, 1995; Trin Minha, 1987; Tuhawai Smith, 2012; Wieringa, 1995).

My work continues in the vein of the Guyanese scholar Elsa Goveia’s (1965) challenge and radical departure from intellectual trappings of colonial history of the Caribbean in the 1950s, to find out not only what the descendants of the enslaved people did, but also what they thought and felt. Moreover, Goveia’s dissertation (1965) Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century, departed from the intellectual tradition, by placing her focus on the tiny islands of the Eastern Caribbean in an era when research conducted in the larger British colonized, Caribbean islands was complicit in constructing an imagined, homogenous British Caribbean. The departure also challenged historians to shift the gaze from the enslavers to the enslaved.
The data collection process, transcription, and interpretation reflect a co-joint process, which reduces the complexities of reading multivoiced sources with incursions of subjectivities. Writing through the lens of subalternity remains complicated by issues of intellectual culture, power, and interpretive authority. Researchers have engaged a range of epistemic strategies to reduce the polarisation identified between intellectual culture and subaltern culture in colonial societies. However, even as scholars engage issues of interpretive power and culture between the researcher and researched and seek to encourage cultural familiarity to reduce interpretive difference, they experience interpretive conflict when processing data that create conflict between their cultural empathy and their intellectual interpretive framework.

One of the storytellers, Eltruda DaCosta, related an incident that is relevant and which I was convinced to read to her. She explained that she makes annual pilgrimages to the site where armed forces shot and killed citizens who were participating in a protest against oppression. She is convinced that during her annual visit to the site, on the date that marks the anniversary of the shootings, she sees a fresh pool of blood on the northwestern corner of Cayon Street and Wigley Avenue in Basseterre. Her storytelling is punctuated with “A duan kwoit memba how e go, bot a know [I cannot recall every detail, but I know].” She is convinced that she has valuable information to record. I visited the spot on three occasions, hoping to see blood, yet rationalising her disclosure as a post-traumatic experience. My foremothers, whose roles were integral to the community of dissidents, knew, and I wanted to tell their stories with the anecdotes, asides, and wit and provide a collective interpretation from their perspectives, to legitimise us as agents of our history.

In the 1980s, Caribbean feminist scholarship began to proliferate with the availability of international funding for gender and development. A research project, Women in the Caribbean
Project (Broder, 1982), yielded comprehensive data on women in the British colonized Caribbean, and the findings were published in the University of the West Indies (UWI) academic publication, *Journal of Social and Economic Studies*. A series of anthologies with multidisciplinary contributions and histories, conference papers, and dissertations funded by Euro-American organizations began to grow the pool of feminist works.

Numerous authors added gender as a variable that is integral for interpreting the resistance activities in history of the Caribbean (Andaiye, 2010; Beckles, 1989; Ford-Smith, 1995a, 1995b; French, 1988; Macpherson, 2010; Mathurin-Mair, 2006; Reddock, 1994). The next step was to explore how women experienced the civil disturbance and how they perceived women’s involvement in the activities during a period that historians regard as important because of heightened resistance to direct colonial rule and the attack on colonial, plantocratic dominance. This work takes into account the challenge of the gendered approach and applies it to the historical moment in St. Kitts.

The women’s stories are replete with contradictions of femininity, and notions of womanhood, sexuality, and *oomanship*. The latter defines the relations of women in Kittitian society, their contributions to its development and transformation. *Oomanship* was not presented as a relationship that is antithetical to men, but rather a negotiated, fluid, gender category. *Edwantij* [convergence of oppressions, persistent abuse], an underlying theme, emerged as the justification for resistance and the expectation of social justice. They articulated race relations and theorized the politics of state control in colonial society, and they understood their role in subverting acts of oppression directed at their family, neighbours, co-workers, and themselves.
Borland (1991), Brereton (2013), Chamberlain (1995), Parry (1987, 2002), Putnam (2006), and Wilkie and Farnsworth (2005) have raised the issues of truth telling and how to avoid the pitfalls of research using oral sources. This study assumed the majority of the women, who were advanced in age, were not seeking recognition for their involvement. They were all women of moderate means who were not paid for the information they provided, yet they accommodated return visits for data gathering, as far as their health allowed. Many of them died soon after the data collection was completed.

1.4 The Relevance of the Study

The work is important for its pioneering value in inserting Kittitian women as visible activists in an era that is of importance to Caribbean people and, in that regard, for introducing into scholarship new perspectives on how the struggle can be understood. It adds to the body of scholarly work on the historiography of the Caribbean and the agency of African-Caribbean women. I believe that by starting from the actualities of women’s lived experiences as they recall them, feminist scholars and the Caribbean women who participate in their studies jointly produce new knowledge that can withstand challenges of empirical merit. Such collaborations are important to insert Caribbean women into all spheres of Caribbean development, from which they have been excluded in the past, and to ensure that they are included in present and future discursive representations of Caribbean society. With application use of the appropriate theoretical and methodological apparati, the scholars can avoid the pitfalls of essentialism and the generalisations that plague masculine bias in colonial and neo-colonial studies of the Caribbean.

When I began this journey, I simply wanted to add Kittitian women’s voices to the discourse that focuses on anti-colonial struggles and resistance movements in the region. As I listened to the
stories and observed the speakers, I recognised that the narratives provide a unique understanding of the women’s everyday lives and reveal a political consciousness that motivated their activism. The new insights that emerged from the analysis shed light on Kittitian women’s involvement in insurrection and court trials surrounding the event as well as offer the opportunity for contributing to the discourse on feminist theory and epistemology.

The study is devoted to arguing that the oral accounts from the marginalised populations produce new narratives and an ontological shift from the historians’ interpretations of colonial records and other existing archival sources. I argue further for a methodological approach that embraces the subjectivity of the tellers and honours their *memories of feelings*.

This work is specifically gendered in its approach, and the knowledge producers are of African ancestry. Moreover, I had been searching for an opportunity to apply my academic skills to produce relevant, new knowledge that would bridge the epistemology of experience of rural, Kittitian women with academic learning and fill a void in the literature on women’s perspective of the episodic event that has been interpreted from a colonised, masculinist, nationalist perspective. The main assumption is that the civil disturbances of 1935 have been central to the lives of Caribbean women and men who participated in the protests and that written history has to be revisited to facilitate the inclusion of their perspectives. Consequently, the women interviewed on the topic recalled and reflected on personal experiences and circumstances related to the episode, decades after it occurred. Their collective stories repeated some events recorded in previous texts, and through cross-referencing of the individual stories, I established the reliability of the recollections, which served as verification, so that even if embellishments occurred, the information proved dependable.
The critical questions answered by this study are:

What do the women’s stories tell us about the period?

How does this knowledge help us to understand social unrest and resistance?

This work has answered these two questions, which will change, fundamentally, the reader’s understanding about the period.

This investigation, based on the women’s recollection of their experiences, is not an attempt to find heroes or to romanticize the period, but to present an analysis of the accounts. These accounts are legitimate sources and are reflective of women’s contribution to current understanding of the resistance activities in St. Kitts in 1935, as well as their relevance to protest, issues of gender subjectivities, and knowledge production involving poor African women.

My intention, as a researcher, was to produce the story of the 1935 upheaval, told in a different way and from a new perspective. The knowledge producers are all African-Caribbean women whose reflective testimonies form the nucleus of the primary data to be included in my analysis. The detailed personal accounts provide new data not captured by conventional methodologies of historical research as pursued by earlier scholars. It provides an alternative and complementary view on the occurrences. It is not revisionist history; it is a mediated history of the protestors constructed from the data they produced. This work presents to the reader an unlikely group of knowers, whose knowledge base can be converted into a form that is textually mediated and, therefore, accessible in scripted form in a technological era.

It is important to document the protestors’ version of this period that historians project as a time of nationalist fervour, a political and cultural renaissance in the Caribbean. In the 1930s,
Trinidadian C. L. R. James published *The Black Jacobins* (James, 1938/1989), which was considered a revolutionary interpretation of the Haitian Revolution. In his foreword, he urged African-Caribbeans to wrest their independence from Britain rather than negotiate for a colonial constitution. According to Reddock (2014), Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican, internationalized Pan-Africanism, while Aime Cesaire proposed negritude as the solution for oppressions of the colonized, particularly in the French Caribbean. How would a feminist perspective of the period interpret the occurrences? What would a gendered interpretation of the period contribute to the renaissance in these islands in a space called the Caribbean? This story provides their version of the period and provides readers a perspective of a highly politicized sector of the population who could have changed the course of their island’s history.

The women in this study were eager to have their stories written for posterity, especially for future generations. One of the women expressed concern that the stories could be lost because “*de yung peepl dem no ha no toime ou leesn* [the youth have no time to listen].” They understood the importance of providing accurate accounts, and there was no need to discount the veracity of their stories. It is my duty to pass on the stories to another generation, and if they no longer listen, I shall write, for unlike the storytellers, the generation to whom I am to transmit the information are literate in English.

### 1.5 Summary of Chapters

The main body of the text comprises eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic to the reader, sets out the scope of work, and provides the process to be undertaken in the recovery of knowledge that is at risk of being lost as a consequence of Eurocentric epistemicide.
Chapter Two represents the literature review of existing sources. It is entitled Literature Review - Conventional Sources and Interpretations, which indicates the common basis of the events of the period by the writers. It summarizes the interpretations of the protest from the perspectives of the authors of the texts in three categories: (a) the local government official reports and legislative debates on the subject, (b) the report of the British Royal Commission and the historians’ scholarly accounts that review the period from the perspective of mainstream historians, and (c) interrogates the discursive practices that erase women from the text. It also discloses what is left unsaid and under theorized.

The chapter provides a brief background on social and economic environments on the island leading up to the protest and discusses how the sources that inform knowledge production can contain discursive practices that exclude, subjugate, and pathologies. My main argument is that the existing literature covers the official story that leaves the reader without an appreciation of the protestors’ view of the event. Tellingly, accounts are entirely masculine, with a focus on violent aspects of the episode, and exclude the experiences, bodies, and subjective influences of women to inform the event. The sources offer insights from officials and private citizens holding positions of authority whose reports are devoid of input from protestors. Additionally, the focus on violent aspects of the episodes excludes equally effective non-violent resistance activities. Finally, the chapter shows the gaps in the literature, convergences and divergences of the various sources, and establishes the importance of undertaking a feminist perspective in the study to provide a more holistic view of the protest.

Chapter Three, locates my work in feminist theorizing, with particular attention to the traditions of Caribbean women scholars whose works serve as the foundation for this study. It is historiographical, for it inquires critically into the emergence of Caribbean Feminisms and
outlines the importance of a feminist approach for conducting this study on public protest in St.
Kitts, where, statistically, women outnumbered men in the general population, the workplace,
and the domestic sphere. Caribbean feminist theorising includes a historiography of Caribbean
women, paying particular attention to how Caribbean feminist theorizing negotiates the terrain of
colonial and imperial relations of power, based on influences of colonial/imperial dominance and
access to capital. It surveys specific histories that have been researched and methodological
dilemmas. It discusses the major arguments and the question of women’s agency of Black
women versus during and the period following the 1834 passage of the Abolition of Slavery Act.
It deliberates the difficulties of sources and how to understand political participation. This
chapter discusses both Barritteau’s (1998) recommendation of post-modernism and Reddock’s
(1994) Marxist feminist approach as the appropriate frameworks to challenge colonial patriarchy.
It highlights the strengths and shortcomings of other Caribbean feminist theoretical approaches
to understanding resistance—political consciousness and agency—of African Caribbean women
and recommends the decolonizing the theoretical approaches.

There is evidence of resistance activities of Black women, of enslaved women speaking out
publicly and constantly challenging the femininity and womanhood as prescribed by the colonial
discursive practices. Mathurin-Mair’s (1974) ground-breaking thesis provides adequate evidence,
but stops short of developing these Black women’s involvement and political consciousness.
Similarly, Beckles’s (1989) historical account of resistance by Barbadian slave women did not
develop beyond the illusive mentions in the slave logs. The use of traditional accounts could not
provide the data required to spotlight women in the way my study reveals. It details the argument
for the theoretical approach applied in the work and the choice of oral methodology for
collecting and the application of a decolonial lens to reading and interpreting the data.
Chapter Four is the Research Design and Methodological chapter. The chapter introduces the co-authors of the study and establishes the empirical value of storytelling as an evidentiary data gathering method in this scholarship. It discusses the current methodological issues pertaining to memory, orality, and unwritten languages. In conversation, texts including Berger Gluck and Patai (1991), Miller-Rosser, Robinson, Chapman, and Francis (2009), and Rossiter (1993) discuss the intricacies of interpretive and authorial authority power sharing in oral epistemological practice. It considers the peculiarities of idioms and gestures in storytelling the data, as suggested by Chamberlain (1995), in the co-construction of the event. Brodber (1991), Craig-James (2008), Mohammed (1994), and Peake and Trotz (2014) have conducted studies utilizing interviews with Caribbean women that involved analyzing oral data. Miller-Rosser et al. offered four stages of gathering and analyzing oral data: (a) interviews or collecting oral testimonies; (b) portraits of meaning: biographies; (c) seeds of meaning: telling extracts; and (d) collective meaning.

Among the difficulties named in the literature are issues of memory and the analytic for understanding gender as interlocking with race, class, sexuality, enslavement, and colonialism. The chapter outlines a process to read for gendered political consciousness. It offers an argument for how it uses and understands the following concepts: gender, memory, and political consciousness. The chapter discusses methodological dilemmas, major arguments, and the question of women’s agency. It briefly explores permutations of Black women versus other women and the impact of slavery. It considers the difficulties of sources and how to understand political participation.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven are dedicated to the findings from the women’s narratives on the period. They analyse the female sugar workers’ accounts on issues pertaining to the civil
disturbances they witnessed. Chapter Five, Subjects of the Protest: The Texture and Context of their Lives, provides the very detailed accounts of the connectedness of working and familial lives, which is often referred to as their productive and reproductive capacities. Their narratives reveal that their everyday life was extremely oppressive and carried very specific risks. The women’s experiences provide the context of how they lived their gender in the 1930s in St. Kitts. It discusses the types of jobs and the conditions of work that affected women in the sugar industry, providing a gendered perspective of plantation work and the social construction of the identities of the women who participated in the civil disturbance. Their accounts help the reader to understand the storytellers’ activism and to better appreciate their interpretation of the protest actions.

Chapters Six and Seven reveal that female participants in the uprising had a developed, but varying political consciousness. An analysis of their own words reveals that they had a complex political analysis that led them to participate in the uprising in different ways. We can retrieve from their accounts not only a sense of women as political actors, but also a detailed account of how they made their political choices and the constraints under which they did so. Their stories on the strategic planning, communal organizing, their interpretations of marches, confronting the contingents of the British military, and their performance during the court trials provide intricate details of strategic plans interwoven into household activities provide very detailed information on the episode of the civil unrest and the consciousness of the female actors.

Chapter Eight concludes the study, but opens new question possibilities and imaginings for achieving a seamless inclusion of decolonized knowledge production in academia. It outlines the contributions of this work with regard to what it tells us about the women’s agency as knowledge producers. Three major themes are identified from the data: (a) protest/resistance for liberation,
(b) Kittitian language as resistance, and (c) gender as resistance. Additionally, it identifies gaps in the work and offers opportunities for continuing research. It also discusses, in further detail, the research design, providing pitfalls to avoid and new insights from by the research. To date, no Kittitian woman or group has received the highest order of national hero in the Federation. The outcome of this work will equip researchers with tools to continue to unearth outstanding contributions of subjugated populations, as we revisit the significant events in our histories as colonized, racialized, and gendered persons.

1.6. Conclusion

The primary data can be broadcast in a series on folk knowledge, create children’s reading material, and be made accessible in a variety of ways to the public. During the production of the study, I have given All domination involves invasion—at times physical and overt, at times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend. In the last analysis, invasion is a form of economic and cultural domination. Invasion may be practiced by a metropolitan society upon a dependent society, or it may be implicit in the domination of one class over another within the same society (1994: 134). lectures locally and participated in conferences to present the work in various stages, not only for constructive feedback from peers, but also to gauge local public interest in the material. Very little social science material has been produced about the experiences of Kittitians, and there still remains an under appreciation for preserving cultural documents. This is a problem noted on small islands developing into states, which needs to be addressed. It is hoped that this work fills a void in local documentation and contributes to the ongoing development of feminist theory and methodology.

This study urges the importance of recording the histories of those whose words and interpretations of historical events are least likely to be recorded in conventional history and
renews the urgency with which we need to engage the marginalised as critical thinkers in the decolonisation agenda.
Chapter 2
Literature Review: Conventional Sources and Interpretations

This chapter argues that existing historical analysis covers the official story and is then critiqued. The accounts, therefore, reproduce hegemonic power relations endemic in colonialism. Tellingly, accounts are entirely masculine—centred with foci on riots, unionization, nationalism, and state governance that reflect the aspirations males engaged in through a power struggle on a macro level. Absent from the discourse of masculinist power struggle were the women and children who were equally committed to the resistance movement. One does not get a sense of the minutiae of the historic episode. The feelings of the women who feature in this study, their concerns, and their perspectives on the insurgence have not been captured in the official documents or in the histories.

The modern history and culture of the Caribbean have been shaped by centuries of colonialism and racialized slavery. Many islands, pawns in the western European geopolitics of the age, were colonised by the French, Spanish, Dutch, English, and Portuguese, or later the United States of America, over the course of their histories beginning in the 1400s. On Liamuiga, the Europeans conducted a series of raids on the indigenous people that ended in the Kalingo genocide of 1626: the complete dispossession of the entire island and the renaming of the island to St. Kitts or St. Christopher.

St. Kitts, like many British colonised countries in the Caribbean, was used as an agricultural outpost to grow cash crops for the European market. At first, British and French proprietors used the islands for tobacco production to satisfy the demand for tobacco on the European market, but by the mid-seventeenth century, when the demand for a new product increased in Europe and the
sale of the product was more profitable than tobacco, agricultural production shifted from tobacco to large-scale sugar production.

One of the most significant effects of this switch to large-scale commercial agriculture was a massive increase in the population. Capitalists considered maximizing profits through labour-intensive sugar production and imported large numbers of Africans to work on Caribbean plantations, which resulted in a major demographic transformation of the population. The British initiated one of the most heinous crimes against humanity recorded in history, which involved the mass trans-shipment of unwilling and unsuspecting Africans across the Atlantic Ocean for enslavement on Caribbean sugar plantations. Colonialism compounded the dehumanising practice of enslavement of Africans and the loss of lives, but with the combination of colonialism, psychological damage to generations resulted.

By the early seventeenth century when tobacco was no longer grown profitably, farmers abandoned the plots and returned to Europe or sold the properties that they had appropriated as a consequence of the mass dispossession of land from the Kalingos. New white sugar barons, resident in Europe, bought the properties, amalgamated the farms, and began profiteering from sugar production that satisfied a rapidly growing demand for sugar in Western Europe. The radical shift to sugar production occurred over a period of one decade, 1640-1650, fallaciously referred to as the sugar revolution in colonial interpretation, which was the start of the most ignominious period in Caribbean history.

Very few Europeans remained as employees in the sugar industry, while unwilling African immigrants grew the population. As the addiction for sugar spread in Europe and the opportunity for profits escalated, slave traders crammed over-crowded holds of ships with human bodies to maximise their net earnings from the sugar industry, factoring in high death rates from unnatural
causes, suicides, and mutinies on the transatlantic journey. Demographers’ compilations on Barbados indicate that in 1640, there were less than 200 Africans employed on the island; by 1645, there were 6,000, and by 1648, there were 45,000. In contrast, the Europeans decreased by 50% between 1645 and 1648. In St Kitts, the African immigrants outnumbered the Europeans at a ratio of 10:1 by the middle of the 1650s.

Britain’s economy thrived on the revenue inflows from the sugar industry for two and a half centuries. Early in the period, the government introduced constitutional change to effect greater oversight of the colonised countries from the British Parliament, and in St. Kitts, the power elite in the sugar industry assumed authority in local government. This intricate system of social engineering was peculiar to Caribbean societies and has had lasting implications on the manifestations of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender at various historical moments in Caribbean islands. Enslaved Africans were worked to death; the majority of the population died early, and the mortality rate was high. The unwilling, resistant majority population of the enslaved, coerced, colonized, and racialized sustained an uncontainable proclivity for freedom, which was passed on to generations that at certain historical moments was manifestly combustible.

One century after the end of slavery had been declared, the economic foundations of slavery remained intact (Bolland, 1995; Hart, 1989; Rennie, 1973). Large sugar plantations still dominated the economy, and local industry was discouraged; working-class women, men, and their children provided labour on the plantations for minimal wages. Wallace (1977) indicated that child labour was institutionalised in the sugar industry and that child labour depressed wages of adults. Wallace wrote, “In those days children from seven years of age during crop customarily worked on sugar estates for as long as twelve hours a day, at a daily rate of fifteen
cents” (p. 103). Females received less wages than men for the same work, and their wages were further depressed with the employment of their children. The practice reinforced the devaluation of women’s work and worth in the economy, which is an area that warrants further inquiry.

2.1 Twentieth Century Sugar Plantation Society

St. Kitts, unlike other British colonies in the Caribbean, was subjected to uninterrupted British colonial rule from 1624 to 1983. By the early seventeenth century when tobacco was no longer grown profitably, farmers abandoned the plots and returned to Europe or sold the properties, which they had appropriated as a consequence of the mass dispossession of land from the Kalingos. New white sugar barons, resident in Europe, bought the properties, amalgamated the farms, and began profiteering from sugar production, which satisfied a rapidly growing demand for sugar in Western Europe. The radical shift to sugar production occurred over a period of one decade; the decade of 1640-1650 was called the sugar revolution.

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Sugar estate managers preferred and sought young, Black, male labour on the sugar estates until the latter part of the eighteenth century. As the anti-slavery movement grew in momentum and trading in Africans was outlawed in 1808 in the British-owned territories, African women became more valued on sugar plantations. Their reproductive role was assigned as much
importance as their productive role. Momsen (1993), Richardson (1998), and Wallace (1977) referenced the sparse demographic sources on St. Kitts to conclude that women dominated the field workers in the slave population, and they noted a steady increase in the female population as the passage of an act to end the slave trade. Wallace also noted that African-Caribbean women’s involvement in work on sugar plantations was equal to that of men. It is clear, therefore, that employers valued women in the sugar industry for their reproductive and productive contribution.

Momsen (1993) and Reddock (1994) confirmed that the increasing reliance on female employees on sugar plantations was considered for the lower labour costs, and with free labour from their accompanying offspring, assured higher productivity. The reproductive and productive value of women added value to employees and to the labour-intensive production method employed by the sugar industry. Similarly, Beckles (1999a) illustrated that a restructuring of gender representation, which produced a significantly higher ratio of females to males on Barbadian sugar estates, began in the 1800s and continued into the twentieth century. Fog-Olwig’s (2013) publication utilised archival sources that confirmed the shift in the demographic composition was more striking in the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean, which includes St. Kitts.

At the time of the outbreak of the civil disturbance in the 1935, the 68-square mile island was dotted with approximately 52 sugar plantations covering the coastal and flat lands that was appropriate for sugar cultivation. The sugar industry and plantation society dominated the life of residents on St. Kitts from 1643 to 2005. Ninety percent of the lands owned by the white British

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1 The writers claim to have referenced the statistics that Barry Higman compiled. My own observation of the data did not provide much information on St. Kitts, which made me conclude that the demographers drew inferences and made conclusions based on data gathered on Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados, the larger Caribbean countries.
sugar barons lay below the 1,000-foot contour at the foothills of the mountain range. Accounts by Doumerc (2003, p. 43) and Macmillan (1938, pp. 81-83) confirmed that the lands in St. Kitts were predominantly under sugar cultivation, where the African-Kittitian population found employment as manual labourers.

The local government encouraged immigration of Portuguese, Dutch, Lebanese, and Syrians who had migrated to the island at the turn of the twentieth century and provided incentives for them to settle into small businesses sector, especially as retailers, where there was an increasing demand for retail goods (Inniss, 1985). The immigration policy resulted in filling the opportunities for entrepreneurial activities with new immigrants and restricting the availability of employment alternatives for Africans, who would be forced to remain in the traditional fields of employment in the sugar industry. The island did not attract a wave of new immigrants from the South Asia, nor did it develop a significant independent, free, coloured population. The new immigrants, phenotypically white, bought distressed sugar plantation properties and blended in with the traditional white elite who held economic and political power on the island. Mixed-race Kittitians emigrated, leaving a definitively Black, poor, working class and a white power elite.

The British colony was one of the earliest of the British Caribbean colonies to undergo the transformation of its tobacco economy to one dominated by sugar plantations. Its gently sloping topography and rich, volcanic, sandy soil made it a prime environment for sugar cultivation. Almost every inch of the tiny island was covered in sugar cane fields. The sugar plantations, therefore, dominated the lives of all the residents, employers, and employees alike, attendant with its highly racialized, caste-like class structure (Hart, 1989, p. iii).

Consequently, the oligarchic rule by the white plantocracy was far more reactionary, repressive, and unyielding than in other territories. It is not surprising, therefore, that historical records
indicate that the uprisings led by African-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean workers in the 1930s against racial and colonial repression in the Caribbean started in St. Kitts. In 1929, Lord Olivier (as cited in Inniss, 2005) reported that “conditions for the working class are usually deplorable but sometimes desperate” (p. 58). He attributed a 43% decrease in the population over three decades to emigration and a high infant mortality. The 1935 rebellion in St. Kitts was not exclusively concerned with wages and other labour and industrial matters.

The colony of St. Kitts, as an outpost of the British Empire in the 1930s, was a member of the British Caribbean, a cluster of islands and territories bordered by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, and it was administered by European officials of the British government. The British government, through its Colonial Office, issued appointments and assignments and deployed officers to the colonies. The British Caribbean was only a fraction of the British government’s colonial reach around the world. Its colonial office divided and subdivided the colonies into jurisdictions that were convenient for imperial governance.

The Leeward Islands—Anguilla, Antigua, Dominica, Montserrat Nevis and St. Kitts—a block in the central Caribbean, were subdivided into smaller jurisdictions. The sub grouping of St Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla was administered as a single entity with headquarters in Basseterre, St. Kitts. The local government comprised an Administrator, usually an official sent from Britain, a Legislative Council, and an Executive Council, with membership from among the sugar estate owners and civil service employees resident on the islands.

The distance between St. Kitts and Anguilla in the early 1900s made governing and communication very inefficient. Nevis, which was almost a full day’s journey by schooner, was four miles away from Basseterre, St Kitts. Anguilla, which was 70 miles away, needed three travel days, and successive generations remained belligerent about the British decision to link the
three islands. In 1967 following the declaration of political semi autonomy for the tripartite state, Anguillians rebelled, and in 1971, Britain legislated the return of Anguilla to crown colony status, where it has remained to present (Browne, 1980).

The two branches of government under the crown colony system mirrored the bicameral British parliament in optics only. The official members of the Legislative Council or Executive Chamber were chosen from among senior government service employees such as magistrates, medical officers, chief surveyor, and the Comptroller of Customs. The unofficial members of Legislative Council were nominated positions held by wealthy sugar estate owners, often referred to as planters, or their attorneys, family members, or associates, who were fiercely resistant to any attempt to reduce their monopoly over the political and economic affairs of the tripartite political arrangement (Inniss, 1985).²

The officials, all male, who served the British government from the outposts in the Caribbean, uprooted from their homes, traditions, and old friendships, often forged new friendships with the local government appointees and, therefore, were likely to be influenced by their interests. Officials who acted against the norms of the colonial relations of power proscribed by the planter regime were ostracized, and their stay on the islands was short lived. The high turnover of the British officials and evidence of premature termination of contracts pointed to cultural shock and the aversion to effect change by local officials, despite the abhorrent conditions that the majority of the population on the islands endured.

At the time of the disturbances, the Leeward Islands—St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, Antigua, Barbuda and Montserrat—were administered as a single entity under the governorship of Reginald St. Johnson. He resided in Antigua and would visit the islands at intervals. The position of Chief Justice in the islands was also held by a British citizen, James S. Rae, who also resided in Antigua and visited the islands to adjudicate matters heard in the High Court. The itinerant nature of these posts meant that the Governor and Judge had to rely on the reports and support from the local government officials who resided on the various islands.

The plantocracy, a regime of white male dominance, pervaded local politics, the economy, and all aspects of social class relations. The term planter is derived from the root planter and describes government by planters. Planter is the occupational title of a manager or owner of an agricultural plantation (i.e., sugar plantation, also referred to as a sugar estate). The term plantocracy fell into disuse by scholars who affiliated the expansion of voting rights in the mid twentieth century with the decline of planter control in the St. Kitts. However, political parties with neocolonial agendas persisted and promoted colonial genders that reflect planter interests.

When the British imposed the elective element to legislative membership, the body left to its own devices regulated the elections. They introduced male exclusive, property, and income qualifications set at unattainable rates for the majority of the population, which served to entrench racist patriarchy as a feature of governance in the island. Reddock (2004, p. 17) introduced the term “systems of governance” to describe Western European structures and practices, imposed and adapted in colonized Caribbean states. Embedded in these systems are Eurocentric racist, sexualized preconceptions and colonialized capitalism that continue to inform governance systems and election outcomes.
Consequently, the majority of the Black population is alienated from the governance structures and lack the will to participate in the political process. Women were denied the vote and the right to be elected in the tripartite state until 1952, when the law was revised to include all citizens who had acquired the age of 21. Subsequently, voting is contingent on campaign platforms that show a clear path to equity and liberation, or candidates’ willingness to pay voters to cast ballots.

The state at all levels (i.e., local, regional, and international), the judiciary, and the economic elite constituted an oppressive structure of colonial patriarchal hegemony that was intolerant of overt, violent rebellion. Revolts were crushed effortlessly by applying colonial military force, and the Colonial Office had used its powers to over-ride local government decision making. The frequent deployment of Royal Commissions (Inniss, 2005), sanctioning of legislation and practices, allowed sugar estate owners to employ unusually harsh and coercive tactics in regulating the affairs of the three-island colony. Its headquarters situated on St. Kitts, where the majority of planters resided, made government of the people on St. Kitts extremely repressive, resulting in a gender, race, and class divide.³

Enslaved Africans and their descendants remained the main source of labour on Kittitian sugar plantations for 350 years until July 2005; for approximately two and a half centuries of that time, the industry operated exclusively on enslaved labour. The racialized industry permeated all facets of culture, economy, and society, and this colonisation has caused lasting psychological damage to generations of African in St. Kitts. The repopulation of St. Kitts, beginning with the deadly incursions of the Europeans who wiped out the indigenous population, was the beginning

of an intricate system of social engineering, which is peculiar to Caribbean societies and which has had lasting implications on the manifestations of the intersectionality of nationality, race, class, and gender at various historical moments in Caribbean islands.

2.2 Plantation Conditions in the Slavery Afterlife

Historians recorded that during the decades following the passing of the Emancipation Act, numerous rebellions sprouted in various islands to protest the poor quality of life and oppressive conditions of work that remained unchanged. What had changed, however, was the composition of the population from one that was almost exclusively European and African to one that included Portuguese, Lebanese, and Syrians in insignificant numbers, but with greater opportunities to improve their economic status and quality of life. The African-Kittitians resented the new immigrant population because of the elevated status assigned to them, and the attendant economic privileges that they perceived were extended to the new immigrants.

The African-Kittitians had witnessed the South Asians obtain small plots of land as a condition of their contract with the employers in the sugar industry, while the Portuguese, mainly retailers, had progressed from street sellers to propertied store owners. One of the more blatant examples of the newcomers’ privileges was the case of Farara, an illiterate, former indentured servant from Portugal who arrived on the island at the turn of the twentieth century and within a few years had acquired substantial properties, including six sugar estates (Inniss, 2005, p. 6).

During the early 1900s Portuguese Riots in St. Kitts, African-Kittitians were the alleged perpetrators of arson involving the burning of retail stores owned by Portuguese (Inniss, 2005). By the 1930s, the size of the Portuguese population grew as male immigrants sought wives from Portugal, and white families increased mainly through procreation. The evidence of their improved conditions incensed the African-Caribbean residents on St. Kitts. It was not until 1934,
however, that concerted trans-regional rebellions erupted, which Lewis (1993) described as a working-class movement against colonial rule with its racialized practices and the remnants of slavery. “The 1930s Social Revolution,” which Lewis described as a social movement by the working class Caribbeans, was confined in its interpretation by the colonial discursive that massified the protestors and distorted their expectations.

The Wood Commission of Inquiry, conducted a few years before the outbreak of the civil unrest in St. Kitts in 1934, pointed to the low wages paid arbitrarily to employees in the sugar industry. The report concluded that: “In some islands like St. Kitts and Antigua the most substantial elements in the community (by which Major Wood meant white planters and merchants) opposed any changes that would lead to fairer wages” (Wallace, 1977, p. 25). No recommendation, therefore, was made to improve wages generally or, more specifically, to women whose incomes were largely used for the upkeep of themselves and their children. It would be likely that women would have been in the forefront of any industrial action that would improve their earned incomes.

A number of repressive measures, resonant of the period of slavery, were imposed to restrict the mobility of plantation employees. Sugar estate owners, for example, with the assistance of legislators, imposed the insidious Master and Servant Act that purported fines and imprisonment for employees who did not report to work, left one estate to work on another, or sought alternative employment without the approval an estate manager. The Master and Servant Law demonstrated the breach of labour contract and how it was enforced through a network of nine magistrates on St. Kitts. Breach of contract was a criminal offence for workers, but there was no civil consequence for employers who used it to maintain depressingly low wages.
According to Innis (2005), in St. Kitts, where planters owned most of the land and, in many cases, residential properties that sugar workers occupied, employees were under constant threat of losing their tiny farms or housing. A gendered approach to develop this finding could have yielded evidence required to provide a more holistic perspective on the underlying causes for the upheaval, detail how these factors affected women differentially, and offer insight on women’s agency during this period of upheaval, considered a watershed in the history of St. Kitts and rest of the Caribbean.

The class/colour/race barrier between workers and owners was a persistent reminder that the legal abolition of slavery in 1834 was insufficient to dislodge the persistent practices of sexism, racism, and classism that plagued the colonial society for centuries. No group was more aware of it than workers employed in the sugar cane fields. Browne (1992, p. 87) provided an account of one labour leader who, in 1934, defended the cause of a woman who was issued with eviction orders for not reporting for work in the fields on the afternoon of the day that she gave birth. Beckles (2003), Bush-Slimani (1993), Morrissey (1990), and Sebastian (2001) reported that it was not unusual for a Black woman to return to work on the day she gave birth.

The white, authoritarian planter class permanently resident on the islands and British civil servants, who administered the islands on behalf of the British government, dominated the public arena. There were written and unwritten rules and practices that reinforced the dominance of whites on the island. Suffrage was based on property ownership, which disenfranchised the Black majority resident on the islands. Moreover, the hope of gaining the vote for women, who made up the majority of the Black population, seemed even more remote, as local laws existed to limit their franchise.
Liberal sentiment in the British Parliament lamented the absence of voting rights for women in its colonies and argued for extending the suffragettes’ achievement to Britain’s external colonies:

Women can take but little part in the administration of the West Indian Colonies. When they are eligible to exercise the vote on equal terms with men or to stand with them for election to representative institutions, the prescribed qualifications are usually such that few women possess the property or income to satisfy them. In three Colonies woman is debarred from candidature at elections for the Legislative Council, none has yet sat in that body. In Barbados women are not eligible for the vote. Another inequality is that in three Colonies women, otherwise qualified for the vote, may not exercise it until they reach an age higher by some years than that at which a man is entitled to vote. The administration of justice is another field of public service from which the women are in practice excluded. (Moyne et al., 1945, p. 217)

In the absence of a representative government, the interest of the majority population was neither considered nor presented. The state was governed by the British constitution, which in its application, discriminated against women and the Black population on the islands. Even in the wake of the dissatisfaction of sugar cane workers in 1934, members of the local assembly voted overwhelmingly to maintain the property qualification as a requirement to vote. With church, state, and legal systems dominated by white planters, a caste-like racialized society existed (Hart 1989, p. iii). The 1934-1938 struggle against the autocratic white patriarchal oppression was clearly defined in most historical texts as a struggle against racism, colonialism, and dominance, with very few articulating the struggle against sexism.

Historians concurred that three major occurrences were precursors, or possible triggers, to the rebellions that started in St. Kitts in 1935 (Bolland, 1995; Richards, 1993). In October 1934, a planter had died intestate, leaving workers without their weekly wages, immediate employment, and the hope of a Christmas bonus. The latter was an arbitrary allowance, in kind or in cash, which was selectively distributed to employees. It was designed to strengthen planters’ paternalism and create dissention between employees. On other estates, workers were denied the annual Christmas bonuses, and for those who did, the differences in the amounts received varied
remarkably from estate to estate (Browne, 1992; Innis, 2005). Thirdly, the tiny plots of land, which workers had used to grow food for domestic consumption, were gradually being overtaken to increase the acreage for growing sugar. It was clear, therefore), Ford-Smith (2005) and, that conditions had reached an intolerable stage in the 1930s. The growing job insecurity and the withdrawal of opportunities to supplement reduced wages evoked general recalcitrance of employees, and a sense of uneasiness pervaded among workers. The impact this had on female heads of households, who were employed mainly on sugar estates, is an area that requires further investigation and analysis.

Writers on the period rarely theorised the differential impact of the employment conditions on the domestic lives of the workers, especially women who were the main income earners in households and whose responsibility in the domestic sphere involved providing household needs. The absence of a specific analysis pertaining to women has resulted in their exclusion as agents in the anti-colonial liberation struggles of the 1930s. The actions undertaken by women to protect their household incomes, which comprised earnings from the estate and other avenues of employment, as well as financial contributions obtained from their liaisons with men are critical to analyses of social action and discontent of the period.

2.3 Records of Resistance

2.3.1 Migration

Richardson’s (1993) research on human migration patterns of Kittitians suggested that African-Kittitians had established navigational routes across the Caribbean Sea that they had long utilised for escape from enslavement on the island. By the 1930s, sloops and canoes crisscrossed the Caribbean Sea bearing migrants and goods for trade. These artisan transportations were
complemented by more advanced seafaring vessels designed for the transportation of migrant workers.

Men in their most productive years, and a few women, left St. Kitts for better wages in the sugar industry and other industries in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Costa Rica, and Trinidad. Many deserted their wives and partners, with numerous children and other dependents, in their search of new and more lucrative economic opportunities (Richardson, 1993). Inniss (2005, pp. 92-95) described the work of the Child Saving League, led by Governor Burdon’s wife and “ladies of good reputation,” who offered daytime child care, milk, and primary health care to infants and toddlers and lobbied to have men imprisoned for abandonment of their families.

Inniss’s (2005) approach to the issue of migration intimated, but did not address the problem of abandonment of children by migrant fathers, who in many instances neither returned home nor sent remittances for the upkeep of their children. Travel and communication between islands was limited, and therefore, any remittances for families was brought at the end of the harvesting season when men returned home from the Dominican Republic and elsewhere in the Caribbean. The women were left with the day-to-day responsibility of generating incomes for the family, an issue that has not been taken up by any historians or other social scientists writing on the period.

Bonham Richardson (1993) documented the tradition of human migration among Kittitians between 1850 to 1950 as a peculiarly male response to economic or environmental adversity. Enslaved Kittitians had used migration to escape slavery by travelling to nearby islands by canoe to become employed as free persons. In 1834 when slavery ended in nearby Antigua, migration to that island increased at such high rates that St. Kitts became a transhipment point for migrant workers, travelling north or south to the larger Caribbean islands. His description of the network of sloops that criss-crossed the Caribbean Sea is evidence of the interisland travel of male
migrant workers, although some involved trade in provisions and other staples in the Caribbean diet.

The gender imbalance among sugar workers continued into the twentieth century. It was exacerbated by male migration to the bigger islands in the Caribbean or in Latin America to seek higher paid employment. Sugar estate managers and owners realized greater profits by paying extremely low wages to female agricultural workers who often performed their assignments with the help of their children. In many instances, the woman, sole supporter of her family, had to work long gruelling hours each day only to be paid wages that were less than enough to provide a moderate standard of living for her household.

As a consequence of the significant level of male migration, the women who were left as the main caregivers and income earners in the families, and whose meagre wages earned from estate work could hardly sustain their families, were most affected by the conditions of work on the island. These women were, by the nature of the circumstances, as aggressive in their actions as any employee denied adequate wages that were equivalent or commiserate with their level of productivity. Writers of the period failed to explore, beyond peripheral mention, the role of female sugar workers as integral constituents of industrial action that occurred in the 1930s.

Richards (1986) noted that three riots erupted at Pond’s, Needsmust’s, and Buckley’s sugar plantations in St. Kitts, around the same time in January 1935, as indication of the arbitrariness of strike action. He highlighted what he perceived as disorganized protest action that he attributed to the absence of a viable trade union. Similarly, Richardson (1983) argued that mass labour organization and action needed to sustain and guarantee a successful labour rebellion had been stymied by the absence of an organized union and aggressive young labourers who migrated in large numbers to other sugar-producing territories in search of better wages.
2.3.2 Trade Unionism

The masculinist analysis informed mainly by Colonial Office documents and newspaper articles submitted by British-educated writers and journalists provide a context for the subjugation of the women’s perspective and working-class initiative in the uprising and its after-effects. Historians Bolland (1995), Browne (1992), Hart (1993), Lewis (1939), and Richards (1993a, 1993b) focused on the absence of trade unions in labour disputes in the 1930s as a vehicle for organizing workers.

Eric Williams (1970) dedicated a section in one of his classic publications, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*, to the issue of trade unions and its relevance for the Caribbeans in the early to mid-1900s. He concluded from his research that:

> The workers steadily refused to register under this (Trade Unions) ordinance, on the advice of the British Trade Union Congress, because it did not provide for peaceful picketing or protect the unions against actions in tort on the lines of the British 1906 Act. (p. 475)

Williams’s conclusion, however, did not explain the reluctance of Kittitian sugar plantation employees to join formal union organizations led by white and biracial organizers, nor did he discuss how the Eurocentric structures of labour organizing had not proven a recognised machinery of collective bargaining among the African-Caribbean workers. He ignored the possibility that workers may have recognised that the intransigence of plantocratic rule would override any formal organization designed to protect sugar workers’ rights.

Two workers’ rights organizations had emerged from among workers and thrived in Belize and Trinidad up to the 1930s. According to Bolland (1995) and Macpherson (2007), the *Unemployed Brigade* in Belize, with its indigenous, flexible structure and leadership, appealed to a large following of low-waged and under-employed and unemployed. Williams (1970, p. 473) attributed the success of the “National Unemployment Movement” in Trinidad to its focus of
agitating for employment opportunities. These organizations were displaced by the less attractive Western European union organizations, but survived long enough to imbue migrant workers from the smaller islands with organizing skills and consciousness. In St. Kitts, the main transhipment point in the Leeward Islands, a number of disaffected immigrant workers, unwilling to return home without evidence of material success following their sojourn abroad, took up residence. The disaffected fanned the flames of discontent and joined the sugar workers in a successful resistance movement that began in October 1934 and continued into the dawn of 1935.

Early trade unionism was dominated by males and, therefore, precluded the consideration that could have been given to women engaging in folk or grassroots organizing as industrial action. The small size of the island of St. Kitts offered ample opportunities for employees of the various estates to meet and to discuss their disenchantment, which if sufficiently widespread, could have become a catalyst for sugar workers to rebel. Historians Bolland (1995), Richards (1993a, 1993b), Richardson (1983), Williams (1970), and others interpreted the events within the framework of labour history, which gives precedence to union organizing and wage disputes, thereby negating the logic and legitimacy of folk organizing that emerge from a common understanding of the workers’ compulsion to respond to what they considered as unjust treatment.

The historians credited the Workers’ League formed in 1932 with leadership, advocacy, and agency for the industrial actions of workers on St. Kitts in 1935. The executive members of the Workers’ League comprised disaffected whites and males of mixed race who wanted to effect change in the politics and the economy on the island (Lewis, 1993). Innis (2005), although critical of the organization’s focus on gaining political power as a prerequisite for improving
conditions of work for plantation employees, embraced the premise that without the structure of union, inherent with its colonial structures and hegemonic practices, the uprising lacked form and impact.

The discourse suggests that without a formal and recognised organization through which worker dissatisfaction could be channelled and negotiated, then no organizing could take place. This perspective denied the effectiveness of grassroots organizing, which during that period would exclude female sugar workers, who comprised a significant portion of those employed on the sugar estates as replacement workers for men as well as in their own right. Consequently, sugar plantations obtained to employ African-Caribbean women in all aspects of cultivation and harvesting on the sugar estates. 4

2.3.3 Uprisings

By January 1935, the acts of defiance targeted against the planters grew in frequency and intensity. Bolland (1985) suggested that the two days of marches and general disruption of the sugar-harvesting season began when a sugar cane worker, in the company of other employees, confronted a manager on Buckley’s plantation, seeking the assurance that all sugar workers would obtain a raise in pay. When the overseer was unable to guarantee the pay increase, the workers expressed their displeasure by throwing their machetes onto the balcony of the manager’s house and set off to notify sugar workers throughout the island. Bolland noted that as the action spread, planters and overseers were terrorised and humiliated by “bands of rioters armed with stones, sticks and machetes” (p. 58). One overseer was forced to strip to his

4 See Bonham Richardson (1983), whose research on migration in St. Kitts suggests that enslaved males migrated as a form of maroonage since the size of the island and the high utilisation of the land space left very little land for runaway slaves to find long-term refuge.
underwear and made to dance in the centre of a crowd. The crowd dispersed when the police arrived.

Sugar workers took to the streets and were joined by their children, employees of the central sugar factory, and retired sugarcane workers, stevedores, porters, farmers, seamstresses, road workers, store clerks, and generally, citizens who used the occasion to register their discontent with the administration of the island. Winston Sutton (1987), in his autobiography, *A Testimony of Triumph*, recalled the general support mobilised in opposition to the plantocracy during the 1935 civil disturbance. He too joined the strikers who had been marching through the village, where he was at the time attending school in a small schoolhouse. Similarly, Washington Archibald (1993), in his autobiography *Reflections on an Epic Journey*, alluded to the groundswell of support among all workers for the sugar workers who openly defied the planters in the 1930s.

The protest marches, interpreted as sugar workers’ dissidence, grew into a movement and rally. In his autobiographical account, Sutton (1987, p. 79) stated that protestors picketed the sugar factory and government buildings; marched to remote sugar estates throughout the island, interrupting the harvesting of sugar canes and destroying domestic vegetable gardens that provided food for the planters and their families; and in some instances, brought government business to a halt. At each gathering, the local army and the police were summoned to disperse the crowd. A state of emergency was declared. Gatherings of three or more persons in public places were banned, and curfews were enforced.

Much of what we know about the civil disturbance that spread throughout the Caribbean in the 1930s has been made available to us through official modes of knowledge. The documents that bear the language and insignia of the British government include parliamentary papers of
deliberations by members of the British parliament and the St. Kitts Island Assembly, reports from British officials assigned to the colony as representatives of the British government, and the Moyne Commission Report that was submitted at the request of the British government (see Johnson, 1987). Additionally, contemporary newspaper accounts provided the perspectives of the elite group of literate residents on the island.

In 1935, the country was served by two periodicals: the *Daily Bulletin* and the *Union Messenger*. The newspapers published the instrument used to enforce martial law, commentaries, and a special supplementary insert on the riots and reported on the court cases. None of the official or journalistic reports contained a quotation or opinion of a sugar worker. The only reference to the sugar workers was reported as mob hysterics and chants. The papers reinforced the official categorization of the protesters activity as riots, which reinforced the notion of resistance as overt violent activity.

Using conventional historical evidence, the historians relied on the official documents to lend academic credibility to their work. The references and research sources such as the archives and libraries yield official documents that speak to the area of study. The print media produced articles representing the opinions and observations of the power elite on the island at a time when illiteracy was prevalent among women and the majority of the population. The secondary sources reproduced the notions of resistance that are entrenched as primary sources, as the writers struggled to produce anti-colonial knowledge. Although the historians were highly critical of the colonial mishandling of the events, they did not present a perspective radically different from the masculinist interpretations of the colonial sources.

The uprising that began in St. Kitts on January 28, 1935, gradually spread throughout the Caribbean. British government officials, including those in the Colonial Office on the British
mainland, who were responsible for the governance of the islands, exchanged correspondence on the incident. In July 1935, two months after receiving the reports on the riots in St. Kitts, the British government directed the Governor to effect legislation to expand the franchise and introduce elections (Inniss, 2005, p. 137). The liberal proscription that granting the vote would improve conditions failed because it was uninformed by the local reality.

Three years following the outbreak on St. Kitts, the British Parliament commissioned an inquiry into the series of uprisings in the British West Indies. In 1939, after approximately eight months of information gathering, the 10-person Commission submitted its findings and recommendations to the Colonial Office (Johnson, 1987). Lord Moyne, an avowed Fabian with liberal views, chaired The West India Royal Commission. The final report was submitted in 1940, following substantial revisions to meet Parliamentary approval.

2.4 Official Colonial Reports

Reginald. St. Johnston (1935), the Governor of the Leeward Islands and administrative head of St. Kitts submitted a report at the request of the Colonial Office in Britain. Chief Justice James Rae (1935), who presided over the speedy trials of persons involved in the uprising, also submitted a report. Both men were conducting one of their intermittent visits to the island at the time of the outbreak of the disturbances in January 1935. The reports were submitted in May 1935 following the High Court sittings during which protestors were speedily adjudicated. The Judge and Governor were resident on a nearby island, Antigua, approximately 68 miles or 110 kilometers from St. Kitts.

2.4.1 The Governor’s Account

The Governor reported that there were two days of riots precipitated by the call for higher wages that had been planted by the executive members of the Workers’ League, a newly formed
organization. He determined that the “men in Basseterre” were ordered to take strike action, and they armed themselves with them “large cudgels.” He described the protestors as “‘credulous’ ‘gullible’ ‘mobs’ ‘who can easily be stirred up to excesses’” (St. Johnston, 1935, p. 2).

According to his report, during the first two days of the protest, January 28 and 29, dissident sugar workers accompanied by a large contingent of unemployed men marched around the island disrupting employees who were “otherwise peaceably engaged in work on the sugar estates” (p. 2). The protestors travelled eastwards from Basseterre on the first day and then west on the second day, threatening anyone who refused to join the march with bodily harm.

By mid-afternoon of the first day, the strikers entered Lodge Estate, confronted and beat the owner Mr. Todd, who when he asked to be handed his gun to protect his property, was given an unloaded gun by one of his employees. The police arrived, after the incident, made some arrests at Estridge Estate, where they met the marchers who had advanced and ordered them to return to their homes, a command with which the marchers complied. (St. Johnston, 1935, p. 5)

On that same day, first day of the disturbances, the members of the Legislative Council ignored the Administrator’s invitation to an emergency meeting to discuss the growing instability in the country. The Governor who heeded the request of the Administrator and returned from his attempted tour of the island to chair the meeting, found an empty meeting room, and hours later still no one had showed up. (St. Johnston, 1935, p. 6) The Legislature’s priority was to ensure their properties were protected. The Governor excused the recalcitrance of the plantocracy. The Council’s action demonstrated that the plantocratic political leadership was inimical to good relations between the state and the majority of the population and that their personal interest conflicted with that of the state.
The members of the Legislature attended the Governor’s garden party, a social event that he hosted at the government’s official residence on the island on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 29. There, in casual conversation, the Governor, in consultation with and at the insistence of the local legislature, signed instruments to effect a state of emergency, commiserate with regulations for curfew hours and warnings against public assembly. He supported and authorized the call to active service of the local Defense Force and its reservists, an armed team of white volunteers, also with connections to the estate owners. He proceeded to send telegraph messages summoning emergency police and military support from nearby islands to quell the disruption. Two British warships stationed in the Caribbean arrived on January 30 and 31.

By his account, the riots ought to have ended on January 29 with a death count of three, but per Governor St. Johnston (1935, p. 6), “Acts of incendiarism in the sugar cane fields, within a few yards of Government House and at other places on the border of Basseterre . . . [and] large bodies of men parading about trying to intimidate the peaceably inclined workers” warranted the landing of marines.

The Governor concluded his report by stating that there was no evidence of “special underlying or contributory cause of the riot” (St. Johnston, 1935, p. 7). He exonerated the planters by quoting from the Daily Bulletin, a conservative weekly newspaper owned by the planters, that stated, “At no time has the labourer been more satisfied with the treatment accorded to him” and reinforced that riots were instigated “by some person or persons of whose actual identity there is no legal proof” (Marshall, 1935, p. 4).

There were established procedures for correspondence between the British government and the colonies. The Secretary of State for the colonies was a senior civil servant in the Colonial Office, with responsibility for the affairs of the colonies. This office was located in London, England.
No Secretary of State for the colonies had ever visited St. Kitts. He relied on the reports submitted from the government officials on the island to inform and implement policies on the island. One can surmise that the Colonial Office became complicit in the oppression of the workers on the islands by incorporating into local policies the biases and interpretations of many officials based on the islands, who became tainted with the hegemonic practices of class, sex, and racial relations of power practiced by the dominant class.

The official records on the civil disturbance were recorded in government documents and published in newspapers. The archival research yielded reports submitted by the Governor of the Leeward Islands, who was visiting the island at the time that the upheaval began. Official documents are published bearing the seal and crest of the official organ which assigns credibility to the document. In the case of the riots, official documents bore the seal of coat of arms of the British government and its colonies, which established the authority of the submission.

The authors of the reports ensured that each paragraph in each document was numbered to facilitate ease of reference for the officials in Britain. The structure also conformed to the format for submitting official reports to the British Colonial office to assign authority as a government document. The report contained no names, save for civil service employees and management staff on the sugar estates, who were referenced as providing information or acting on behalf of the state. The Governor had travelled to the rural areas on two occasions during the first two days of the unrest, on one occasion to obtain from Mr. Todd whom he described as a “highly respected, elderly white planter who for many years had been on the Executive and Legislative Councils” (St. Johnston, 1935, p. 4). On none of his trips to the rural area did he obtain the perspective of a sugar worker.
St. Johnson’s (1935) empathy towards the planters, as is clearly articulated in his report, must be understood within the political regime of the colonies at that time. His success as a governor depended on his relationship with the administrators and local Legislative Council. Members of the Legislative Council were nominated by their peers. The Legislative and Executive branches of the Crown Colony government wielded excessive power and often created deadlocks that disallowed the functioning of government whenever the Governor or Administrator disagreed with the Council members. A deadlock in government would have little effect on the profits and business operations of the planters who controlled the main economic activities on the island. They demonstrated that they did not need the government to operate in order for them to do business.

In a document dated May 13, 1935, Governor R. St. Johnston, then administrative head of the Leeward Islands, submitted a report to the Secretary of State for the colonies in the Colonial Office in Britain, which he prefaced with the following statement:

In compliance with your request I have the honour to send to you the following full report on the recent disturbances in St. Kitts together with my observations on the possible causes underlying or contributing to them. I happened to be in St. Kitts at the time on one of my routine visits of inspection, and thus am able to give you first-hand information of the disturbance. (p. 3)

Appended to the document was a report from the Chief Justice of the Leeward Islands, who had been presiding over all the cases involving the disturbances (Rae, 1935). Both reports reflected the state’s perspective on the events and form part of official documentation of the colonial history of St. Kitts. These reports became a critical reference points for the commissioners of the West India Royal Commission, which was assigned to investigate the disturbances and inform colonial policy in the Leeward Islands for the next two decades following the outbreak of the civil disturbance. These historical reports continue to serve as an objective source of reference for historians and social scientists.
The context of the reports accomplishes facticity. The term facticity, adopted from Smith (1993) and expounded by Manicom and Campbell (1995), demonstrated that text can construct power relations to oppress and exclude information in institutional settings. Although the work did not extend to text produced within colonial institutions and the impact on racialized and colonized populations, it can be applied. Documents produced on the 1935 disturbances by colonial officials are regarded as reliable, historical evidence provided within colonial offices. The numbered paragraphs, the tone conveyed in the text, and the presence of the seal of the British government, which was affixed to the document, form part of the contextual authority of the documentation.

Both types of documents claimed separately to contain the full report on the recent disturbances in St. Kitts, with the supportive legal opinion on the dispensation of justice on the hearings of the court cases. Additionally, the Governor indicated that he was present on the island at the time of the disturbances and, therefore, could provide a firsthand account of the events that transpired. The Governor’s declaration suggests that his account was an objective and privileged recounting of the event. The personal observation of the Governor and the report of the Judge were presented as constitutive of the all that could be known about the events, consequently silencing other knowers and excluding other perspectives and ways of knowing.

The Governor, R. St. Johnston (1935), indicated that the contents of his report were corroborated in a meeting “with various members of the Executive and Legislative Councils, and prominent planters with knowledge of local conditions” (p. 2). The Governor also indicated that he sought to obtain “the correct account of events at The Lodge from Mr. Todd himself” (p. 3). Mr. Todd was described in the Governor’s report as “a well-known and popular white man, who in the defence of his property with a shotgun, was overpowered by the strikers” (p. 5). He had also
sought information from Mr. Dobridge, another manager on a sugar estate, who claimed that he
had shot at protestors when his person and property were threatened in order to prevent being
assaulted because he was aware of what the crowd had done to his colleague Mr. Todd.

The official reports submitted by the Governor and the Judge, which informed the British
authorities, included the writers’ observations and interpretations of what transpired during the
events of the workers’ rebellion as well as verbal reports obtained from individuals of the local
ruling class. The reports, therefore, reflected the perspective of the constituents of the ruling
regime on the British colony, which satisfied the formal mode of reporting to the Colonial Office
in Britain. However, these reports ignored the perspectives of the sugar workers whose interests
were also at stake and who felt sufficiently wronged to defy the plantocracy. The constituent
elements of these official reports, therefore, embraced class, race, gender, and colonial bias that
excluded representation of the workers.

The Governor (St. Johnston, 1935) reported that on the second day, Mr. Dobridge, the plantation
manager fired shots into the group of strikers, who were referred to as a “mob” in the report, and
no accounts were provided of injuries during that incident at Buckley’s Estate. He also reported
that after the Defence Force fired into the crowd of strikers when the gathering refused to comply
with the terms of the Riot Act, there were three fatalities and eight persons injured. This
information was obtained from Major Duke, the Commander of the armed forces, whose verbal
report to the Governor was described as a “detailed account” (p. 6). St. Johnston condemned the
strike, which he claimed escalated into a riot, as misguided and devoid of proper planning and
execution, and he reaffirmed that the planters bore no responsibility for any causes that may have
fuelled the protest action into its second day.
The only mention of women was made in the Chief Justice’s report (Rae, 1935), to justify the planter, Mr. Dobridge, shooting into the crowd of protestors to protect his wife and daughter, who were both white women. Contrarily, he supported the military’s decision to shoot into the crowd of protestors with “women and children in the main body” (p. 11). He reasoned that prolonged inaction by the armed forces would not have deescalated the mood and intent of “an angry, hostile crowd . . . [Therefore, the only option left to the forces . . . “was that of firing on the rioters” (p. 14). Rae clearly assigned greater value to European womanhood than to African-Kittitian women’s lives.

The Chief Justice, who adjudicated, responded to the British Parliament’s request for a report on “whether the requirements of justice were fully met or not in connection with the recent disturbances in St. Kitts” (Cunliffe Lister, 1935, p. 1). Chief Justice Rae (1935) had processed the cases in record time at the behest of the planters, to ensure swift punishment was meted out and that the protestors received just warning should they contemplate another uprising. The Parliament had questioned the matter of harming women and children in the crowd. The Parliament had also suggested that the employees could have been the pawns in a dispute between the sugar manufacturing company and the plantation owners. The narrative suggests that the workers were being manipulated by the economic elite of the new political aspirants in the Workers’ League.

Records of Parliamentary sittings in Britain during the period contained intermittent exchanges by parliamentarians on the matter of the uprising in St Kitts. Two extracts bear out the positions of the British politicians. The accounts indicate Reginald Fletcher (1936) posed a question as follows:

Further to this matter of labour disturbances, has the Government received any final report on the serious labour disturbances at St. Kitts in January, 1935? They seem to be a
very ugly feature indeed in the West Indies, and it would be interesting to hear the reports of the commissions set up to inquire into them. (§1516)

In response to a question from the opposition benches regarding the quality of the reports that had been submitted on the uprising in St. Kitts, the Labour Party parliamentarian in the House of Commons, Mr. Creech Jones (1938), in his presentation on the annual estimates, responded:

> When the inquiry sat on the disturbances in St. Kitts in 1935. There was no legal proof of agitators or agitation. The causes were found in low wages. (§789)

The parliamentary exchange is indicative of a passing parliamentary joust than serious consideration of the circumstances that motivated a large proportion of employees to protest. The matter of incremental divestment of financial responsibilities to the colonies at a time of fiscal challenges in Britain took precedence to the procedure for gathering information that would provide the details required to eliminate the root causes of the protest. The minutiae are hidden in the verbal accounts by the sugar workers who were never interviewed.

### 2.4.2 Perspective of the West India Royal Commission

The protracted instability on St. Kitts, which ignited similar events in the rest of the colonized Caribbean, including Guyana formerly British Guiana and Belize then known as British Honduras, on the South and Central American peninsula, had become an embarrassment to the liberal British Government. The British government hastily convened and dispatched a 10-member team of white, British residents, including two women, all with no experience in the West Indies, and two supporting secretaries to the West India Royal Commission⁵. The

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⁵ The original Members of the Royal West India Commission were Baron Walter Edward Moyne (Chairman), Sir Reginald Edward Stubbs (Vice Chairman), Dame Rachel Eleanor Crowdy, Sir Walter McLennan Citrine, Sir Percy Graham Mackinnon, Ralph Asseton, Mary Georgina Blacklock, Frank Leonard Engledow, Hubert Douglas Henderson, and Morgan Jones. Lord Moyne died one year before the report was published. The Commissioners used the occasion to visit Puerto Rico, Cuba, Virgin Islands, Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique.
commissioners held 131 days of hearings between September 28, 1938 to June 8, 1939, in the colonies and in London.

The West India Royal Commission (WIRC), also referred to as the Moyne Commission, was appointed to conduct an inquiry into the wave of rebellions in the British Caribbean in the 1930s and to present a written report to the Colonial Office in Britain (Johnson, 1987). The British Royal Commission is a constitutional mechanism employed by the imperial government to investigate matters of public or political interest in the empire. The Commission and its members were appointed by warrant, signed by the monarch and by law, autonomous to the point of self-dissolution. Despite the extensive authority by law, the reality is that Commissions are appointed by and exist at the pleasure of the Executive branch of government. The report and recommendations of Commissions were neither binding on the government that appointed it nor any succeeding government, and there is evidence that the British government has terminated Commissions (Smith, 1970).

While the British government positioned Royal Commissions to British colonies as apolitical, objective bodies, scholars interrogating their composition and purpose suggested otherwise. Mongia (2004), building on Foucault’s notion of regime of truth, discovered that the repetitive use of this imperial apparati that inquired into nineteenth century Indian indentureship discursively constructed impartial regimes of truth that resulted in perpetuating scandalous migration practices and policies. Similarly, Razack (2015) demonstrated that commissions of inquiries designed to understand and recommend solutions in indigenous communities missed the patterns and high incidence of death in custody of the indigenous Canadians and that suspicious deaths continue in alarming numbers, despite their functioning as regimes of truth.
Johnston (1989) was harshly critical of the royal commissions deployed to Trinidad during the 1930s. He argued that their recommendations were devoid of benevolence and stopped short of dealing with the fundamental inequalities in the society because of preconceived notions and the urgency of applying a quick fix to instability in the colony. For Johnson (1987), the optics of stability in the Empire comprised the desired outcome of two concurrent commissions of inquiry to Trinidad in 1938 (p. 266). Reports of Commissions, despite assertions of thorough, robust, and objective claims, are as reliable as the methodology applied and the sources that inform the outcome.

The Moyne Commission arrived in St. Kitts in 1938 (Moyne et al. 1945). With the local government having failed to provide an acceptable report on the riot in 1935, the commission, invested with its aura of objectivity and autonomy, was expected to produce a more reliable version of the uprising on the island, its causes, and the solutions. The international climate also played into the formation and deployment of the WIRC. The British colonial supremacy was seemingly becoming unhinged: pre-war rhetoric by Germany and Italy condemned as scandalous the conditions in the colonies (Johnson, 1987). In Britain, political crisis led to the premature end of the Labour party and the installation of an unsteady National Government, and with the possibility of an outbreak of war, the oil reserves in Trinidad needed protection (Hansard). It would have been critical for the Britain to maintain calm in the Caribbean in order to consolidate its reputation as the dominant world power.

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6 Trinidad’s importance is borne out in the Hansard records, 21 July 1937, vol 326 cc2190-3 Major Owen: In view of the great strategic importance of this island and of the fact that it is practically the only source of supply, within British Dominions, of oil in case of emergency, will the Right Hon. Gentleman consider making more adequate provision for the protection of law and order within the island, and also for the establishment of a naval base there?
The 10-member team of white, middle and upper class British residents including two women, spent three days in St. Kitts, December 21-23, 1938. They interviewed six groups and the Senior Medical Officer. Among the 22 interviewees from among the Kittitian elite were two women, both appearing as members of the St. Kitts Service League, a charity organization founded and operated by members of the elite in society. The other groups included the Sugar Cane Investigation Committee comprising male plantation owners, the unofficial members of the Legislative Council, St. Kitts Chamber of commerce, St. Kitts Workers’ League, and Ministers of Religion.

Some interviewees returned to the inquiry in different capacities, which reflects the overlapping roles of a small minority of white and white-identified elites in the society. Richards (2000) discussed the nepotism, cronyism, and generally incestuous plantocratic practices that pervaded in appointments to public service positions. The formal interviews were stacked with members of the local elite. The report recorded the inclusion of two memoranda, in the form of briefs, one from the Secretary to the Workers’ League, Joseph N. France, a young black clerk, the contents of which confirmed the issues raised by the organization’s members, and another from the St. Kitts Teachers Association. The Colonial Office also provided the commissioners with the reports from St. Kitts as background material to aid their investigation.

The Colonial office provided to the commission the reports from the Governor (St. Johnston, 1935) and Chief Justice (Rae, 1935) as background material to aid their investigation. Long-standing national organizations with grassroots leadership and membership: the Heart and Hand Friendly Society, the Black and White Society (representing the colour of its members’ uniform), the Lodge, the Odd Fellows, and the Pardna Han Sokl (informal savings groups), were not represented at the interviews. Notably absent were religious leaders from the fastest growing
evangelical or sideway churches on the island. The absence of these organizations resulted in the exclusion from the report of the perspectives of the large majority of the population and eliminated the opportunity to obtain valuable information on the disturbances from field workers in the sugar industry.

The report (Moyne et al., 1945) documented deplorable living and working conditions of the employees and less than humane quality of life. The report confirmed that there is little scope for land settlement in St. Kitts except through the displacement of estate cane growing (Moyne et al., 1945, p. 319.18). It recommended the introduction of trade unions, elected officials in government, a robust social welfare programme supplemented by a Welfare fund provided by the British. It recommended population growth reduction as a prerequisite for economic growth.

With regards to women in the sugar industry, Moyne et al. (1945) noted that female employees were equally engaged in physically demanding jobs as their male counterparts and were heads of households who received unequal pay, yet they stopped short of recommending just remuneration for the female employees.

The West India Royal Commission Report (Moyne et al., 1945) had raised a number of unsettling issues to the British government and Parliament; consequently, the report had to be revised on a number of occasions to meet the Parliament’s approval. The Colonial Office issued a directive to have Part V of the Report- Conclusions and Recommendations- issued approximately two years before the full report was approved and released. Moyne et al. (1945) recommended that an annual sum of one million pounds be paid for a period of 20 years into a Welfare Fund for distribution to all the British Caribbean colonies. A strict mechanism for accountability was to be developed with guidelines given in the Report. At the same time, the British government was concerned that its recommendation for political integration of its
colonies in the Caribbean had not progressed. Administrative costs for the colonies were considered burdensome, and the British government had hoped to reduce the costs through political integration of the colonies. The request for increased funding was a sore point, as borne out in the Hansard records of the Parliamentary sittings.

The West India Royal Commission was the only commission of its kind in centuries of British tradition that was not published in full upon its presentation to the government. The colonial Secretary presented a verbal report to Parliament in December of 1939, but the recommendations were not presented or published until 1945. British Prime Minister Baldwin said in November 1936,

I would like to emphasise . . . that a Royal Commission in this country is an entirely independent body, uncontrolled by His Majesty’s government and perfectly free to report in any sense that it thinks fit within the terms of reference. (Great Britain, Parliament, 317, H. C., Deb. 31)

Moyne et al.’s (1945) report did not indicate that the Commission visited rural villages and slum sites in the towns as it did in Jamaica or Guyana or Trinidad, nor did it report a general outdoor meeting as occurred in Barbados. So there is no evidence of direct contact with the persons who had participated in the protest in St. Kitts. The dye had been cast on how existing conditions could be improved without obtaining, from those most affected, their perspectives on how the conditions could be improved.

Moyne et al.’s (1945) report confirmed the findings of previous commissions to the Caribbean, one as recent as 1929, that stated the majority of the population residing in the territories was living in deplorable conditions with a quality of life almost equivalent to conditions of a slave society. The cost of implementing the recommendations and the distraction of World War II averted action on the report from 1939 when it was prepared for Parliament, to 1945 when it was published. It butressed the imaginings of the officials and other intellectuals in the British empire
of the disfigured genders and dysfunctional families in St. Kitts, necessary to support and entrench the fabricated superiority of the British culture and white race for continued empire building and to entrench colonialism.

Moyne et al.’s (1945) report identified no specific causes of the rebellion, but proposed how existing conditions could be improved. However, the commission did not obtain testimony from those most affected as to their perspectives on how the conditions could be improved. Moyne et al. neither shed light on what the protestors expressed as their reasons for the protest, nor did they provide any details or analysis of the protests. Devoid of documented evidence found in the inquiry, Moyne et al. concluded that the event was a riot that required military intervention.

2.4.3 Periodicals and Journalists Accounts

Newspaper accounts of the incident were found in the two contemporary publications on the island, which represented the views of two rivalling factions—the white, traditional elite with conservative values versus the newer progressive plantation owners and the lettered, Black, and mixed-race middle class. The former were the owners of and contributors to the St. Kitts-Nevis Daily Bulletin, which was founded in 1915, while the views of the latter group were represented in The Union Messenger, which began publication in 1921.

The St. Kitts-Nevis Daily Bulletin carried articles and commentaries that expressed opposition to the actions of the civil disturbance. The articles in The Union Messenger were sympathetic to the cause of the sugar workers, but did not overtly support the workers’ protest actions. The issues that fuelled the rivalry between an aspiring new political class of biracial and Black, educated Kittitians, imbibed with Fabian ideology, and the ruling plantocracy, which refused to relinquish its monopoly on the economy and politics, were recurrent topics articulated in the newspapers.
The progressive group wanted to be included as political decision makers in the Councils that were monopolised by the traditional plantocracy. The liberal faction, which had laid claim to connections and a common ideology with the Britain’s Labour Party, used the historical moment to lobby for reform in governance. The goal was to effect the transformation of Council membership from the process of nomination to one that involved elected office on a wider franchise. The Councils in St. Kitts rejected the introduction of elections in December 1934 to the chagrin of the liberals and their Fabian colleagues in London. It was not until 1941 that the British government unilaterally legislated the introduction of elections. The specific regulations had to be formulated by an incorrigible local government that applied stringent property qualifications, which resulted in a very limited franchise and the continued disenfranchisement of the majority in society, who were Black and property less, until 1952 when universal suffrage rights were introduced.

The male dominance issues and positions are embedded into the papers’ content and context. The newspaper reported on the political stand-off and the intimidation by conservative members of the legislature by suggesting that “by extending the franchise to vote would soon have conditions degenerating into the worst form of Haitian politics” in vogue prior to the American occupation and that “men of substance” would vote to retain the status quo, while “men of straw” would vote for a change that would lead to economic disaster (Sebastian, 1935b, p. 2).

7 Colonial officials, their surrogates and plantation managers used the phrase “Haitian politics” as a derogatory term to denigrate government controlled by Africans, more specifically descendants of enslaved African in the Caribbean. The former French colony of Saint Domingue, renamed Haiti, had been seized in a coup by the enslaved population in 1791. It represented a victory over white dominance that terrified the colonials.
The embittered, unofficial opposition taken by the *Union Messenger* vilified the plantocracy and the British government for its inaction. In an article in the *Union Messenger*, published on January 28, 1935, under a report captioned “The Plantocracy of St. Kitts Rejects the Elective Principle,” (Sebastian, 1935a) wrote:

> All schools of political economy agree on the principal of: no taxation without representation and we enjoin the people of St. Kitts to stand firm on the public principle, come what may: Public opinion is with the people of St. Kitts and this moral backing of sympathy should in-spirit stir them to action in the political struggle on the question, and should serve as a tower of strength to those who are denied the right to vote or to have any other kind of representation. . . . We harp on these facts again because it was a fine opportunity to expose the diplomacy and duplicity of Downing Street. (p. 2)

The reporting surmised that those men who had been denied access to political power, as a consequence of the successful lobbying of those who already had access, refocused their method of attack by concentrating on agitating the workers to defy plantocratic rule. The opposition recognised that the Achilles heel of the plantocracy was in the economic control over the sugar industry—its sole income earner which dominated the economic landscape of St. Kitts.

On the matter of casualties as a consequence of the upheaval in the Buckley’s site area, the *Daily Bulletin* reported, “A grave responsibility rests with those who are responsible for fermenting dissatisfaction: which has resulted in the death of 3 and wounding of 8” (Blackett, 1935a, p. 2). The *Union Messenger* concurred with the count reported in the *Daily Bulletin* and vowed its dedication “to the service of the people that no good cause shall lack a champion, and that wrong shall not thrive unopposed” (Sebastian, 1935b, p. 2), but failed to seek out a more realistic count of the number of persons injured by the pellets that had wounded many who were in the crowd on Buckley’s Estate and later at Wigley Avenue, Basseterre.

The *Daily Bulletin*, which appeared as a daily publication, was published more frequently than the *Union Messenger*, which was a weekly publication. Consequently, the *Daily Bulletin*
presented the conservative, pro-planter position of its contributors more often and had the greater advantage of influencing the reading public’s sentiment than the Union Messenger. Similarly, the frequency of the publication of the Daily Bulletin occupies a greater proportion of the primary historical records on the incident. The Daily Bulletin is, therefore, more likely to be referenced in secondary historical writing and to inform the interpretation of the historical event. The newspapers were located in the ruling relations by content of the writers, frequency of the publications, and preservation as archival documents, which affected their availability to researchers.

The Union Messenger, which assumed a position sympathetic to the cause of the workers, provided no articles from the perspective of those sugar cane workers involved in protest action. No editorials or other articles quoted the workers, their families, or leaders in the protest. The Union Messenger accepted the official designation of the protest as a riot by the authorities and failed to counter the argument by redefining the event using terms obtained from the protestors. On February 7, 1935, under the caption “What is a Riot?” (Blackett, 1935d, p. 2), the Daily Bulletin sought to define and construct the activities of the workers as a riot that justifiably required the reading of the Riot Act before the soldiers shot into the crowd. No counter argument was made by the Union Messenger as would have been expected. Neither paper, therefore, articulated the position of the worker.

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8 Newspapers were used for wrapping purchases in village shops and as recycled for utilitarian purposes among the poor who more likely had greater access to the Union Messenger, which was reused to wrap purchases at village shops or as toilet tissue. This meant fewer copies of the Union Messenger were preserved. The researcher noticed gaps in the dates of the publication of the Union Messenger. Mr. A. M. Losada, a Portuguese proprietor, donated a complete set of the conservative newspaper, The Daily Bulletin, to the National Archives, St. Kitts.
During the period of the disturbance and the period prior to the start of the trials of persons accused of being involved in the riots, the two newspapers published numerous articles on the unrest. In a period when investigative journalism was not the norm, neither newspaper sought to interview protestors or to interrogate beyond the descriptive information they reproduced. In one article, the *Union Messenger* claimed that the writer was representing the views of the protestors from conversations the writer had overheard. The *Union Messenger*, which was touted as representing the voice of liberal Kittitians, also assumed representation of the protestors, but without attempting to obtain their perspectives on the events.

The protestors’ voices emerged only within the proscribed context of the court proceedings that produced legal documents, manuscripts, and journalists’ impressions of the responses by witnesses. The coloniser’s language replaced the ancestor language of the defendants; the elicited witness statements in the court and the judicial parameters that were unfamiliar to the accused constructed the protestors as voiceless and obtuse. Newspapers produced the Bakhtinian notion of a monologic text, which subsumed the intentions, meanings, and voices of the protestors.

The textual content contained in 56 articles published in both periodicals from January to April 1935 presented the underlying cause of the uprising as peripheral to the participants who took to the streets and defied the armed forces. The *Daily Bulletin*’s storyline charged that the leaders of the St. Kitts Benevolent Society, who had been vying to displace the existing political elite, instigated the upheaval and drew into its plot field workers from the sugar industry who had no interest in public protest (Blackett, 1935b, p. 2). The paper’s analysis framed the protestors as a gullible and unthinking mob.
The sugar workers and their sympathizers who initiated the civil unrest were considered as the other. Their actions were represented through selected events and interpretations determined by the ruling class, to qualify their actions as illegal, hostile, and the resurgence of terror, which was compared to the activities of the Haitian revolution 1796-1804 that resulted in establishing the first republic in the Caribbean region. Framing the dispute within the context of the experience in Haiti in the nineteenth century created the context to justify the summoning of the British maritime forces that patrolled the Caribbean to quell the upheaval in St. Kitts.

The slave population had overthrown the government in the French colony of Saint-Domingue and had seized power in 1791. The insurgent Black population toppled the plantocracy, which ended their enslavement. Approximately 13 years of struggle ensued; the ex-slaves in Saint Domingue assumed responsibility for governing the country and renamed it Haiti. The plantocracy in the Caribbean region and its supporters often invoked the successful revolution in Haiti to create unity among its members and galvanise support from Britain to reinforce its monopoly over government and protect the status quo.

The equivalence between the upheavals in St. Kitts with the early stages of the Haitian revolution was in the leadership and mobilization of the sugar workers that the Daily Bulletin attributed to the work of “disaffected middleclass men of mixed race” (Blackett, 1935c, p. 2). The paper also alluded to the racial make-up of those in the front-line of the marches and scuffles that occurred during the events, who were described as Black working-class men. The hegemonic discourse that tended towards the denigration of a Black government by comparing Haiti to St. Kitts served to invoke fear and self-preservation strategies among the plantocracy and the Colonial Office.

Secondly, it ascribes a middle-class interpretation of women’s behaviour that contradicts the historical findings of female workers in the early twentieth century sugar industry (Shepherd &
Payne, 2003). Notions that restrict women to the private or exclusively domestic realm could not apply to female sugar workers in the labour-intensive sugar industry, in a country with a small and rapidly declining labour force, where depressed rates contributed to poor morale among the employees, which pushed many citizens who could have obtained employment in the local sugar industry to migrate in search of better working conditions and pay.

A large proportion of the Union Messenger’s coverage of the rebellion focused on the trials of the dissidents and the outcomes. With its staff’s access to men, women, and children who were directly involved in the protest, the weekly newspaper could have printed human interest stories and other personal testimonies of what occurred even before the trials. In the absence of direct perspectives of the protestors, the paper missed an opportunity to move beyond empathizing with the protestors and giving voice to their issues for posterity. Neither paper sought an understanding of the sugar workers’ issues outside the courtroom setting.

2.5 Historians’ Accounts

Historians acknowledged the period of populist dissent in St. Kitts as one in a series of uprisings and a mood of unrest by the labouring populations of sugar workers. Oil field workers compromised the majority of African-Caribbeans in the Caribbean region during the period 1935-1939. The year 1935 was also considered a significant historical milestone, for historians who connected the civil disturbances with the hundredth anniversary of the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 passed in the British Parliament, to abolish slavery legally in the colonised countries of the empire, with the exception of St. Helena and Srilanka.

The historians, reporting on the period of unrest in St. Kitts, utilized a wide temporal frame in their work. Innis (1979, 1989, 2005) covered the periods 1896-1936 and 1883-1983, and Richards (1993a, 1993b) eclipsed the event as one of a series of revolts during the period 1896-
1995, while Brown (1992) inserted the event as a miniscule occurrence within the biography of a national political leader. The broad historical frame does not allow for the specifics, which could provide the rich content to the historical moment that has been considered as a watershed in Caribbean development, which these historians attributed to the decline in colonial control and the birth of nationalist movements.

The writers relied on newspaper sources and other official archival documents to produce secondary historical accounts of the event, which reproduced the low casualty and injury rates recorded in the original documents. The official figures relating to fatalities and injuries were accomplished by accounting only for those persons who sought medical assistance at the local hospital and those who died during the fracas in Basseterre on January 29 (Blackett, 1935b, p. 2). This method of accounting excluded those who suffered minor injuries and those, who for fear of repression, sought the assistance of family and friends to care for them.

By official accounts, three persons were killed and eight were injured in clashes with the armed forces (Richards, 1993b, p. 19). An additional two persons suffered injuries as a result of incidents that occurred during protests in the countryside (Inniss, 2005). Official accounts, including newspaper reports, corroborated on the evidence that many rounds of ammunition were fired into the crowd of protestors on the afternoon of January 29, 1935. Labour historians and political economists Bolland (1995), Henry (1972), Lewis (1939), Richards (1993b), and Smith and Smith (1989) reproduced the number of injuries and fatalities on St. Kitts, which varied between totals of 11 and 12 in later works on the episode.9

A micro study from the experiential perspective of protestors as a method challenges conventional modes of referencing and historical inquiry employed in the existing historical accounts of the event. The historical accounts have been complicit in representing the injuries, mitigating the impact of the armed forces against unarmed citizens, and consequentially, devaluing the bodies of the protestors. The archival sources are colonised sources produced by the officers in government and elite in society who were literate in English and whose interpretations were admitted to the archives. An investigation that focused on the impact on families, where women serve as the main caregivers, would have yielded complementary numbers of the number of fatalities and injuries related to the protest.

The historians’ approach adopted the chronological order of events reported in the official accounts, restricting their foci to those occurrences that formulated the colonial discursive. Their stories began with sugar plantation employees’ refusal to work at the start of the sugar-harvesting season and ended with the arrival of two British war ships January 30 and 31 to enforce the power of the authorities over the protestors and the suppression of a rebellion. The historians, descendants of the population of protestors, reproduced a history published after the country gained independence in 1983 under African-Caribbean political leaders, which maintained the colonial interpretation of that period. The histories do not contest the colonial deprecation of the protestors and implicate the colonized knowledge production and reproduction.

Reporting on the arrival of warships and the points of contact between the military and protestors served to legitimize the application of the term riot and to justify the request for military

intervention from the British government, reportedly to return stability to the island. It was with their arrival, however, that the local police, with renewed confidence, conducted weeks of searches, harassment, and pre-trial incarceration of protestors who were alleged to have participated in the disturbance, which were not reported in the historical accounts. The two British war ships remained in close proximity to the Basseterre harbour throughout the duration of the trials, which a protestor interpreted as a reminder of the might of the colonial government and the imperial government’s support to injustices by the local authorities.

The analysis concludes existing historical accounts that focus on formal workers organizing and nationalism, based on a change in political leadership interpreted through the prism of labour history, present the protestors as pawns rather than agents in the St. Kitts rebellion in 1935. Additionally, the notion of mass nationalist movements led by charismatic leaders universalises how political consciousness is manifested and resistance is articulated in the texts.

Existing literature that features the uprising in St Kitts revealed a disembodied, masculinist approach that muted the women’s involvement. The women’s experience has remained undisclosed because (a) methods of research and interpretation privilege official accounts, (b) resonance of androgyny that inform studies of plantation economies in the Caribbean and which privilege class and race at the expense of gender, (c) the search for charismatic leaders and heroes to emerge from violent struggle precludes most females from being recognised in those categories, and (d) evidence of women’s involvement in the civil disturbance has been treated as peripheral and no further exploration had been conducted. The literature affords opportunity to redress the masculine bias in the accounts on the 1935 protest in St. Kitts. This work gives the necessary focus to women’s agency in the resistance activities and presents a new understanding of what transpired during the days of rebellion.
Similarly, scholars depicted enslaved men and women as constantly involved in struggles for their freedom, while they interpreted their descendants’ cause in the public protest of the 1930s as a demand for political democracy and workers’ rights enjoyed by British citizens. These rights, designed to bring equality to the colonized, racialized, and gendered populations in the Caribbean, warrant future interrogation beyond the reforms to the Westminster system that Quinn (2015a) and Ryan (1999) propose or to unions that Bolles (2015) and Reddock (2008) offers. I argue that the African-Kittitian women articulate an analysis of the 1935 protest that produces a new narrative of the events, which is relevant to inform future discussions on political change and organizing.

The historiographical surveys that focus on African women in the British Caribbean area (Brereton, 2013; Macpherson, 2007; Shepherd, 1999b; Stubbs, 1999) are replete with evidentiary persuasiveness of the militancy of African-Caribbean women, from slavery to the twentieth century. We now know that women in most of the larger British Caribbean countries stood out in nationalist and other twentieth century movements, but we know very little about how women in the smaller territories drew on the militancy of their ancestors to inform their political consciousness and engage in the anti-colonial struggle of the 1930s.

Historical accounts on Anglo-Caribbean women’s resistance from Beckles (1989) and Mathurin-Mair (2006) and who used conventional research resources can be compared to Brodber (2004), Craig-James (2008), Macpherson (2007), and Reddock (1994), who combined the traditional research methods with oral sources and utilized wide temporal lenses to cover a series of episodes. This study is not intended to replace or to challenge history’s canons; rather it captures the experiences of the tellers and combines the ethnographic approach of the anthropologist and
the disruptive discourse of metafiction employed in post-colonial literary works to inscribe the women’s experiences into scholarly discourse.

Earlier authors have contributed to a narrative of neo-colonial resistance that focuses on nationalism and trade unionism as the expected outcomes of the uprisings in the St. Kitts in 1935. It highlights the political aspirations of a growing sector of educated Black and biracial Kittitians and their challenge to replace the exclusively white, elite plantocracy while muting the perspectives of protestors; whose oral knowledge source was not assigned equal evidentiary value to archival sources; whose language was discounted as appropriate for academic knowledge production; and whose bodies have been constructed as consumers rather than producers of knowledge. These finding have relevance for further discussion of feminist historian Laura Putnam’s (2006) questions regarding “why high hopes for independence rose so quickly in the British Caribbean and why some of those hopes have proven so illusory” (p. 626).

Mainstream accounts and official documents paid peripheral attention to gender as a critical element in the interpretation of the historical event. The autobiographical works by Archibald (1993) and Sutton (1987) makes no reference to women’s involvement in the protests; while historians and trade unionists acknowledge their presence in the events, they did not ascribe to them any political consciousness or organizational involvement. Similarly, historical works by Bolland (1995, 2001), France (n.d.), Inniss (2005), O’Flaherty (1978), and Richards (1993b) recognize the limited expansion of the franchise, which continued to exclude the majority of sugar workers and the women with whom this study is concerned, as a positive outcome of the national unrest. Browne (1992) and Inniss’s (2005) accounts focus on the riots and the emergence of male dominated trade union leaders to give impetus to the political labour movement on the island.
Kittitian historians Browne (1992) and Inniss (2005) concurs with Caribbean historians Gordon Lewis (1968), Keith Hart (1987), and other Marxist radicals as well as the liberal economist Arthur Lewis (1993) that the insurgency that occurred in St. Kitts in 1935 was an anti-colonial conflict. They premise the outbreak of the rebellion in the British Caribbean on an ideological ferment of an elite circle of men who, disenchanted with rejection and prospects for employment abroad, returned home infused with liberal, Anglicized values to replace the traditional conservative politicians and to advocate on the behalf of the working class, comprised almost exclusively of African-Kittitian sugar estate employees.

Although there were women among the protestors, the focus on men as leaders of the march, engaging in physical confrontation and charged rioters, the accounts occluded the active involvement of the female protestors. Accordingly, the historians conflated the interests of the protestors with that of the members of the Workers’ League, which they elicited from among the many chants of the protestors’ “higher wages,” which they interpreted as the protestors’ trade unions and the expansion of political democracy.

The literature conceded that women and children were in the crowds of protestors. It relegated the women’s role to loud chatter, verbal abuse, taunting, and vociferous laughter during the marches. The literature alluded to a possible planning and awareness meeting organized one week before the protest by the members of the Worker’s League. A meeting convened in the Mutual Improvement Society Hall, a place where the disaffected male elites held meetings and engaged in intellectual discussions, to which head cutters and other influential men among sugar workers were invited. The informal planning and strategizing activities, associated with subaltern struggle in which there was a strong female presence, were not captured by the literature.
Whereas, discursive practices of hegemonic masculinity filtered through the historians’ interpretation of the protest, Audre Lorde’s (1984) admonition that “there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle for we do not live single issue lives” (p. 138) is very instructive in this regard, for it does not speak exclusively to intersectionality of individuals, but can be applied to the deconstruction of domination.

The subjective positions of Black women in the British colony of St. Kitts who participated in the protest in 1935 were not represented in the dominant discourse; their terms of engagement, priorities, and expected outcomes require attention and an approach that differs significantly from those of the Workers’ League as contained in the mainstream historians’ accounts. The precedence assigned to the Workers’ League obfuscates the independent initiative of the subaltern group and shades the historical and material conditions that define the terrain of struggle for the women who risked their lives as protestors.

In the absence of suffragette organizing and a civil rights movement in the Caribbean, feminist social scientists interpreted political consciousness within the framework of the labour movement and its contradictions of colonial governance (Macpherson 2007, Reddock). Their interpretive accounts of the period highlighted women whose activities confirmed the nationalist discourse pertaining to political parties and trade unions. Consequently, the organizing practices and traditions utilized by the majority of female protestors were discursively excluded, resulting in a missed opportunity to construct governance structures informed by the influential protestors.

In many Caribbean islands, more especially the smaller islands in the Leewards, the political parties and trade unions emerged as co-depended organizations. Rhoda Reddock (1988) identified Elma Francois’ political awareness and action during the 1930s rebellion in Trinidad, Macpherson’s (2007) work on the Belize rebellion focuses on Efreda Trapp for her involvement
in national party politics and trade union organization. The Women’s Arms and Women’s Branches, subsidiaries of the central party and union, were major features to solicit women’s support, but not for their unmediated inclusion in the organizational structure, despite the general acceptance of African-Caribbean women’s influence in the communities and their intrusion into national political discussion.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter established that existing historical analysis covers the official story and critiques it. The accounts reproduce hegemonic power relations endemic in colonialism. Tellingly, accounts are entirely masculine-centred, with foci on riots, unionization, nationalism, and state governance that reflect the aspirations of males engaged in a power struggle on a macro level. Absent from the discourse of masculinist power were the women and children who were equally committed to the resistance movement. One does not get a sense of the minutiae of the historic episode. The feelings of the women who feature in this study, their concerns, and perspectives on the insurrection have not been captured in the official documents.

The chapter provided a socio-political, periodic background on St. Kitts. It discussed the interpretation of the episodic period from contemporary accounts by colonial officials and newspapers. It then considered the perspectives provided in the secondary sources found in historical scholarship, autobiographies, and biographies. This chapter is important as a complementary comparative to the methodology applied to disclose hidden truths that would enrich the existing knowledge on the event and the complex dynamics of colonial relations of power.

The discourse represents perspectives on a colonised African-Kittitian population produced through colonial state documents and liberal historical reconstructions. This study will contest
the colonised representations of the protestors by utilising methodologies and theoretical frameworks to decolonise the interpretation of the event. It will present how the survivors of the 1935 protest are contradictory memory bearers, contesting the dominant discourse by probing the blind spots in official documents. In the next chapter, I will discuss Caribbean feminist knowledge production as a framework for this study.
Chapter 3
Feminist Theorising

Chapter Two revealed how certain historical texts construct and interpret the popular protest in St. Kitts in 1935 that obfuscate the subjectivities of the protestors and occlude the details of the event. The glaring gender bias in the authors’ interpretations requires attention to the status of feminist theorizing in the Caribbean. There is need for the reader to gain an appreciation of how feminist scholars theorize resistance and protest and African-Caribbean women’s involvement in political action. Secondly, it will provide the reader with a glimpse into what Mohammed (1998) described as “an internal discourse which is specific to the region” (p. 1), with a uniqueness in feminist circles that includes male colleagues who are prolific in and supportive of the scholarship, thus allowing feminism in the Caribbean to be a dialogue between men and women.

The analysis of material in the literature review demonstrated that African-Kittitian women comprised the majority of the population. While colonial documents pathologized the protest and justified the violent suppression by colonial forces, historians’ interpretations focused on emergent organizational structures to support a liberal notion for developing political democracies based on the Westminster political system and British-based union organizations to bargain on behalf of the workforce. Women, when mentioned, were projected as either supporters of their male counterparts or compliant workers, and the interpretation of the event accomplished a masculinist hegemonic that is alien to African-Caribbean women’s experience.

This chapter illuminates the contributions of Anglophone Caribbean feminist scholars and researchers to the historiography of African-Caribbean females and theorising of their experiences. These academics have engaged a range of sources and methodologies to recover
and to analyse the hidden histories of the lives of the enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean region. The historical description and interpretive methodologies have begun to restore, in textual form, the identities and subjectivities of the enslaved populations to accessible textual format now acceptable to social science disciplines. It is timely that we turn our eyes to this subject once again, recalling the political significance of the protest and resistance in these histories and refocusing on their struggles of the 1930s, both to remember and consider how they might inform women’s struggles today.

I offer gendered interpretations of resistance of African-Caribbean women found in Caribbean feminist scholarship. I do so in order to illuminate part of the discursive field in which my project is located. This chapter continues the interrogation of the ways in which African-Caribbean women are constructed as protestors. It introduces my thesis, developed in subsequent chapters, that there is more to be learned from African-Caribbean women’s experiences in protest and resistance, which have not been made available, and that it can be best made accessible through a gendered interpretation of the protest. Concomitantly, it reveals that a gendered interpretation defies a monolithic notion of protest that emerges from a colonial epistemology and proffers that subjectivity produces a different narrative that interrupts the dominant narrative.

I take this micro collective approach at a juncture in intellectual thought when postmodern sensibilities, transnational scholarship, and multiple gendered identities crisscross the intellectual landscape of womanisms and feminisms. I do so despite the contention by Caribbean scholars that a focus on African-Caribbeans occludes the multi-racial/ethnic/colour and gender complexities of the region (Brereton, 1988; Mohammed, 1988) and an imagined Caribbean monolith. This study demonstrates that there is more to be said and unveiled of African-
Caribbean feminist thought emanating from the scholarship that brings into perspective the underserved Eastern Caribbean islands. I acknowledge the dominance of the feminist writings emerging from the British colonised Caribbeans in my work as a product of my own colonial training and location. The work, however, is a continuation of the liberation process and the reconstituting of Caribbean feminist ontologies and epistemologies.

African Caribbean is a contested concept. Its use emerged late twentieth century as a distinguishing tool to dissipate the monolithic cultural discourse designating Caribbeans as Black or of African origin. African Caribbean forms part of the postmodernist view of highlighting difference and recognising heterogeneity of Caribbeans in scholarship. The term describes Caribbeans of African descent who are phenotypically Black or who identify politically as of African descent. What might appear in scholarship as an intransient refusal to present African-Caribbean women as a diverse group, with differential access to resources during enslavement as well as after, is more an attempt at avoiding an argument about levels of oppressions. This area has not been given adequate attention in the scholarship, but portends as a locus of power to disrupt, defy, negotiate, and resist coloniality from our varying locations.

Caribbeans self-identify in a series of hybridized designations that demonstrate a complex ancestral association to the Caribbean (Bobb-Smith, 1998, p. 294). By 2000, Caribbean feminist scholars focused more intently on the debates surrounding woman, gender, and difference in keeping with the northern dictates without fully surrendering indigenous concerns (Newton, 2013)\textsuperscript{10}. European-American post-modern feminism urged a focus on the various Caribbean

\textsuperscript{10} I use the term indigenous mindful of Newton’s (2013) caution against the appropriation of the Caribbean space by diasporic populations in her work “Returns to Native Land: Indigeneity and decolonisation in the Anglophone Caribbean” in \textit{Small Axe, 17}, 108-122.
ethnicities, while ignoring the need for research inclusive of more islands and inclusive of diverse representations of island populations.

I focus on social scientific scholarship produced within academia, cognizant of the hegemonic relations of imperial capital and structures of coloniality that inform the production of such knowledge and my own position as a diasporic researcher located in North America. The use of English language, the modes and means of production, and the hierarchy of knowledges that cause some knowledges to be more accessible than others means that there are some studies that will not be considered in this work, which leaves open the possibilities for new historiographies. I recognise the implications for producing academic work within the developmental paradigm that privileges control of subjectivity and knowledge, which can result in epistemological colonisation and the construction of Caribbean subjectivity as inferior and constituted of deficits and lacks.11

I assess the contributions of Caribbean feminist social scientific scholarship after four decades of recovering, retrieving, and theorizing representations of African-Caribbean women. Wane, Deliovsky, and Lawson’s (2002, p. 17) work on Canadian Feminism purported “that feminist historiography represents the struggle to write women into history as agents of their own making and as members of social collectives.” Here, I explore the ideological and conceptual underpinnings of woman and gender and how resistance has been politicised in the histories that have been researched. I also interrogate the major arguments and methodological dilemmas in the scholarship.

11 See Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2012b) lecture, “Coloniality of Power in Development Studies and the Impact of Global Imperial Designs on Africa,” for an explanation of Walter Mignoli’s four matrices of power on which coloniality is founded.
I argue that the history of African Caribbean populations is rooted in resistance and that gender was inconsequential to the trade in Black, *able* bodies from the African coast destined for enslavement on sugar plantations in the Caribbean. I also proffer that Caribbean scholars and researchers involved in the production of Caribbean gender histories engage in intellectual resistance, for they decolonize knowledge production much in the same way as African Caribbeans approach daily life struggles against their exploitation. How does the African-Caribbean Feminist scholarship conceptualize protest and resistance during the period of enslavement and up to the 1930s? Does the work challenge colonial empiricism?

### 3.1 Caribbean Feminist Theorising

The term Caribbean feminism first gained currency in the Anglophone Caribbean in the 1980s following the establishment of the Women and Development Unit within the University of the West Indies in 1978 and in the context of the first United Nation’s international conference for women, which was held in Mexico City in 1975. The conference issued a call to mainstream women related to gender issues and to institutionalize women’s activities, including research conditional to development funding being made available to states and organizations in the Anglophone Caribbean. The islands’ economies, incongruously linked to the world capitalist market as a region of exploitation and dependent on development funding for the state programmes, were required to include empirical gender-based evidence into their funding proposals. The University of the West Indies was identified as the administrative body to produce Caribbean gender evidence. The scholarly work of Caribbean feminists, residing in the Caribbean at the early stages of gender-focused scholarship, therefore, tended to be policy and
project oriented to meet the neoliberal development agenda in the European and North American centres.¹²

Caribbean scholars have not contested the term feminism but rather use it interchangeably with womanist\womanism that has been adopted by African-American and African woman. African-American women cited the incompatibility with issues of feminism in relation to issues of race and the concept of multiple genders. Black lesbian scholarship also contests the term feminism as essentialist and not adequately inclusive. Similarly, Africana Womanism rejects feminism as representative of the many gender-, race-, and class-based issues that affect women from the African continent and its diaspora. With the resurgence in Afrocentric intellectual analyses, Caribbean scholars of African ancestry should be disposed to pursue our redefinition within the womanisms.

The term feminism is denounced by the majority of the population, as is the term lesbianism, as a distinguishing category of women, yet scholars struggle with applying an appropriate terminology. Mohammed (1998) declares that Euro-American feminism’s roots in strident suffragettes, the militancy of the Society to Cut Up Men (SCUM), and the bra-burning images do not resonate with Caribbean women’s reality, yet intimated that colonised societies benefitted from the feminists’ successes. Ford-Smith (1989) documents the experiences of hostility towards women identified as feminists who were involved in Sistren—a theatrical group of underprivileged women—who dramatized woman-centred issues during the 1970s; while Bolles

described the hostility towards intellectuals producing feminist scholarship within academia in the Caribbean.

Universal suffrage in St. Kitts was imposed by British law and not achieved through gender struggle for equal access to the vote. The genesis of African-Caribbean Feminism can be traced with hindsight to what Mohammed (1998, p. 16) describes as “the contradictions which women faced in post-colonial struggles and the contradictions of the men who welcomed their comradeship.” While Mohammed locates the inception of feminist struggle in the post-colonial struggle beginning in the 1930s, historians Johnson (2007b) and Shepherd (1999b) cite their arrival as indentures in the Caribbean in the 1500s as a defining moment of anti-colonial struggle against the gendered differences between white European women and Black women, rather than a struggle between men and women. Similarly, the definition of lesbian, which was never conceptualised in opposition to women, was initially conceived in Euro-American feminist identities.

Caribbean feminists have chosen to prioritise issues related to centuries of labour and capital extraction that have rendered small island states resource poor and materially deficit, with fragile and vulnerable economies that are dependent on Euro-American capitalist markets. Cultural dispossession has also created a form of cultural rootlessness specific to Caribbeans. Feminist scholars have had to contend with findings from research conducted in the larger Anglophone Caribbean islands, which are often taken up as representative of an imagined, homogenous British Caribbean. The establishment of the University of the West Indies in the early 1960s, with campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and later, Guyana, was concurrent with the political independence of these countries. A shift to campus countries-based research advanced a discursive that marginalised the smaller Caribbean countries to maintain the notion
of the imagined homogeneous Caribbean. Feminists have also had to challenge the perception of the Caribbean as a uniformly Black, underprivileged, British-colonised society.

Early definitions of Caribbean Feminism reflect the complex, highly sensitive terrain of Black nationalism, Western/Euro-American white feminisms, and African-American womanisms that the scholars navigated. Mohammed (1998) situates feminism in the Caribbean as constituent of a tradition of western intellectual thought and activism. Reddock (2007) defines *indigenous* Caribbean feminism as emerging from the racialized and colonial histories of Caribbean peoples, a feminism that was located in the ongoing struggles of its people at the time, while Barritteau (2007) personalises Caribbean feminism, recognising the variety of histories and ethnicities in the region and anchored it in African-American feminist thought. The definitions are reflective of conflicted intellectual positions informed by the material location of the scholars that was intimately tied to the discourse of development, and the cornucopia of ethnicities and geographical ancestral origins of Caribbeans who have survived a history of intrusion, genocide, dispossession, and capital exploitation.

European ideologies of racial superiority have been challenged in the colonised Caribbean through masculinist lens and androcentric frameworks for just over half a century. The early twentieth century Pan-Africanist activism, anti-colonial writings, and speeches of CLR James, Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon, Marcus Garvey, and George Padmore dominated the discourse. According to Reddock (2007), Trinidadian Pan-African feminist Audrey Jeffers called on women in the 1920s “to help in the new epoch in the construction of the race” (p. 10). Feminists writing on women in the same period (Ford-Smith, 1989; Macpherson, 2007; Taylor, 2000) assert that Pan-Africanist and communal feminist Amy Jacques Garvey’s work throughout the British colonised Caribbean “allowed for collaboration and friendships of women of all races”
Jacques Garvey’s (1925/2009) internationalism included collaborative work with Sylvia Pankhurst, an Ethiopian, and Ladipo Solanke, a Nigerian. The movement, however, remained masculinist in its interpretation, its ties to communism kept the politics located in a European paradigm and its membership exclusively biracial/brown and educated African Caribbeans.

Other writings identifying early Pan-African feminists and women’s organizations, such as Alma La Badie and Una Marson of Jamaica, Barbados Women’s Alliance, Gema Ramkisoon Indo Trinidadian, Jamaican Aimey Bailey, and the Black Cross in Belize, advocated “future advancement that Africans and Indians could achieve by walking side by side” (Brereton, 2013 p. 12). Literate, biracial, and Black African-Caribbean women were a rarity in the early twentieth century, and therefore, they must have obtained literacy against the odds. Their platforms were very similar to those in Europe, advancing equal work for equal pay, women retaining their jobs in the civil service after marriage, and formation of coteries, earned them middle-class respectability that they desired13. Their work did little to improve the conditions of the large population of underpaid and highly exploited female workforce, whose everyday experiences and militancy for survival have not been adequately documented and appropriately ascribed as African-Caribbean feminist advocacy.

DeShong (2013) proffers a Caribbean feminism that “exists at the intersections of struggles against colonialist, neo colonial, racist, sexist, hetero-patriarchal, classist and other discriminatory institutions and practices. It is a feminism birthed out of the sociohistorical, political, and cultural realities of the Caribbean, and while it has been influenced by several global feminist movements and perspectives, it cannot be reduced to that which is an offshoot of northern feminisms” (p. 2). DeShong contests Mohammed’s (1998) earlier definition. The definitions have changed overtime as Caribbean feminist researchers and scholars’ clarify their positions in relation with the range of feminisms and have refined strategies to negotiate funding and establish alliances with northern and southern partners.

Ama Mazume’s (2003) Africana Womanist precolonial consciousness, which promotes an ontology and epistemology of an African world view, offers a continuity and a liberation perspective of womanism for African women in Kittitian society, where they constitute the majority population. She wrote as a diasporic Caribbean woman from her position as faculty in a North American university that provided her some protection from the direct pressures of coloniality that existed in the Caribbean academic institutions. Lynn Bolles (2015) describes Caribbean feminist scholarship in its broadest sense as “that body of written knowledge that focuses on equality and justice for women, seeks to eliminate systems of inequality and injustice in women’s lives and speaks to human dignity for all people- both women and men in the Caribbean” (p. 64). Despite the marked differences between the roots of the term feminism and Caribbean woman-centred organizing and scholarship, feminism has been retained as a pragmatic choice.

The Caribbean is a geographical space with a variety of linguistic and culturally variations that escape contemplations that inform an ideologically construct of a monolithic region that
permeates Caribbean scholarship\textsuperscript{14}. It is of necessity that Caribbean feminist scholars, burdened by modern geopolitical colonialities and institutional marginalization, negotiate northern feminisms to obtain international exposure and recognition of their work as we seek wider markets for our work.\textsuperscript{15} Except for its cultural entertainment value, the region has been largely ignored by the outside world as a location for intellectual work. Goveia (1965) concluded that the Caribbean arc of islands was seen by Europe as a collection of obscure and unimportant former colonies, by Latin Americans as unnatural and marginal pockets of European influence, and by North America as a sphere of their own American influence.

Caribbean feminist scholars utilized the same strategic negotiation employed by their foremothers during slavery and indentureship and post-emancipation exploitation, to operate within the development framework interpolated by a Euro-American \textit{civilizing mission} and knowledge genealogy. The scholars were neither passive participants nor victims, but actively sought out spaces in the liberal developmental missions to publish work and obtain financing for other feminist-related intellectual survivalist activities in the Caribbean. The praxis of negotiation as a resistance strategy among African-Caribbean female scholars within academia permeates the texts and sub texts. African and descended women and feminist scholars, descendants of twentieth century-bonded indentureship, organized as strong and unwilling subjects, employing subversion and other strategies available to them to establish Caribbean

\textsuperscript{14} St. Maarten part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands shares land space with St. Martin a department of France. Size 87km sq. Population of 77,600. The official languages are Dutch and French. Haiti shares the same land mass with the Dominican Republic. The population speaks different languages a legacy of colonial domination between the French and the Spanish.

feminisms as contesting genres of feminist scholarship. My conclusion is in contradiction of Ford-Smith’s (2005) Marxist premise that categorised Caribbean feminist scholars as “professional feminists” (p. 291) and Andaiye’s (as cited in Scott, 2004) conviction that “middle class feminists . . . represent the depoliticising of the women’s movement in the region” (p. 126).

In the 1990s while an inchoate Women’s Studies proposal sought legitimisation in the University of the West Indies (UWI), international financiers to the women’s studies program were demanding a focus on gender studies. Joan Scott’s (1988) pronouncements in feminist theorising of the value of gender as a conceptual framework for studying history, by then had gained international recognition. Goveia’s (1965) publication\(^{16}\), which offers an equivalent micro analysis of social relations among the descendants of the enslaved in the colonised Caribbean to Scott’s, gender-specific focus, remained in the archives and in the university’s libraries, the consequence of international capital distribution and discursive practices of knowledge production between the north and south. Elsa Goveia issued a challenge to Caribbean historians to not only be contented with finding out what enslaved people did, but also to recognize that there is a need to find out what they thought and felt. This was in contradiction to Scott’s position, which did not contemplate racialized, colonized, gendered relations or the fluidity and resiliency of patriarchal legacies in colonies of exploitation, although it has remained a global

\(^{16}\) Goveia’s seminal works, her 1952 dissertation \textit{Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the end of the Eighteenth Century}, published in 1965, and \textit{A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies to End of the Nineteenth Century} (1956) confronted the canons of the academic discipline that focused on trade/economic and political structures. She recommended a focus on social relations in historical analysis, a methodological approach that was popularized by feminist historian Joan Scott-Wallach in the 1980s. There is no evidence that Scott may have read Goveia’s work which preceded the era of disciplinary challenge by European and North American feminist intellectuals.
reference for gender studies, when interrogated, against the realities of African Caribbeans societies.

Joan Scott Wallach’s (1988) gender approach, which was adopted into international donor-funding policies, proved problematic for the women’s studies program development and Caribbean Feminist knowledge production in its infancy. Its Euro-American cultural approach resulted in the diversion of funds to finance studies in masculinity for a large population of men who also relied on the same sources of international donor funding. While Brereton (2013) embraces the shift from woman to social relations of gender as an intellectual achievement, Barritteau (2003) interrogates the shift as inherently problematic when applied to the cultural environment of gender in the Caribbean. Barritteau describes it as a purveyor of “conceptual confusion, policy dilemmas, and politics of deception and fragmentation that arise in feminist investigations” (p. 27). African-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean men and women had begun theorising their gender relations to counter colonial racism that was being endangered by Scott’s Eurocentric-infused gender theorising.

Errol Miller’s controversial study Men at Risk published in 1991, stoked a divisive gender politics aggravated by international capital funding that threatened the existing gender practices embedded in Caribbean Feminist thought. Gender from the north had reinscribed its essentialist, hierarchical, and oppositional empiricism into African-Caribbeans’ gender theorising and practice. Despite the clear involvement of males in feminist scholarship production, the

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17 See Linda Carty’s (1988) PhD dissertation “The Political Economy of Gender Inequality at the University of the West Indies.”

University of the West Indies’ ‘Women and Development Unit' underwent a name change to the ‘Centre for Gender and Development Studies’ and held a masculinities conference, “The Construction of Masculinity towards a Research Agenda.” The cosmetic adjustments to accommodate European-American trends to address gender, often confused with complicity, is indicative of the terrain of economic power relations of capital and empirical incursions that Caribbean feminists continue to negotiate in order to produce intellectual work.

The discursive transfer from women to gender as prescribed by Eurocentric hegemonic epistemologies is an ongoing debate in Caribbean feminist theorising (Barriteau, 2003; Brereton, 2013; Mohammed, 2002; Stubbs, 1999). It reflects a tension between Caribbean feminist scholars’ reality and the dominant academic debates in the north. Brereton’s (2013) historiography, which focuses specifically on the work of feminist scholars of history, concluded that there is a great deal of overlap in the approaches. Readings of the anthologies of Caribbean Feminist scholarship produced in the last two decades offer no delineated or analytical shift in focus from women to gender. Rather, there is a combination of both approaches within the scholarship or between writers and the recognition that gender, as an analytical tool, is essential to capture the totality of the female experience. Additionally, male contributors with gendered quantitative research methods to provide demographic statistics on enslaved populations that supported feminist studies in the recovery phase of African Caribbean women’s histories.


197 Lindsey1(997:140) To argue that women can overpower men simply on the basis of increased income or occupational status is to incorrectly presume that income or occupational dominance forms the sole basis of men’s control over women”.

20 In the first publication of an anthology, the result of papers presented at a conference held in 1986 and published in 1988, to generate material for women’s studies programme, Mohammed warned that “Women Studies does not mean add women and stir but rather requires a reformulation of disciplinary concepts and new approaches to social reality” (p. 77). This position was adopted before theorizing occurred following the gender-specific research Women...
approaches have been integral to feminist scholarship produced in the Caribbean. Gender has never been interpreted as polarities between men and women. Rather, it interlocks with colonial hierarchies of nation, race, ethnicity, and class.

Caribbean feminist writers have had to rescue the notion of the prevalence of heads of households among African-Caribbean women from conflation with matriarchy and the emasculation of Black males in Eurocentric literature. Massiah (1986) argues that the role of female heads of household “is more than merely a demarcation in autonomy between male and female.” (p. 12). Safa (1986) found that economic autonomy among female household heads does not correspond with economic earning power in relation to men; therefore, female-headed households tend to be on or below the poverty line. Household head is often a disempowering and vulnerable position held by women who require male financial support and outstanding survival skills to manage her scarce resources. The woman’s existence is not in opposition to the male, but primarily both sexes are in opposition to colonial or neo-colonial oppressions.

3.1.1 On Intersectionality

The Caribbean’s diverse and complex socio-cultural condition challenges the dualistic ways in which gender has been understood. Cultural conditions and gendered histories of indigenous and transplanted peoples—African, Asiatic, and European—converge in ways that are unique to each island and place; yet in each island, the engineered societies reflect one of the earliest post-modern societies. Their transitioning from slave to capitalist societies have occurred within a world systems framework that has discursively and materially constructed the Caribbean states in the Caribbean Project 1979-1982. Also reflected in Barriteau (2003, 2006); Barrow (2015), and Mohammed (1994, 1998).
as non-sovereign, penetrable spaces of subjugated, gendered, and racialized populations. The populations have created cultural recesses for peaceful survival in horizontal and vertical social relations. The complex feature of race, colour, ethnicity, nationality, class, sex, and the gender performances predisposes Caribbean societies for discourses of intersectionality.

Barritteau (2003, p. 30) defines gender as “complex systems of personal and social relations of power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to status, power and resources within the society.” During the entire period of the Atlantic slave trade and the centuries of enslavement, labour extraction normalised the sexual violation of enslaved females, by males, for pleasure or procreation. There was no gender differentiation in field work on the sugar plantations prior to the industrialisation of certain aspects of sugar production. The focus on able-bodied took priority to sex of the enslaved labouring population. Labour extraction from enslaved Africans accomplished an ideological levelling of the genders to facilitate and advance Britain’s empire building21 (Beckles, 1995; Bush, 2004). This flattening continued to manifest through British colonial liberal policies in St. Kitts in the slavery afterlife, in such areas as public education and universal suffrage rights extended to the Africans.

Caribbean Feminists scholarship regards race as a social relation that exposes the hierarchy in feminisms, disrupts the essentialism of sisterhood of women, and problematizes the notion of patriarchy as dualist concept in colonial society. Early development discourses constructed women in the south whether Caribbean, Asian, or African as essentially, poor, helpless victims in

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need of international development intervention. To categorise Caribbean or any other collective of women as victims is a persistent narrative seen too often in women and development discourses. Donna St. Hill (2003) counters this dualistic discriminatory perception by offering an alternative view. According to St. Hill, an appropriate feminist acknowledgement of poor women’s victim/agent status would necessarily acknowledge their resourcefulness under injustice, while at the same time arguing for transformative change that would relieve women of excessive burdens that gender and the legacy of colonial capital exploitation have bestowed upon them.

Barritteau (2006) acknowledges commonalities with Alice Walker’s definition of the African-American woman-centred work as womanist and Hills-Collin’s (1993) articulation of intersectionality. She encourages collaborative work between scholars in Africa and its diaspora, but established a distinction with how intersectionality framework is addressed in Caribbean feminist theorizing, with a particular focus on Barbados:

Black women’s experiences of race in the Caribbean differ from that of black women in North America. With population composition ranging from 95.4% to 79.9% black in most Caribbean countries there is the legacy of race rather than say the North American version of the day to day reality of racism. For example, in Barbados, indigenous whites dominate the corporate economy, they own or control economic activities within major industrial sectors. They maintain a web of corporate interlinkages based on ethnic or kinship ties\(^\text{22}\). Yet for black Barbadians racial discrimination in the area of health services, education, transportation, housing and public policy is an alien experience. (Barritteau, 2006, p. 10)

While in the Caribbean, racism remains as a psychological legacy of white European rule or segregated in a particular sector, everyday racism continues to impact the lives of African-

\(^{22}\) See Beckles (1989) *Natural Rebels: A social history of enslaved women in Barbados.*
Americans. Whereas, international capitalism remains a persistent and fundamental oppression that affects the advancement of Caribbean populations, enslaved and free.

Mohammed (2003, p. 124) concludes that “there’s a seemingly eclecticism of the feminist movement and feminist theory in the Caribbean, because the women responded to issues of class, race/ethnicity and gender identity,” alluding to the increase in feminist scholarship in which both African- and Indian-Caribbean feminist scholars have begun to widen the scholarship from its African-Caribbean bias instituted through European colonial representations, to include work on the Asian-Caribbean and indigenous Caribbean. Academic scholarship in the Caribbean is so entrenched in the University of the West Indies (UWI) that inequities of access to funding have created an unintended coterie of feminist writers in the region. This phenomenon needs to be problematized. The power struggle that ensued during the transition of Women and Development Center from its place in the community to a Department in the UWI challenges the notion of eclecticism between the feminist movement and feminist theory, but the scholarship addresses local issues using innovative approaches.

Patricia Mohammed (2003 observes in her article “A Symbiotic Visiting Relationship: Caribbean Feminist Historiography and Caribbean Feminist Theory” that the themes of strength and resistance among Black women pervades the texts “thus placing at the cornerstone of Caribbean Feminist theorising, African descended Caribbean women, as strong and unwilling subjects in their subjugation.” (p. 117). I shall problematize this statement later in this chapter. The histories have traced these women’s involvement in protest from the early 1600s when Black Africans, regardless of gender, were inhumanely and involuntarily transported to the Caribbean to work on farms and plantations for European empire building, establishing the foundation for women, femininity, and gender as highly contested in colonial discourses.
Strength and resistance comprise pervading themes in African-Caribbean feminist historiography, which is also found in African American womanist writings. African-Caribbean women who arrived as bonded workers under the Spanish encomienda system or as enslaved chattel under the British, performed tasks that demanded physical strength equivalent to their male counterparts. Gendered racialization processes and colonial discourses naturalised strength as endemic to Black women and normalised their demand for better working conditions as an inherent trait. These distinctions informed the gendered differences between white women and women of colour in early colonial discourses of hierarchical, racialized femaleness. However, the concepts of strength and resistance continue to inform Black feminist/womanist discourses, not as biological determinants, but as sociocultural and economic conditions that persist to shape women’s responses.

Caribbean feminist writers are subjects of the work that they produce, as they shape the subjectivities of African Caribbeans and reconstruct their histories from the distorted, gendered, racialized, hegemonic colonial discourses. Beckles (1999b), whose prolific publications on gender focuses on Barbados, argues that the existing archival sources yield much more information on enslaved Black women than there is on enslaved men, which makes reconstructive histories of enslaved women an easier task than it is for Black men.

While Beckles (1999b) might be correct in his description of the demographic sources, given the biases in plantation records of managers whose diaries and logs detailed rapes and impregnation of enslaved females as trophied accounting of their virility and power, he discounts the possible incidences of exaggeration in the statistics. Further, he ignores the discursive impact of centuries of colonial accounts generated by the coloniser to disfigure and dehumanize enslaved women. The feminist agenda requires scholars to view the data through a lens that interrogate these
accounts and reclaim subjectivities from the contested positions of *culture bearers* and *keepers of tradition.*

Beckles’ (1999a) study of Baradians during the period of enslavement searches to articulate gender differentiation by advancing a gendered polarity of the European white male and African-descended Black female, yet he discusses a hierarchy that includes marginalised African-Caribbean males, puritanical European white females, as well as white females who display unacceptable *female* behaviours. Similarly, in her article, “A Race of Men, A Class of Women: Nation, Ethnicity and Gender,” which focuses on Afro-Guyanese relations, Williams (2013) interrogates a teleological, colonial, and ideological construct of gender in *post emancipation* nationalist politics and asserts that the less feminine the woman, the more feminine the men as a race and as a nation and the more disturbed the family life. The Caribbean Feminist historiographies recognise that gender defies polarities and are void without historicising class and race as contested categories in colonial relations and nationalist politics. The scholars do not have a name for the fluid ontological manifestation of the gendered self.

Referencing northern theoretical frameworks facilitates the entry into approved scholarship debates in colonial and imperial centres and should not be regarded as capitulation to hegemonic discourses within the Caribbean or from without. Resident scholars negotiate spaces to produce feminist discourses through transnational ethnic feminism projects, while diaspora researchers operating outside the region develop scholarship outside the main locus of Caribbean intellectual

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23 Psychoanalysis is an unexplored area in Caribbean feminist theorizing quite unlike the African-American and Afro-Latina feminisms.

24 See Brackette Williams (2013) constructionist theory on how colonial ideologies of racial difference informed gender difference in Guyana in his introduction “Mannish Women and Gender after the Act.”
knowledge production, the University of the West Indies. There is need to negotiate theoretical entry points. These are strategies of and for negotiation, as they are of protest and resistance to essentialist and dominant narratives.

Beckles (1999b) laments the absence of a coherent feminist genre that he anticipates is achievable should Caribbean feminist scholars politicise and interrogate the concept of womanism and feminism by relocating and redefining “Caribbean women’s movements within the ideological space provided by postmodernism.” Barritteau’s (2003) attempt at remedying the incoherence was inherently contradictory, but she advanced the academic agenda. She identified the inadequacies of the liberal, Marxist, and socialist feminist theorising for the Caribbean and offers a post-modernist feminist analysis that takes at its core Foucault’s concept of power, with its inadequacy in reference to the colonial subject. In her work, an interdisciplinary anthology, she argued vehemently against descriptive bias and the essentialist the concept of Caribbean woman in previous feminist scholarship and delineated the pitfalls of incursions by Euro-American gender theorising. Similarly, interdisciplinary feminist anthologies (Barrow, 1998; Dagnais & Piche, 1994; Ellis, 2003; Mohammed, 2002; Momsen, 1993; Springfield Lopez, 1997) have reflected the epistemological contradictions that militate against the coherence that Beckles sought.

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26 Barritteau (2003) produced a six-part anthology, Confronting Power, Theorising Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean, with a declared aim “to prevent women’s subjectivity from disappearing from the discourses of gender” (p. 14).
The Caribbean populations are peculiarly rootless without the hybridised identities of its peoples, except for a tiny minority of indigenous people on the mainland Caribbean, as are the expressions of gender. This complexity could not fit into the monolithic mould of genders advanced by conventional colonial and imperial ideologies and, therefore, was projected as abnormal and incoherent until it could find root in a dominant Euro-American theoretical framework.

The Caribbean Feminist scholars and researchers identified a fluidity of genders that pre-existed the range of genders that post-modern theory embrace. Glave (2008), Kempadoo (2003, 2004, 2013), Silviera (1992), Tinsley-Omise’ke (2010), and others have contested representations of gender and sexuality and reinforced the incoherent to the gender complex that prevails in the Caribbean. The Caribbean, redesigned as a region for exploitation, post-modern from the inception of its repopulation by migrants—adventurers, pirates, criminals, forced and bonded Africans and Asians—with competing cultures, departs radically from European and Euro-American European designations of gender. That incoherence, yet unnamed, is clearly reflective of the fluidity of genders that have been salvaged from the historical fracturing of “woman” located in a regime of dehumanising, racialized enslavement and the intensity with which the ideological project of demeaning the Black womanhood was achieved by pitting it against an elite white woman standard.

3.1.2 Theorising Resistance

Social scientists have led the way in recent decades to produce an abundance of scholarship on resistance. Apart from the exhaustive considerations 1935 detailed and the conventional focus on violent rebellions and demonstrations, often within the context of organized political movements, they have identified the notion of everyday resistance. The concept of everyday resistance
compels one to consider the subversive nature of acts that may not initially appear subversive and may remain elusive to scholars who may not have an appreciation of the cultural nuances and experiences of the group being studied. It first emerged in scholarship on slavery in 1942, with the publication of Raymond and Alice Bauer’s (1989) article “Day to Day Resistance to Slavery,” in which they identified feigning illness as one such act of resistance.

The representations of the African Caribbean women in Caribbean feminist historiography has been a deliberate act of advocacy to recreate gendered political subjects. Beckles (1999a), Johnson (2004), Lightfoot (2010), Mathurin-Mair (1975), Newton (2013), Philip (2010), Reddock (1990, 1994), Shepherd (1999b), and others engaged a wide range of sources, both traditional and unconventional, drawing from cross-disciplinary methodologies to carefully and systematically recast and reengineer Caribbean women in their struggles against oppression and injustice. Their detailed mining of data, using a feminist lens, decolonial and anti-racist frames, and cultural agendas have begun to piece together the societies that Goveia (1965) first identified and which previous historians missed, in which Black women as individuals and collectivities lived.

Mathurin-Mair (1975), Goveia’s mentee and surrogate, introduces the concept of rebel woman as a descriptor for Black female protestors. During the 1980s, the concept of the rebel woman was placed in a wider context that recognised resistance in different forms, ranging from collective non-violent protest and individual negotiation and compromise to violent rebellions. Bush’s (1982) analysis details a diversity of actions constituting resistance, and Ford-Smith’s

life stories of African Jamaican women evoked questions of the fluidity and elasticity of applying historical evidence to meet the rebel woman criteria and cast doubt on the disciplinary fitness of certain scholarship.

Beckles (1999b, p. 165) argues that the “spirit of resistance” as conceptualised in Bush’s (1992) work had been “weakened by excessive elasticity and has lost sight of what constitutes political action.”

His conceptual premise of resistance as overt combative activities that revolved around slave revolts during the period of enslavement was consistent with a colonised masculinist interpretation that limited the notion of political action to revolt and disregarded the scholarship as pandering to superficial postmodern analyses. Tellingly, Beckles devalues the broader perspective of gender-specific political action and agency that disrupted the unilineal interpretation of enslaved African-Caribbean women exclusively as victims in acts such as miscegenation and suppression of fertility. These actions contested and subverted the system of racialized, gendered enslavement by undermining the purity of white society and expanding the opportunities for negotiating freedom or reducing the encumbrances of unfreedom. These actions mobilised the puritans in liberal anti-slavery movement and inflamed racist sentiments in Europe towards the dismantling of slavery.

Beckles (1989) proposes women in resistance against enslavement as natural rebels. This term was presented as a complementary concept to the rebel woman, which Mathurin-Mair (1975) constructed in her study of African-Jamaican women, as a central transformative figure with charismatic leadership qualities such as Nanny the Queen of Maroons, a military leader.

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28 See Beckles’ (1999b) *Centering Woman* (p. 165) for critique of the ‘general spirit of resistance found in Bush’s (1982) range of resistance mechanism that enslaved women employed in the Caribbean.
culturally invested with political leadership. Beckles argued for a new category, citing the restrictions in the definition of the rebel woman, rather than provide a substantive conceptual revision. For Beckles, the new category, *natural rebels*, possessed no claim to distinct individuality and “the everyday experience of her material existence” (p. 167) nor as the basis of culture of resistance; yet, he named Nanny of the Maroons as a natural rebel.

Beckles’ (1999a) argument two decades following Mathurin-Mair’s (1974) dissertation did not offer substantive gendered advance in the understanding of political action outside the prism of *slave revolt* and his contention that Bush’s (1982) conceptual category of African-Caribbean women in resistance lacks a robust and convincing conceptual difference. The value in concept of rebel, however, provides an entry point for conceptualising African-Caribbean women’s resistance in contrast to white Euro-American femininity that peripheralizes women’s involvement in direct combat. Beckles also historicized gender performance rather than conform to the racialized, colonial discursive that masculinizes the enslaved woman and her female descendants.

By the start of the twenty-first century, Caribbean feminist scholars increased publications that micro analysed resistance, strengthening the variations of its manifestations during the period of enslavement and post enslavement. Allain’s (2014) article, “Infanticide as Slave Resistance: Evidence from Barbados, Jamaica and St. Domingue,” and Atlink (2007) in her article, “I did not want to face the shame of exposure: Gender Ideologies and Child Murder in Post Emancipation,” discuss incidences of infanticide among enslaved women and their female descendants to depathologize their actions and to demonstrate the multifarious manifestations of resistance that escaped earlier versions of histories that imposed gendered constructs of brutality and anti-motherhood on African Caribbean women.
The emergence of micro histories focusing on the minute details of historical issues has expanded the reconstitution of Black female subjects actively involved in everyday protest in the Caribbean. In “Problematic Bodies”: Negotiations and terminations in Domestic Service in Jamaica, 1920-1970, Johnson (2007a) documents protest by female domestic service employees whose working bodies were physically/materially strong, and within long-extant discourses of racialized and gendered labour, they represented strong black womanhood. They used ‘non-feminine strength’ to fulfil ‘female domestic duties’ and, like their foremothers, they were women whose bodies both were and represented black labour. (p. 92)

There are equivalencies between Prince’s personal account in 1828 and Johnson’s (2007a) interpretation of how women used intimate knowledge of their employers’ infidelity and other resistance strategies specific to their domestic workspace, as sources of power to leverage better working conditions and reduce verbal and sexual abuse actions.

Caribbean feminist writing is mediated by feminist ideology, mainly from the north and local nationalist agenda. Mathurin-Mair was recruited to work with the state as a diplomat to give international visibility to her country’s commitment to gender mainstreaming, while her work remained in the university archives for 32 years before it was recovered for wider access.

Mathurin-Mair’s (1974, 1975, 1977, 1990) work is considered among African Caribbean Feminist writers interrogating slavery during an era of nationalism and a militant a resurgence of an Africa-centred movement with anti-colonial agendas in the Caribbean.29

Gender historiography in the Anglophone Caribbean emerged during a period of British paternalistic nationalism that displaced the more radically founded Pan-Africanist nationalism. Caribbean Feminists researchers uncovered elite white women’s contemporary accounts on the slavery era of enslaved Black women and periods immediately following the passage of the Act to Abolish Slavery. Brereton (2003) analysed personal correspondence and two full-length books of five elite women who visited or resided in the Caribbean and concluded that the women’s accounts of enslaved and free Black women as well as biracial women projected images of racialized and gendered misfits. Whereas the accounts denigrated the Black women’s child raising, hygienic and sexual practices, and condemned their lack of manners and social graces, the women remained the main care givers providing domestic services in the elite women’s homes. Elite white women’s abuse, condemnation, and directed flogging of enslaved female domestic signified the contrast and confirmed their femininity and suggested a fractured female gender. Even in instances where elite white women expressed empathy, it reinforced the Blacks as objects and victims needing to be redeemed by white women’s intervention.

For Goveia (1965), the act of subjecthood for African-Caribbean scholars and researchers requires personal and political commitment:

We need to know who we are as West Indians, which can be achieved through the knowledge and understanding of slavery and its legacies at a time when this acknowledgement was becoming a part of a popular silencing/forgetting; to speak openly about its dynamics and its interiority, provides the structures through which remembrance and recognition becomes permissible. (pp. 31-32)

Goveia incorporates her nationalist and Africa-centred proclivities, common at that time among Caribbean intellectuals, in her reading of the empirical colonial evidence. She served as Committee Chair for the next ground-breaking work by an African Caribbean woman, Lucille Mathurin-Mair (1974, 2006) whose work been considered as the crucible for Caribbean Feminist thought (author, date).
3.1.2.1 Women’s Resistance to Enslavement

Caribbean feminist historiography has been profoundly influenced by Lucille Mathurin-Mair’s (1974) dissertation on Jamaican women for a period covering 183 years of slavery. In 2006, 32 years later, Mathurin-Mair published a more accessible version of the seminal study, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*. Its regional appeal and nationalist agenda inserted African-Jamaican women as subjects into the Caribbean intellectual debates on slavery and colonialism and into feminist theorising on the concept of the rebel woman, gender, race, and class.

Mathurin-Mair’s (1974) work, a practical demonstration of intersectionality theory, predates Angela Davis’ (1981) *Women, Race and Class*, one of the foundational writings on which Patricia Hill-Collins used to develop the theory of intersectionality that contributed significantly to institutionalizing African-American Feminist/Womanist thought. This knowledge demonstrates the similarities between African-American and African-Caribbean feminism and contests the epistemological centre of intersectionality theory. Beckles and Shepherd (2006), Bolles (2013), Bush (2008), and Paton (2009) have challenged Mathurin-Mair’s work as an oversimplification of race and class, which gave root to essentialist notions that her work had hoped to avoid.

Mathurin-Mair published a series of articles that focused on protest and resistance activities of African Caribbean women found in her study shortly after the completion of the dissertation in 1974. They include *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery* (1975), a 41-page reader written in accessible language and distributed to public libraries and schools in Jamaica; “Reluctant Matriarchs” (1977), which was first published in *Savacoo*, a Caribbean journal; and “Recollection of a Journey into a Rebel Past” (1990), an article published among
conference proceedings in Calaloo Publications. It chronicled the leadership acumen and achievements of an African Jamaican woman who escaped enslavement, organized and conducted guerrilla warfare against British troops during 1720-1739 Maroon Wars in Jamaica. Mathurin-Mair’s microscopic analysis of the historical documents constructed the African-Caribbean woman as a rebel who defied colonial representations of her. Nanny, Mathurin-Mair’s prototype of the rebel woman, was transformed from myth to human legend and was honoured as a national hero of Jamaica in 1982.

Mathurin-Mair’s (1974/2006) interpretive work introduces African-Caribbean women as subjects into the intellectual debate on feminist historical writings. Using archival sources including slave logs, sugar plantation records, slave court documents and personal correspondence, Mathurin-Mair produced social relations of *slave society* that not only advances Goveia’s (1952/1965) thesis beyond its early framing, but also challenges the colonial masculinist historical interpretations that were imposed on oppositional discourses of the genders. Her nuanced approach to the data with its colonial bias introduces a complex hierarchical structure of gendered ontologies specific to the Caribbean existence.

Mathurin-Mair’s methodology incorporates the use of quantitative and qualitative archival material including slaver’s logs, plantation records and slave court reports that demonstrate that able-bodied Black African females between the ages 14 to 40 were the preferred demographic, which was confirmed in Beckles’ (1989) research of Barbadian women. Mathurin-Mair (1975) concludes that the females, mainly from the Gold Coast, entered the Caribbean already initiated as adult women equipped with survival strategies of “militancy and aggressiveness, self-respect and confidence . . . educated and seeped in a culture where women were respected.” (p. 3). Enslaved African women’s defiance, in defence of their self-respect, which was pathologized in
colonial writings and in ideologies of defeminisation of the African, indigenous, and indentured Asian females, were redefined in Caribbean feminist work.

In Barbara Bush’s (2008) article, “Daughters of Injur’d Afrik,” she analyses data gathered from slavers’ logs and Mathurin-Mair’s (1974/2006) findings to further illuminate how women who were captured and sold to traders in Africa, organized to resist their captors as they journeyed to the Caribbean. Her work demonstrates that while the reporting constructed warped images of African women’s sexuality and fertility during the Atlantic journey to the Caribbean, the researcher also found evidence that the women organized by forming bonds to resist sexual abuse and to control reproduction. The strategies learned in bonding, the sharing of knowledge, and the exchange of information on board were useful when reengineered for their survival during enslavement.

Carey (1997) and Shepherd (1999b) confirm the indispensable organizational skills of female priestesses who prepared the guerrilla fighters, male and female, psychologically, for warfare. The women recruited fighters from their households and villages. Maroon women organized themselves into teams to carry off spoils from raids of provision grounds and conducted the burning of British military campsites.\(^\text{30}\) Rhoda Reddock (1994, p.25) uncover a practice of mass poisonings in late 18th Century and early 19\(^{th}\) Century Trinidad, allegedly to reduce plantation stock, in defiance of cruel sugar plantation managers, at the passing of the Act to end the Slave trade in 1808 and the Amelioration Proposals of 1822. The slave court records identify obeah

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\(^{30}\) See Verene Shepherd’s (1999b) *Women in Caribbean History* (p. 61); Beverly Carey’s (1997) *Maroon Story* (pp. 46-47); Mathurin-Mair’s (1975) *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery* (pp. 22-37), and Carolyn Fick’s (1997) *The Making of Haiti*. 
women and nurses as the main instigators involved in preparing the solution, organizing the participants, persuading the enslaved to ingest the potions and administering the poisons.

In a series of articles, Barbara Bush\(^\text{31}\) (1981, 1982, 2004, 2007) demonstrates that the discourse on slavery produces negative stereotypes of the enslaved Black woman in Jamaica by constructing them as sexual and workforce deviants to justify the economic and sexual exploitation of the women. Other gender-focused social scientists writing on the period of slavery, including Laurine Phillip’s (2010) work on Grenadian women during slavery and Beckles on Barbados (2003b) *Perfect Property: Enslaved Black Women in the Caribbean*; and (1999b) *Property Rights in Pleasure: The Prostitution of Enslaved Black Women in the West Indies*; and Johnson’s (2007b) “Women’s Labours in the Caribbean,” confirm that the authors’ readings of the archival material suggest that the vulnerabilities of enslaved women’s bodies did not render the women powerless.

Feminist researchers injected a range of themes in demographic bio-histories to reveal the centrality of enslaved African-Caribbean women’s bodies in gender specific resistance. Allain (2014), DeBarros (2014), Gonzalez-Lopez (2010, 2012), Reddock (1994), and Shepherd and Payne (2003) identify strategic anti-nationalist practices in which the enslaved women engaged collectively, individually, and by midwives, which appeared more frequently between 1807 and 1834 when colonial policy and enslavers favoured pro-nationalisms. The writers demonstrated that suicide, infanticide, and abortions were altruistic, freedom-oriented acts among the enslaved

\(^{31}\) In 2000, conscious of her own privilege as a white descendant of British colonialism, Barbara Bush published ‘Sabel Venus’, ‘She Devil’ or ‘Drudge’ in which she focused on “white visions of black lives and addresses the problem of what Maya Angelou terms the “fabulous fiction of black women’s identities”. She argues that “Stereotypes of black woman were thus highly gendered and clustered around contradictory representations and it is only in the deconstruction of this fabulous fiction of white imaginings that white women can glimpse the personhood of the black woman” (p. 762).
and that resistance and altruism were not mutually exclusive. Gynaecological strikes resulted in work stoppage and slow-downs; mutilations and red-colouring (a practice of dyeing undergarments red to suggest excessive menstrual bleeding or the aftermath of a spontaneous abortion), defined forms of subversive acts.

Beckles’s (1989) *natural rebels* and Mathurin-Mair’s (1970, 1977, 1990) rebel women and *reluctant matriarchs* engage in violent rebellions and everyday acts of subversion that could have been overlooked or attracted severe beatings, being shipped out of the colony, or death from enslavers. Unknowingly, colonial slavery left records of court hearings and various forms of hegemonic epistemologies, which left glimpses of enslaved women’s fierce defendants of their truths and in other ways speak to the researchers’ interpretations of the data.

### 3.1.2.2 Negotiating the Afterlife of Enslavement

The ethos of slavery remains one of those *never again* historical moments that endures for descendants of enslaved Africans in the diaspora. The spirit of defiance among African-Caribbean women did not end with the passage of the Abolition of Slavery Act and that constant stream of rebellious sentiment pervades the scholarship in the post-slavery scholarship. The histories record that violent rebellions occurred with great frequency and covert defiance grew more intense in the period 1834-1900, as the large populations of free persons sought to exercise their privileges and fulfil their expectations of freedom. The period immediately following the *emancipation* thrust the African-Caribbean populations into direct exposure and conflict with the colonial state and employers that sought to limit their freedoms through legislation, policies, and retroactive practices.

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32 Labour historians have listed a number of uprisings throughout the Caribbean
Historians have delved into slave logs, plantation records, and slave court records to recover and reconstitute African-Caribbean women’s resistance histories. The period immediately following the passing of the Abolition of Slavery Act has proven more challenging, for gender historians despite Brereton (2013) and Bush’s (2004) observation of the superfluity of colonial government documentation. Reddock (1998) attributes the silence on African-Caribbeans in post-emancipation records to the imposition of the liberal Eurocentric prism that discounted women’s involvement in public protest. Historical documentation such as missionary and baptismal records, deeds and colonial maps, African folk spiritual songs and festivals, oral histories or narratives, photographic images, and other archival sources have been the main sources.

Therefore, Caribbean gender historians writing on the period engaged with scholarly treatment the historical sources that operate in ways to silence, dehumanize, and disempower African-Caribbean women and men, yet embedded with European liberal ideologies of human and social development. Christian churches proliferated during the period, and their records on their converts and proselytising activities, along with regular, mandatory reports of Stipendiary Magistrates appointed by the British government to oversee the transition to freedom, provided documentation for researchers. Those reports and court records were indispensable for David Trotman’s (2009) study on the criminalising of African-Caribbean women in Trinidad in the decades immediately following apprenticeships. Jonathan Dalby (2000) conducted a similar study on Jamaica that highlighted domestic violence and assault. These studies also illuminate how the court system dealt with women as new citizens emerging from a period of legal and normalised assault on their bodies and the use of the court’s public forum to shame and resist the perpetrators of the abuse.
Laurine Phillip (2010), Lightfoot (2010), and Swithin Wilmot (1995) utilise church documents, Magistrates reports, and court records to highlight women’s involvement in public protest in Jamaica, Grenada, and Antigua. From reports delineating the shameless and shocking behaviour of the women, Wilmot found that in 1838, women had organized themselves to protect Baptist missionaries from a rumoured hanging by the white establishment and the police whom they threatened with obeah\(^{33}\) and to “murder and then drown in the river like dogs” (p. 284). In 1840, women prevented police from apprehending a group of African-Caribbeans who sought refuge in a Baptist church in Falmouth Jamaica and defended a female protestors by warning the police that they “would not allow a woman to be threatened in that manner” (p. 288). In researching records for 1841 and 1842, Wilmot discovered a report that held details of women protesting a ban on cultural performances, threatened blood-shed, and stoned the police, causing peace makers to retreat (pp. 286–287). Her findings on the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865 confirmed how far African-Caribbean women were invested in rebellions, which was in keeping with their own involvement in all spheres of the society.

Demographic information presented by gender historians Andaiye (2010), Lightfoot (2010), Macpherson (2007), and Reddock (2006) reintroduce African-Caribbean women as combatants in national insurgencies in the twentieth century and the tactical changes in which they engaged to deflect the military response by the authorities. They proffered that depressed wages, state policing to limit movement of workers that compromised freedom, and the deepening

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impoverishment of African-Caribbean households thrust women in the forefront of confrontational resistance in nationalist movements.

Feminist interpretations of the 1930s uprisings that occurred across the Caribbean in the 1930s focused mainly on Trinidad, Guyana, and Jamaica in the Anglophone Caribbean. Based on reflection on her work in the 1980s, Reddock (2006, p. 18) confesses, “I was operating in the context… of greater acceptance of Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses with respect to labour consciousness, organization and struggle as a basis of political action,” and offered as a corrective measure, in 2008, a definition that distinguishes between labour and labour movement. The theoretical distinction left intact the colonial epistemological approach to organizing, which adhered to Westminster party politics and Fabian trade union structures, separately or jointly, under the terminology labour movement. Moreover, it privileges a Eurocentric paradigm that alienates meaningful involvement of women and distorts the existence of collective organizing among the employees prior to the union structure.


34 Reddock in a lecture delivered in 2008, Forever Indebted to Women: The Contribution of women in the Development of the Caribbean Labour Movement, describes the labour movement as the collective struggles of working peoples for better working and living conditions. She also introduced the term “responsible trade unions” to describe highly structured unions that marginalized women. Bolles (2005) and Phillip (2009), the organizers of the lecture series bearing the title of Reddock’s lecture, offered assimilationist solutions reflective of liberal development ideology and as defined by colonial hegemonic organizing.

35 Lucille Mathurin Mair was recruited to the diplomatic service soon after she completed her pioneering work on Jamaican women; Neesha Haniff (1988) compiled an anthology of biographies of women in leadership positions in politics and trade unions in Blaze a Fire: Significant Contributions of Caribbean Women. The list of biographies
organizations, Pan-Africanist/African diasporic organizations, and union organizations with structures that muted African-Caribbean women’s organizing strategies prevalent during slavery and the decades immediate after 1834. The colonial bias endemic in the Anglicized organizations dominated the mode of interpreting resistance. The renderings of African-Caribbean women’s involvement, in politics and trade unions has been eclipsed by the discursive practices of coloniality.

The African-Caribbean female subject produced through liberal constructions remains highly contested. It is extremely disturbing that what was witnessed as varying forms of resistance to enslavement, and its immediate aftermath to impose unfreedom, has been displaced by colonial discourses of labour relations and party politics that occludes African-Caribbeans’ organizing traditions and the women’s place in them. The discursive pathologizing of African-Caribbean protests is, therefore, not simply a practice of the past. What is clear is that while feminist scholarship has added women’s involvement in the 1930s protests in other Caribbean islands, it has retained the colonial renderings of the narrative which has resulted in obfuscating the subjecthood of the protestors and concealing revelations from the period that represent female protestors in particular.


36 Labour historiography, which has tended to assume the presence of the modern, individuated, rational worker, has usually viewed the process of unionisation in narrow, rational, institutional, goal oriented terms. The problem of culture and praxis is passed over in silence.
Caribbean feminist historiography has enriched the region’s history with its increasing focus of integrating oral sources with narratives on Caribbean women. Borg-O’Flaherty (2004), Brodber (2004, 2013), Craig-James (2008), Hosein (2011), Kassim (2011), Macpherson (2007), Mohammed (2001), Reddock (1984), and Warner-Lewis (2003) have produced rich, complex interviews that are preserved at the University of the West Indies archives and available for changing the historical discourse in the Caribbean on women and the subjugated populations. Linear readings of these interviews, published mainly in descriptive historical text, provide minimal added value to the rich sources.

There is as much value in problematizing the concepts of rebel woman and natural rebel to expose the bias inherent in the concepts when applied to women as political actors as there is in conceptualizing their worth as subjective categories to understand one aspect of the varying political consciousness and political action of the protestors in St. Kitts in the 1930s. One can discover how a better understanding of the concepts can yield valuable information for women who are engaged in perennial struggles for basic dignity and survival. This discover can be used to disrupt the colonial, racialized discursive in application of predominantly political economy analysis that designates the term working class to the descendants of the enslaved, whose bodies have been inscribed for arduous forms of manual work extraction, in colonial history. In the next chapter, I shall explore a methodology to enable memory bearers of history and scholars to create decolonizing narratives.

In 1989, Blanca Silvestrini (2003, p. 162) urges the historians “to utilize the oral history method, not merely to obtain information, but so that the voices and the life histories could help shape the historians” discourse. Wieringa (1995) reinforces her predecessor’s claim: “Feminism is thus also a discursive process, a process of producing meaning, of subverting representations of
gender and of re-creating new representations of gender, of womanhood, of identity and the collective self” (p. 5). Caribbean feminist notions of the rebel tradition have been posited as disparate theorizing, which conforms to the displacement politics domination in knowledge production. However, there is clearly a connectedness in meaning and an opportunity to demonstrate collaborative expression of rebel women’s involvement in Caribbean resistance movements, thus countering the discursive practices of domination. Opportunities to create new theoretical knowledges can be subsumed in Christianson’s (1987, p. 51) notion of “The Race for Theory” as a product of domination entrenched in Eurocentric academic theorizing.

This chapter confirmed that Caribbean feminists had been producing knowledge relevant to an understanding of gender in the Caribbean by the second decade of the twentieth century. Literate Black and biracial/brown women and men began to research and record outstanding achievers among them and their work in the communities they served with the paternalistic sentiment of European service agencies of the period. Their scholarship, diaries, and correspondence informed the Caribbean feminist scholarship that began in the 1970s, mushrooming during a period of revived nationalism, Black power activism in the region, and initial international support for feminist scholarship. Greater collaboration is needed between scholars and the community to conduct research and produce interpretive scholarship that represents that majority’s perspectives, which did not occur in earlier studies, to continue to build inclusive sources from which scholars can draw.

Knowledge production is not immune from the international market and the discursive of coloniality that stifled the notion and commitment to academic freedom. There was a protracted delay in Caribbean feminist scholarship arriving on the international market, which reduced the impact of their research and theories comparative with knowledge that was produced in the
north. These realities affected the negotiative skills that feminists applied to knowledge production. Competitiveness in and access to the Euro-American market was determined by language accessibility, English being the dominant language and the research focus and theoretical frameworks that satisfy that market. Twenty-first century Caribbean scholars need to apply new methodological approaches to research that capture and represent the perspectives of that sector of the population whose sources are memories and whose method of knowledge production are storytelling.

3.2 Conclusion

Conclusively, Caribbean feminist theorising addresses moments of difference (Mohammed, 1998, p.8) that are imperative for its analysis. The first is its situatedness in a history of political struggle as defined through the experiences of women. The second is the meaning of gender as performed within the cultural setting, while the third moment is expressed through the linguistic difference. The fourth is its connectedness with feminisms of various diasporas. The four moments should emerge in the findings, which are the result from a storytelling methodology.

The connectedness, however, remains untheorized and conflicted. Scholars acknowledge that a gap exists between the categorisation of the body of work described as Caribbean feminism and the perceptions of the population that reject the terms feminist/feminism. This contradiction can be resolved by rejecting the colonial imposition that ensnares scholars into a preoccupation with theorising a monolithic Caribbean identity. By accepting the plural identities of Caribbeans and by theorising ancestry as essential for liberation, scholars will produce theories and identities based on the realities of the populations. This work will articulate a definition of this work in concert with the findings from the research.
Chapter 4
Research Design and Method

In Chapter Two, I mapped out some of the discourses and sources used to document a protest involving protestors in an historical event in 1935. The survey of literature revealed that historians writing on the event had relied on archival documentation to reconstruct the narrative of the period. The conventional sources provided a perspective of history that shared the hegemonic discourse and interpretation from the perspective of the ruling elite in colonial society. Additionally, they made inferences based on the work of historians who had written on similar events that occurred in the larger British-colonized Caribbean islands during the decade of the 1930s. Although there are many commonalities between the colonized societies, there are peculiarities in history that must be retained and not occluded by coincidences of size or differential access to resources for knowledge production.

In Chapter Three, I provided a feminist historiography of some of the predominant images of African-Caribbean women in the history of resistance found in the work by Caribbeanist scholars. I discovered a tradition of struggle and negotiation in producing decolonised feminist scholarship. Theorising African-Caribbean women in history had dealt with the persistent struggle, but how women organized to overcome the difficulties was often explained through the Eurocentric theoretical lens of Marxist feminism and the prism of developmental politics of the period during which the scholarship was produced. The concepts of the natural rebel and the rebel woman seems consistent within historical literature, and I sought to determine whether the conceptualisations also apply to the narrators in this study.
In this chapter, I outline the methodological approach to qualitative research that tackled the epistemological challenges of sources encountered by historians and enhanced the feminist approaches to the study of African Caribbeans. In what follows, I discuss the importance of storytelling and oral narratives for the research design of the study, the technique I used in selecting my sample of women, and the rationale for my actions. I then discuss the limitations of the method for the overall study, the elements that have created advantages and disadvantages, as well as the similarities and differences that my work has to other studies. I close with a discussion of the language that the women used to engage this academic exercise in knowledge production.

4.1 The Research Design

The most appropriate sources for the data required for this study gathered from the living memories of survivors of the protest. The persons in whom this knowledge is vested are Africans. They have a tradition of storytelling and were themselves versed in the practice of storytellers. As Mohammed (2015) confides,

We pride ourselves in the Caribbean that we are very oral peoples. Anecdotes are easier on the ear and at the same time provide the analysis or connections we are seeking to explain in a more colourful and memorable way. (p.120)

I gathered qualitative data provided in narrative form in the absence of written, unfiltered documentation of protestors statements

This method allows the researcher to find the mode of expression that best reflects the panache of joint knowledge production with which this study was concerned. Storytelling humanizes the

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37 Newspaper reporting contained court testimonies from protestors which presented a discursive and intervening subjectivities that I wished to avoid. I was unable to locate any of the witnesses named in the newspaper reports.
events and brings alive the issues and ideas they are intended to evoke. Most crucially, the stories recorded are legacies and lessons of struggle that are left to future generations, and these are them taken up and retold with their own flavour.

This research focus was oral testimonies delivered in the stories of witnesses to a national protest in St. Kitts in 1935. The target group was African Caribbean, who comprised the majority of the Kittitian population in St. Kitts in the period. The women, most of whom at the time of the interviews were advanced in age, differently located, with improved living conditions and the hindsight of many years, recalled the details of their lived experience. They related their stories on the behalf of their contemporaries, whose perspectives remain in the collective memories of a few survivors, and their descendants to whom they relayed the stories. For these women, storytelling is a skill, acquired through experience—observation and practice—that they use to condense and illuminate biography, history, and society. Storytelling is also a relational activity that most African-Kittitian seniors enjoy38 and, therefore, chain referral within the target group emerged within normal conversation.

4.2 Storytellers’ Profiles

I generated data about the protest from the perspective of protestors through 21 interviews from 41 recommendations from community leaders, the national supervisor for seniors’ services, and through a process of referral from interviewees. Referral is the process whereby the researcher asks participants to provide information to locate other participants whom they know. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) recommends the referral technique primarily for exploratory research

38 See Victoria Borg O’Flaherty’s (2004) Inquiry from the Periphery (p. 2).
purposes, when the sample for the study is difficult to locate, rare, or limited to a small sub-group of the population. It is conducive in exploratory research. Claudia Gollop’s (1997) study, *Where Have all the Nice Old Ladies Gone*, was instructive. She found referral to be the most effective method to reach her population, and it did not compromise the outcome of her study. Her target group of African-American women, aged 65 to 88, was obtained through the referral method.

Those who agreed to be interviewed appeared within clusters in the area known as the *sugar belt*, from Newton Ground to Lodge and Basseterre, where the major clashes between the protestors and the military occurred (See Appendix C). Although the location of the interviewees might have been influenced by populist sentiment that links the protest to the sugar industry and more particularly in the area of Buckley’s sugar Estate in Basseterre, those who felt more invested in telling their stories, and interviewee referrals that afforded partiality in selection of friends, these reasons did not significantly affect the purpose, outcome, or the scholarly value of the study. A short profile on each of the participants confirms their co-authorship of this scholarship to maintain the integrity of the research design and epistemological underpinnings of the work:

Veronica Byron, widow, mother of 16 children. As a child, she assisted her mother with dress-making. She was never registered worker as an employee in the sugar cane industry. At 17, after the birth of her third child, she married and moved in with her late husband. Currently, she lives in a large and luxurious home with a well-kept lawn. She attributes the home she owns to the contributions of her children. She is part owner of a restaurant, has paid domestic help and a handy man to assist her at home. She receives financial assistance regularly from her children and social security. The first interview took place on her front porch on March 10, 1998.
Anita Ward began working on the sugar estates earlier than age eight. At first, she assisted her mother at work and later was employed on her own behalf. She stopped working on the sugar plantation when she married her late husband. She now lives in one room of a two-room house. There are no bathroom facilities, electricity, or running water on the property for which she pays a weekly rent. Her granddaughter prepares and delivers her meals, does her laundry and cleaning, and provides the water she needs. The sparsely furnished single room is divided by a wooden screen into a living room and bedroom. The screen is decorated with photographs of her relatives. Her income totals EC$55.00 monthly, which includes a state allowance of EC$40.00 and EC$15.00 from the church she attended. Recorded on October 11, 1997.

Bernice Caesar, age 74, died from complications of surgery less than a year after recording her story. She worked with her grandmother as a minor on a sugar plantation until she obtained the status as an adult employee. She was a single mother of five children. She lived in a modest home, though over-crowded, with her adult daughter, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. She received financial assistance from a granddaughter who worked as clerk and the state allowance of $40.00 monthly. Her daughter was responsible for paying utility bills and the purchase of food to be served at home. Bernice assisted with the cooking and caring of children during the day. She was an active member of the St. Kitts-Nevis Trade and Labour Union and performed the role of shop steward. Recorded on October 7, 1997.

Pricilla ‘Pa’ David, widow, has no biological children, though she raised one child who was informally adopted. She lives alone in her two-room wooden home. In one room are three single chairs that normally form part of a dining room set and a side table. There is also an old, empty glass cabinet, which once displayed dishes used for special occasions. The second room serves as a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. In the yard is a water tap and an outhouse. She migrated from
Nevis, started providing estate labour at an early age, and continued until her retirement at age 65. As a plantation labourer, she worked as a weeder, picked cotton, prepared animal feed, and was a gang worker. She receives monthly allowances from the state and church totalling EC$55.00. A neighbour prepares and delivers her dinner and provides the basic requirements for snacks that Mrs. David prepares for herself. Recorded on October 13, 1997.

Margaret ‘Muggie’ Richardson is single mother of seven children. She was employed on the sugar estate until her retirement in 1991. She worked primarily as a weeder, but also as a sugar cane packer and a gang worker doing miscellaneous tasks. She lives in a modest house with all the basic amenities. A daughter and grandchildren also reside in the home. Her relatives take turns preparing her meals, but the primary caregiver is the daughter who has remained in the original family home with her. Her income totals EC$40.00, a state allowance, which she regards as pocket money, as all her basic needs are provided by family members. Interviewed September 20, 1997.

Florence Jarvis, age 77, worked on the sugar plantation primarily as a weeder before she married her late husband. After his death, she returned to work on the plantation. She has no biological children, but provided financial assistance and free child-care service for her relatives. She continues to provide free child-care service for relatives and lives alone in a two-room wooden house that is sparsely furnished. One room serves as her bedroom and bathroom, and the other as her living room, dining room, and kitchen. She has an outhouse, no running water or bathroom facility. The rooms appear overcrowded because of the multiple purposes that they serve. She receives a state allowance of EC$40.00 monthly and remittances from family abroad. She cooks her own meals, maintains a kitchen garden, and voluntarily oversees property for a friend who resides in the United Kingdom. Recorded on October 11, 1997.
Lucille Morton, age 80, is a widow and mother of 14 children. She was primarily employed as a weeder on sugar plantations until 1956. She started by assisting her mother who was employed in the same capacity. She lives comfortably in a large middle-income home with all the basic amenities. A daughter and four grandchildren live with her. She receives the state allowance of EC$40.00 monthly along with remittances from her children. She also receives clothes and food from her children abroad. She uses the money she receives to assist in paying household bills and buying extra food supplies. Recorded October 9, 1997.

Maud O'Garro, age unknown, is a widow and mother of five children. She worked on a sugar plantation until her retirement at age 56. She worked as a weeder, prepared canes for planting, carried water for sugar cane cutters, and performed miscellaneous tasks with the women’s gang. She lives in a modest two-room dwelling that is sparsely furnished. She lives alone, a great grandchild overnights with her. Meals are supplemented by her granddaughter, who visits regularly and provides care. Recorded on February 6, 1998.

Viola Herbert, age unknown, is a widow and mother of three adult children who reside in the United Kingdom. She was employed on the sugar plantation as a weeder and women’s gang worker until 1960 when she migrated to England, but she returned to St. Kitts in 1996. She lives comfortably in a moderately furnished home. She sells cold beverages and sweets to attract passers-by to stop and talk, keep busy, and to supplement the pension she receives monthly from the British government. Recorded on January 12, 1998.

Nettie Richardson (Iris Elliott) is 91 years old, declares her fear of dying, and spends most of her day visiting friends, sometimes travelling three miles by foot. She lives in a dilapidated two-room, wooden house. The front room serves as a living and dining room, and the second room houses two beds divided by a curtain. A grandson lives with her. She survived two husbands, the
first whom she married in Nevis, and her second marriage was to a Kittitian after she migrated to St. Kitts. She has no running water, bathroom, or toilet facilities. She cooks in the open. She receives a state allowance of $40.00 and a church allowance of $15.00; friends and neighbours assist with clothing. When I visited Auny Netti in 2009, just before she died at age estimated at 103, she had just returned from a football match about 200 yards from where she lived in a new home constructed on the same site. Recorded November 17, 1997.

Mary Boddie, age 73, is a widowed mother of four adult children. She assisted her mother on the sugar estate as a weeder until she was employed in the same role. She lives in a modest home with a daughter and granddaughter. She receives financial assistance from two of her children who reside in North America. She lives in a modest home with basic amenities, where she says she lives comfortably in conditions “500% better dan a barn in [500% better than conditions of the home in which she was born].” She arranged a group meeting of storytellers. Recorded on April 21, 1998.

Lillian Williams, age unknown, worked as a weeder and in the women’s gang and as a domestic servant in the main plantation house on Estridge sugar plantation. She also worked at Mills sugar plantation. She stopped working on the sugar plantation after her marriage. She lives in a modest home (combination of wood and brick) and receives financial assistance from her children and the state. Recorded April 21, 1998.

Marie Henry, age unknown, is a mother of three adult children. She worked in a variety of jobs on the sugar plantation until she was retired at age 70, in her recollection. When she joined the group of three storytellers, she was barefooted, her hair tied loosely with a dirty and torn head kerchief. Her clothes were worn, and she complained of the ingratitude of her children, who
caused her to live in poverty because they refused to provide financial and other assistance.

Recorded April 21, 1998.

Eltruda DaCosta, 84 years old, is a widow and a mother of five. She assisted her mother picking cotton and as a weeder on the sugar plantation and was later employed as a weeder and worker in the women’s gang. She lives in a moderate home with the basic amenities. She has visited a daughter who lives in North America on two occasions. She receives regular remittances from her children, who often ship food and clothing to her. She does her own cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Recorded on March 25, 1998.

Florence “Oinee” Hanley, age unknown, is a single mother of five children. She is considered an expert on the protest by other storytellers and had been interviewed previously on the event. She witnessed violent confrontation and marched throughout the island and is considered a political activist. She had migrated from Nevis. She worked on the sugar plantation as weeder, worker in the women’s gang, and a cotton-picker. She shares a modest home with a daughter and granddaughter. She receives a state allowance and buys and sells small quantities of bananas at a marginal profit. Recorded on December 5, 1997 & April 24, 1998.

Ismay Francis/May Southwell, age unknown, worked as mason, weeder, packer, and cotton picker and was in the women’s gang while employed on the sugar plantation. She lives with her husband Charles Francis, age 89. They share a moderate home with two great grandchildren. They receive state allowances, remittances from their children, and she conducts a small business in kerosene oil retail. The home has a large living room, separate dining room and kitchen, three bedrooms, and contains bathroom facilities. The children maintain payments for household bills. Recorded on September 25, 1998.
Arabella Matthew gave her age as 90 when she recorded her story. She had worked on two sugar plantations as a weeder, a packer, and also picked cotton grown as a rotational crop on the sugar plantation. At the time of the interview, her household expenses were met by her daughter, who lives in the United States Virgin Islands. The daughter, who visits her often, was present during the interview. She shares her home, a large bungalow, with a granddaughter who serves as her caretaker—prepares her meals, does the laundry and oversees the payment of household bills.
Recorded on December 29, 1997

Miriam Matthew, age unknown. She described herself as a widowed mother of five adult children. She was employed in a variety of plantation jobs, including weeder, packer, worker in the women’s gang, and she also prepared animal feed. She lives in a modest wooden home with the basic amenities. She shares the home with her youngest son and a grandson. At the time of the recording, she worked at a bookstore stacking and cleaning shelves. She is responsible for some of the household bills; she receives minimal and irregular financial assistance from other members of the family. Recorded on December 29, 1997.

Irene Hamilton, 80 years old, mother of six. Her father, a White European plantation owner, lived with her mother, a Black, African field worker. She lived and worked on several sugar estates: namely, Mills, Parsons, Lynches, and Caines. She mainly worked in the Great House and was responsible for laundry. She lives in her own home contributed by her husband and son-in-law. It’s a two-room modest house, with a basement constructed by her son for his own use. She receives social security benefit and is supported by her six children and grandchildren. Her father was the sugar estate manager for an estate where her mother worked as a weeder. Recorded on her birthday, May 15, 1998.
Louisa Fraser, age unknown. I met Louisa Fraser sitting on her balcony on Wigley Avenue, Basseterre. Her house was on the same site where she lived in the 1930s. Her husband worked at the Telephone Exchange and was identified as the clerk who communicated the request for troops that arrived on St. Kitts to suppress the protest. She worked on the sugar estate and as a shop clerk. She rejected her husband’s conservative views and placating approach to the protest and became an activist. Recorded on April 9, 1998.

Henrietta Watson, age 89, is a resident in the village of Old Road. She lives in moderate, middle-income home with her daughter-in-law. She receives a social security benefit and intermittent support from her grandchildren. She worked at Franklands and Wingfield Estates before she became a shop clerk. She was a member of the Trades and Labour Union and a political activist, though quiet and retiring. Recorded on February 19, 1998.

4.3 Disruptive Empiricism

The stories were audiotaped and conducted in an environment familiar to the women. I had contemplated that video graphing the storytelling sessions, but decided against it on the grounds that a video camera would be distracting to older storytellers and could affect the natural conversational flow warranted for the project. I was also cognizant of the pitfalls of boasting and toasting that Chamberlain (2011) cautioned were possible with the use of video equipment or other sophisticated technology.

I selected 21 completed interviews as the focus of this study. Some audio-taped interviews were incomplete for a variety of reasons, including cancellations, the failure of the audio tape recorder to function on one occasion, or the interviewee’s refusal to continue the interview. In one case, I took preliminary notes at a chance meeting with a potential interviewee, whose full interview did not materialise.
The 21 women were approximately 80 years of age or older at the time of the interview. Many of the storytellers were uncertain of their age, but celebrated birthdays in accordance with the incomplete information passed on to them orally by their mother. In two cases, conflicts arose between the birth dates recoded by the state, the church, and personal memory. They attested to first-hand knowledge of the event before they participated in the interview, some in the presence of their caretakers including adult daughters who had been contacted to arrange the interview. I noted that women present at the interview would, on occasion, prompt the interviewee on specificities, which suggested that the tellers had passed on their knowledge to a younger generation, confirming the rationale for the selection of the method used in this research.

In the absence of the documentation, the lived histories of the women were being preserved in family members’ memories, which suggests the stories were being transmitted between generations. Family members present at the interview intermittently intervened in the conversation, stimulating the memories of the tellers and, on occasion verifying the telling.

Florence “Oinee” Hanley, whom I considered one of the more open and loquacious interviewees, requested that I return, on her daughter’s advice that I could be trusted with her uncensored account of the protest activities.

I felt it was necessary to retain the names of the respondents who had ceded authorial responsibility to me, in respect of their contribution to this new narrative of resistance, and because focus of the study has minimal risk of reputational damage to them and their descendants. I assumed an ethical obligation to portray their individual memories as accurately

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39 Many of the interviewees did not know their actual age, although all of them celebrated birthdays in accordance with dates passed on orally by their parents. Conflicts arose between birth dates recorded by the state and the church and personal memory.
as possible in this interpretive work, while contending with the challenges of subjectivity, orality, language transfer, silences, and incomplete sentences, with expectations of completion by the researcher.

On occasion, meeting dates were postponed, or I would receive a call from a family member requesting that the interview be done immediately, often prefaced with “Me granmoda seh ef yu kud kom nung [My grandmother is ready for you visit].” It conveyed an urgency to attend or lose the opportunity to gather data from an energised storyteller. It can also be interpreted as the storyteller’s need to feel alert and energized to present as much information as possible in the sitting, for storytelling can be an animated performance to be enjoyed by the oral historian and her audience.

The study also includes a group interview of three women, which one of the members of the group organized unilaterally. I was willing to accept these digressions as peculiarities of my target population that would not affect the substantive content of the data or the methodological integrity of the study. It was the longest storytelling experience. The women had remained in the same area geographical area that they lived in 1935. The discussion included collective perceptions; they verified each other’s accounts either by disagreeing or sanctioning each other’s memories and confirmed that they were indeed witnesses of the periodic event. On this occasion, I stayed on after the session ended to transcribe the audio tape, when I could more accurately recall the contribution of each speaker.

During the interviews, I answered the telephone, provided the interviewee with a glass of water as requested, monitored the cooking, gave an opinion on a community concern, viewed a photo album, and accepted a tour of the house and garden. The activities reconstructed the storytelling environment that was often interwoven with daily activities, such as hair braiding, food
preparation, and other domestic activities, as Devi Mucini\textsuperscript{40} (2011) describes it, and how I remembered my personal experience as a listener. The interruptions, reinforced my awareness of cultural expectations to show respect and deference to my elders, but they also enhanced the relationship of trust for a candid interview. The interviewees provided personal advice on my lifestyle, handling finance, and family life, which were interwoven in the interview, providing cues to interpret how the teller felt about memories that she disclosed. Invariably, the interviewees requested information on my family background, especially about older relatives with whom I could be identified. This disclosure contributed to a more relaxed conversational interview and forthrightness of the interviewees.

While Ford-Smith (1995a) recognized the unwillingness of her female interviewees to acknowledge their participation in the Jamaica uprisings in the 1930s, Brodber (2013) concluded that her female and male interviewees did not regard the upheaval as significant and, therefore, did not identify it as an important event in their life experiences. The participants in the study were forthcoming with their stories, and some invited me to return to provide additional information that they claimed to have forgotten to reveal. I concluded that the interview format used by Ford-Smith and Brodber might have restricted the natural flow of information from women who were accustomed to determining the process for revealing information and that an interview format can introduce elements of power between scholar and interviewee that I aspired to eliminate in my study.

\textsuperscript{40} See Mucina’s (2011) *Ubuntu: A Regenerative Philosophy for Rupturing Racist Colonial Stories of Dispossession* (p. 19, Illustration 1) for tradition of interweaving story telling with domestic activities.
Victoria Borg-O’Flaherty (2004) discovered that finding willing participants for her study, *Inquiry from the Periphery: Documenting the Masquerading Arts- St. Kitts*, was made easier when her target group of older Africans utilised storytelling techniques, with which they were familiar, to transfer knowledge of their past. Storytelling not only offered a comfortable space for the interviewee to speak in her language of competence, but its method incorporated a snowballing effect that yielded more interviewees, and the storytellers assumed the authority as a knower, which realigned the power relations between the researcher and teller. Although the editor or transcriber has the last word in arranging and ordering the final narrative, the oral storytelling of the narrator is a vital component of the written product. The orator chooses and orders what to narrate to the interlocutor. Therefore, I abandoned the five questions that I had originally constructed to order the flow of the stories and found that the questions were answered and rarely without my prompting.

In their studies conducted among indigenous populations, Razack (2015) and Tuwahi Smith (2012) provide the relevance of trust in perceived or real unequal power relations between members of a subjugated populations and data gatherer. Trust between the researcher and interviewees is critical for eliciting information that was previously used to incriminate witnesses and criminalise informants on public protest. I focused on enabling an environment of trust and ensuring that I facilitated a format conducive to the conversational storytelling that I had experienced growing up. The women agreed to have their names used in the study, which further revealed that the trust between researcher and interviewee was predicated on relations of trust in
the interview stage, which reduced concerns with analysis and interpretative credibility at the
back end of the process of historical knowledge construction.\footnote{41}

Gathering oral data by the storytelling method requires acute listening and observational skills. I
grew up in a storytelling tradition, where I learned to listen for the moral of a story, for
instructions, to repeat by rote, and to elicit encoded messages. Listening is engraved in my
upbringing as a cultural imperative, where children were \textit{to be seen not heard, speak only when they are spoken to, and relay a messages verbatim} and where success in a colonial educational
system was based on rote learning. The Anglicised colonial curricula were so foreign that
learning was conflated with regurgitation of curricula. In the position of researcher, equipped
with developed, experiential listening skills, I probed for explanations and expansion of
statements to obtain details to improve accuracy in the transcription and interpretive stage of the
study.

On occasion, some narrators asserted their authority as knowledge producer. Eltruda DeCosta
warned me about interrupting with introjections concerning what I had read about the protest and asserted, \textit{“Me no waan heea wha dei say inna no book, jus tek dung arl dat a tell yu an doan leev nutten oat” [I don’t want to hear what you read from a book. Record my account and leave nothing out].”} I understood her response as her insistence that I transmit her story
uncontaminated by previous histories of the period that had excluded her story.

\footnote{41 Qualitative researchers using oral interviews as historical evidence have presented a range of cautionary positions in eliciting information. See St. Hill (2003), Crotty (1998), Scott Wallach (2013) for their writings on the importance of flexibility, reflexivity in building trust in the oral interview. Hughes (2006, p. 4) insisted that “qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspective in words and their actions. Therefore, qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives.”}
During the storytelling, the narrators confirm the listener’s attention which is a skill storytellers use to keep the audience engaged. Alleyne (1999) discusses the practice in Caribbean storytelling for the narrator to introduce “call and response” as an interactive element to maintain the listeners’ attention. During the storytelling, the speakers wove expressions of endearment to address me into the telling, to which I would respond to confirm that I was listening actively. Terms such as choil (child), darlin (darling), and lil wan (little one) were used to denote their seniority in the relationship and inscribed the process of transferring knowledge between generations rather than between researcher and interviewee. I addressed the interviewees using Miss or Mrs. with their last name or use the familial familiar term of Autie, Mama, and Nana before the first name, which is culturally appropriate for female elders. The approaches minimised dominance and created a fluidity in the relations between researcher and narrator during the process of data collection.

My cultural awareness may have impacted the incidences and range of non-verbal cues or paralanguage, which are culturally specific communication that I recorded in note form and inserted in transcriptions for inclusion in the interpretation stage of the study. They ranged from particular nods, tilting of the head, tongue clapping (described pejoratively in the urban dictionary a random, annoying sound), intonations, and eye movements that oral historians (Chamberlain, 1997; Johnson, 2007a, 2007b; Portelli, 2006; Onuora, 2015) and scholars of literary and performing arts (Alleyne, 1999; Edgecombe, 2011; Ford-Smith, 2005; O’Callahan, 1987; Vété-Congolo, 2016) asserted give meaning to the narration. Storytelling, which is

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42 Mary Chamberlain’s (1995) study used oral interviews of Barbadians living in Britain to produce methodological insights on the use of oral evidence in gender history and the relevance of interpreting speech patterns of women to enrich historical text. Diana Fox (2010) anthropologist in her study on folklore she combined oral traditions and ethnographic studies to write gender into history
considered a performative art, both by the speaker and the researcher, contains a range of gestures, movements, and other forms of non-verbal communication to aid accurate interpretation of data in scholarly work based on oral sources.

Philomna Essed (1996) explained instances of cultural affinity that she encountered during her interviews for her investigation of everyday racism. Her respondents relied on her to complete sentences and to interpret emotive paralanguage and culturally specific metaphors. Based on Essed’s experiences, I compensated by taking copious notes to support the audio recordings. The women assumed that I understood the language. I tried to get an explanation for the term “Dei say she han duty,” which literally translates as “It is rumoured that she has dirty hands.” My cultural affinity equipped me to provide the interpretation: “It is rumoured that she practices obeah.” Lucille Morton insisted that I knew what she meant and that she would not explain the term. I recognised that by clarifying the statement, she would directly be making a disparaging comment about a community member and, therefore, deferred to my interpretation for the responsibility of interpretation in the accounting to the recorder.

The respondents spoke in Keteshon, the Kittitian nation language in which they are fluent instead of Kittitian English, an inflected form of English- the colonialist language, which is the proscribed official language used in for formal settings and scholarly exchange. I began most interviews in the inflected English, but deferred to the nation language, which is my mother tongue, during the natural conversational format of the interview. Nation language, which exists only in its oral form, except for popular use in social media, is essentially an everyday communicative tool and the language of resistance to the colonial, official English. The storytellers understand English, but were not conversant in it. They were proficient in Keteshon.
I made several attempts to transcribe the audio tapes into standard English and to insert the paralinguistic notes and references. However, the transcription and the paralanguage seemed to resist coherence and produced a discordant reading, much in the same way that Forde-Smith (2005) describes her experience in trying to convert Jamaican Patwah to English, and “it would not behave” (p. 15). The meanings communicated through the nation language evaporated when transcribed into English. I could no longer discern the storyteller’s tones and other affected speech, therein lay the discordance. The language used to subvert the authority of the colonial hegemony and discursive hierarchy of languages refused to be constrained in a scribed English standard. I resolved that to reduce the discordance created by standard English and improve the accuracy of interpreted meanings, I must weave the fluid form of Kittitian nation language, used in the transcription, into the analysis of the stories. This seemed to appease the memories of my foremothers (i.e., the participants in my study) and inscribe their resistance to British imperial dominance.

The value of paralinguistic notes became more apparent in transcribing the audio version of the data, as there were, on occasion, no verbal equivalencies between the standard English required for the interpretive aspect of the research. I transcribed the audio tapes, devoid of lexicology and with equivalence to English, the language of the coloniser, producing a scribal format involving Anglo-phonetics, which Honor Ford-Smith (2005) utilises in her work *Lionheat Gal* and drew on Allsopp and Allsopp’s (2003) *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* for the conversion.\(^4^3\)

\(^{43}\)See Nicole Aljoe’s (2004) “Caribbean Slave Narratives: Creole in Form and Genre,” where she discussed the multiple subjectivities inserted into the reading of slave narratives that occur from separating the tasks of data collection, transcription and analysis and which can corrupt intended meaning of the narrator.
Interpreting narrative analysis is a slow and painstaking process. It requires attention to subtlety, nuances of speech, relations between researcher and storyteller, and the organization of responses, while reflecting on maturational aspects of the social and historical context. As researcher, I collected the data, transcribed each story, and conducted the analysis to avoid what Aljoe (2004) describes as layers of subjectivities that can distance and disrupt the storytellers’ meaning and which Graham Goodson (1997) purported as intellectual self-interest and policy imperatives that create dissonance between the speaker’s meaning and the interpretation.

I procrastinated and felt an unusual burden for ensuring that the interpretation reflected what my foremothers wanted me to transmit, as most of them did not live to see and approve the final product. I would have to negotiate with the academic requirements of the Eurocentric language and the institution to minimize alienation between meanings they conveyed and the final product.

Personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They present past events from the realities and from the vantage point of present realities and values. From the complex relationships between narrative time and memory for the storyteller and for the listener/researcher, time recording, transcribing, reviewing, and interpreting, questions may arise, but that perplexity neither changes the meaning communicated during the recording nor does it prevent another researcher from arriving at different conclusions as to what she or he deems important from the recordings or transcriptions.

I purposely bounded the field of information and the themes that emerged in reviewing the transcripts and focused on what can be described as an alternative political consciousness that remain silent, occluded by the colonial sources of reference, macro theoretical approaches, and ideological frameworks that did not explain the minutiae of the event in previous studies. Secondly, the female protestors, who were gendered and deemed illiterate and peripheral to the
uprising in current texts, emerged to redefine their gendered selves in the research process through their stories.

Through the analytical tool of broadening or expansion (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), a researcher brings into the analysis what else one came to know about the storytellers and their local and general circumstances from their stories. Broadening, according to Misler,\(^{44}\) includes the description of the participant implied in the story told. The first of my findings chapters is dedicated to illuminating, through the broadening process, the storytellers’ self-perceptions, both reflective and current. The process is significant, as background verification for the findings in the succeeding chapter highlights specifically their witness testimonies of the protest.

4.4 Similarities to and Differences from Related Studies

Yvonne Browne’s (2007) study, *Bodies, Memories and Empire: Life Stories About Growing up in Jamaica 1943-1965*, utilises an auto-ethnographical approach in which she establishes herself as intellectual/researcher and storyteller and assumes authorial responsibility. Her perspective provides insight of a brown Jamaican woman who identified as an African-Jamaican-Canadian, reflecting on her experiences. The information is a rich tapestry of colonial history that highlights gender, race, colour and class that would not be found elsewhere. In his PhD dissertation, *Ubuntu: A Regenerative Philosophy for Rupturing Racist Colonial Stories of Dispossession*, Devi Mucina (2011) employs a series of personal stories to overcome the issues of power relations in decolonizing scholarship.

\(^{44}\) Misler (as cited in Saleh, Mennon & Clandinin’s (2014) *Autobiographical Narratives: Telling and Retelling*; Clandinin & Connelly’s (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*.)
My work mobilised the methodology that Ford-Smith (2005) utilises in *Lionheart Gal* to make sense of the life testimonies of 11 working-class Jamaican women. The term *lionheart gal* translates into English as *strong woman*; it embraces resilience, resourcefulness, strategic, and practiced survivability in the everyday life. Honor Ford-Smith’s *Lionheart Gal*, first published in 1986, is an anthology of personal stories written exclusively in the language of the narrators, with some editing, a Foreword and Afterword in English, by Ford-Smith. It was the first attempt at writing a book in using previously unscripted Patwah.

Where I depart from Ford-Smith (2005) is in her admission to constructing the Jamaican Patwah in a version close to English to ensure greater accessibility to the North American market, despite her conviction that Patwah is a language that is not a perversion of English. She negotiated a pragmatic decision for the sale of her work. I seek to enter the Kittitian nation language as central to this study, knowledge decolonization, and to honour the memory of my foremothers.

This work has been particularly influenced by Michele Johnson’s (2007a) methodology applied in her study of Jamaican women involved in domestic service, in particular her focus on discourses of the body in “*Problematic Bodies*: Negotiations and terminations in Domestic Service in Jamaica, 1920-1970. Johnson relied mainly on the oral interviews to generate data on domestic service providers, which she has recommended as a reliable source that “permits the study of everyday lives of ordinary people which would not have found their way into public documentation.,” (p. 88). Johnson attributed her approach to Joan Scott-Wallach’s efforts to expand the legitimation of oral sources as historical evidence and ignored the contribution of Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia, who in the early 1950s, challenged the metropolitan and imperial focus of West Indian history and introduced social history in Caribbean historiography.
Johnson further acknowledged that “the tasks of locating the body within the peculiarities of historical moments which themselves include large social, economic, political and cultural contexts can be overwhelming, the concept of embodiment encompasses moments of encounter and interpretation, agency and resistance” (p. 86) allow the researcher an opportunity for escape from dominant methodological frameworks and ideological confines.

Female protestors’ bodies present a problematic in nationalist versions of the 1935 uprising. They emerge from this work as individual thinkers involved in creating history, therefore disrupting the narrative of an illiterate, pseudo-male gendered collective with a peripheral role in the history of that period. I gathered the stories as a researcher, and read them as a descendant of the protestors, against the grain of the colonial archive. While anthropologist Mina Davis Caufield (1979) urged researchers to engage in “partisan participation openly taking sides with the oppressed, instead of trying spastically to be objective” (p. 50). Mina Davis Caufield’s work emerged in the early stages of feminist challenges to conventional disciplinary research that questioned the validity of objectivity in social scientific. In 1997, Kim Marie Vaz produced an anthology of research that featured African-American women as researchers and target population. The work established the relevance of the researcher’s familiarity with culture of the interviewee during an oral interview to assist with interpretation and the risks and suggestions to minimize the risks and reinforce the integrity of the research. Scholars (Aljoe, 2004; Brodber, 1983; Brown, 1997; Terborg-Penn, 1986, 1995; Vaz, 1997) and others have recommended inter-disciplinary, methodological designs as political devices to maintain the scholarly integrity of their studies.
4.5 Storytelling and Memory

The literature in defense of the use of oral sources as evidence on retrospective memory proliferated historical scholarship. Feminist writers have sought to explain how gender affects the way that women remember and how to include and interpret these memory processes. The women in this study provided clues as to how they structured their remembrances, which I collected as temporal data. Anita Ward, who was interviewed at age 87, revealed specificity in memory when she stated,

\begin{align*}
A \text{ remember when Janice come to me to find out when Oliver born, I told her jus’ watch pan de church in Dieppe Bay. He born dat same day dat de church open. Was a Sunday he born, dat same day. I remember. You know what date dat?}
\end{align*}

Janice wanted to know Oliver’s birthdate, I referred her to the date inscribed on the church in Dieppe Bay. He was born on the Sunday that the church was opened.

Anita Ward had identified Oliver as one of her brothers during the interview. Her repetitive use of “dat seaam deh” signified the confirmation of the date, without adopting the specificities of the Julien calendar in a Eurocentric format.

This study relied on the retrospective evidence of interviewees, advanced in age, who recalled an event that occurred while they were under the age of 35. Psychologist David Thelen’s (as cited in Yow, 2015) study on older adults concluded that they are better at telling stories of the past than are young adults, while psychologist David Rubin (as cited in Yow, 2015)\(^45\) found that from middle age on, most people are better at remembering things from their childhood and early

\(^{45}\) Both Thelen and Rubin are quoted in Yow (2015) *The Oral History Reader* (p. 41 and p. 45, respectively).
adolescent years than recent. My experience as a listener to elders relaying stories indicates a level of clarity and consistency in the content. Whatever the experiential or scientific grounding, the storytellers that I encountered seemed to have developed mnemonic strategies of recall.

The historical verification of narrative accounts cannot be evaluated using traditional criteria of the discipline. The storytellers in this study positioned themselves as the authority on their versions of the event and recommended other knowledgeable persons who could verify or clarify their accounts. The knowers’ empiricism is located in referential oral sources or verifying memories. Oral historians may find that overall, a narrator’s account is accurate, but some details may be missing or exaggerated. Needless to say, some inaccuracies do not negate the value of the entire testimony. Individuals tend to see themselves as actors in these events, and the emotional charge and the entire context surrounding an event, is usually part of the memory. Moreover, in this study, the focus on recollected evidence, from the memories of elders, it is the interpretation of the event and the remembered feeling that I sought. The accuracy resides in researchers’ findings that suggest feelings are usually consistent within memory.

Episodic memory represents one’s memory of experiences and specific events in time, in a serial form, from which one can reconstruct the actual events that took place at any given point in one’s lives. It is the memory of autobiographical events -time, place, associated emotions and other contextual knowledge- that can be explicitly stated. Brown (1997), Gollop (1997), Mohammed (2001), and Turner (1995) found that females consistently perform better than males on long-term, episodic memory tasks, especially those involving recall, recognition, feelings, and meaning. Hosein (2011), who used oral narratives to analyse the lives of Indo-Trinidadian women who were 80 or older when interviewed in 1997–98, and who came of age in the 1920s. The researcher concluded that traumatic, episodic events, such as the participants’ journey from
India, their arrival in Trinidad as indentures, and periods of racial unrest in which South Asian indentures were targeted, were remembered with detailed memories, and evoked strong emotions from the storytellers. Scholars (Abbrey 1999, Sutherland 2013) involved in theorizing the impact of historical trauma on diasporic Africans have concluded that the aggrieved populations commit experiences of psychological and physical violence to communal memory.

Some of the women who were children at the time of the protest situated themselves within a childhood memory, less encumbered by what they reported as the hardships of their elders. Yet, when they discussed their elders’ losses, there was often a profound grief, reflective of the enormity of the loss. This age-specific self-situatedness may not be comprehended by those who hear these testimonies. One may expect the adult before one to report what an adult might have experienced over 60 years ago. That is, one does not recognize the memories from childhood and the language in which they are expressed, which may be different from those who were adults, and that some adults may have attempted to shield children from the violence in all its complexity.

Some interviewees relied on a variety of personal mnemonic devices. Mrs. Fraser, one of the storytellers, recalled being pregnant and standing at the top of Wigley Avenue where she witnessed an official declaring Marshall Law that effected a curfew. In her recollection, she expressed that she “memba how de choil moow an how a een ha a bad feelin inna de pit a me stomak to dis day [I remember that the child moved and I was overcome with an ominous feeling, as I do now that I am recalling the story: I remember the unborn child stirred and the anguish I felt, to this day].” Enid Decosta verified Mrs. Fraser’s pregnancy in her account that identified Mr. Fraser as a “traitor” who worked at the Exchange that wired Governor’s request for additional troops. Florence Jarvis explained that she was married to a sugar estate overseer,
lived at Cranston’s Estate with her husband, and rejected the category of sugar worker on the
grounds that “me ain no low class person [I do not belong to the lower class].”

Anita Ward’s story referenced Florence Jarvis on a number of occasions, which confirmed both
women temporally within the period of study, and sought to contest her attempt to separate
herself from protestors, whom she considered below her social status:

I doan know if she yuz to liw a Lahoom, but a know she liv up a Fahie an me and Mrs. Jarvis weed
keyan togyada dong a Sarl Pan. I don’t remember her living at Cranston’s. I know she lived at
Fahies and we worked together at Salt Pond.

Salt Pond was the name of a field of sugar cane. My cultural awareness that plantation owners
assigned names to each field of sugar cane plants also provided verifiable points for cross
referencing. The stories provided the opportunity for cross-referencing accounts and for
interpreting consistency in feelings and meanings among narrators.

Cross referencing, while it satisfies the conventional epistemic requirement, can occlude the
subjectivity of the storyteller, which was of paramount importance in this study. Mary
Chamberlain (1997) discusses perception and subjectivity in oral sources as presenting a
different credibility. She argues that memory manifests evidence of a shared consciousness, a
part of social production, and therefore, any discordances found in oral sources reflect subjective
difference rather than a weakness in the method. Each woman in this study remembered the
event in her language of defiance to the colonial narrative of the same event. Together, the
stories provided a new and compelling narrative co-constructed with each other and the
researcher to produce and preserve in text.
4.6 Centering Orality

Scholars agree that testimonies remain the last bastion to be tapped to preserve historical perspectives constructed from the memories of those whose language competencies are exclusively in the oral tradition. Caribbean oral forms, commonly constructed as folk language or the language of the poor, have been distorted as a consequence of racialized colonialism, relegating the nation language as a pejorative metonymy. I use the term nation language not as Edward Braithwaite (1984) defines it, but generically to mean the language spoken by the majority of the population that occupies a geopolitical land space. Contestations abound on issues regarding the constituent elements of the languages, competing languages, and the impact of converting the oral language to scribal forms, though they are not limited these specific issues.

Edward Braithwaite (1984, p. 13) coined the term nation language, which he described as “English . . . in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words as you hear might be English to a greater or lesser degree.” Kittitian linguist Vincent Cooper’s (1998) analyzed Kittitian nation language as comprising words from specific regions of the West African coast, Guadeloupean creole, English, and “indistinguishable words” that he assumed might have been of indigenous origin, which suggests that English is not the predominant content. In an article that summarized a wide range of perspectives on Caribbean nation languages, Supriya Nair (2000) concluded that each nation language is a constituent of the multiple migrant and indigenous cultures; their fluidity guards against its own hegemonic development and deflects immutable dominance of Eurocentric linguistic hegemony.

Ama Mazama (2001) has long argued for the classification of Caribbean languages as African based to avoid relegation to “footnote status in a White man’s book” (p. 387). Her work
registered her conviction with the centrality of the African cultural experience in the African-Caribbean populations and set out a cogently argued dialectic of Afrocentricity. She has used her linguistic background to establish that the language of the descendants of the enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and North America are rooted in African languages. This supported my decision to root the name of the unnamed nation language used in St. Kitts, within an African-centred ethos.

Historically, the colonial hierarchy of languages in the Caribbean elevated the European languages at the highest rung and African language at the lowest. The adaptation of Caribbean oral forms into the written text has significant yet paradoxical ramifications. On one hand, it gives voice to a range of past African cultural, social, political, sexual, aesthetic, and linguistic systems long muted by the history of colonialism, providing access to the best of what African oral and European written forms have to offer. On the other hand, however, such adaptation, in the face of the dominant ideology and conventions of European colonial or neo-colonial culture, puts the scholar continually in conflict.

Despite numerous efforts, no Caribbean country, except Haiti-Kweyol and Aruba-Papiemento, have formalised the nation language. Ford-Smith’s (2005) Lionheart Gal, which comes closest to producing a social historical text in the Jamaican nation language, was relegated exclusively to the literary, performing arts, and entertainment sector to meet the cultural preservation agenda. Michael Carr’s (2002) reading of the text 16 years later recognises the social scientific value of the text, but reinforced the colonial discourse that marginalize and devalue nation language by producing the reading in English.

Kittitians use two modes of communication, apart from English, which are designated as the official language. Kittitian nation language is pathologized and conflated with a pidgin that is
spoken by a sector of the society whose mimicry of British culture includes a language adapted to aspire to communicate exclusively in English. The pidgin is accommodative and often used mockingly in conversation by the majority of Kittitian speakers. Pidgin English is spoken by an elite group of upper and middle class Kittitians. It is structurally English, with flawed pronunciations, grammatical misuses, and voice inflexions that make it clearly recognisable as bad or broken English. The pidgin language is, in fact, a dialect, created in an attempt to ridicule English. It falls within the category of Creole English, a euphemism for broken or imperfect English.

The second, is the primary Kittitian language, which, until its introduction in this study, has been exclusively oral, is often conflated with the pidgin, and devalued by outsiders. Although it is the language of choice and comfort for all Kittitians, it is held in contempt by colonized parents, teachers, and administrators and discouraged as a formal mode of communication. Kittitian is the language to which Kittitian intellectuals and other officials differ in formal settings to clarify, persuade, or to become more accessible to large audiences. It contains passions and communicative devices that can only be communicated through those Kittitian words.

This work insists on the decolonization of Kittitian as fundamental to the decolonization of the knowledge it produces jointly with Kittitian speakers. Indigenous languages are embedded with axiological, ontological and epistemological understandings. Consequently, I infuse Kittitian in the text not simply to disrupt the colonizing influence of English Language dominance in this study but to preserve the “cultural values, collective identities and social and ancestral histories” that Dei (2004, p. 205) asserts are endemic in language.
Oral languages that defy regulative principles of Eurocentric linguistic patterns are also fuelling a wave of critical revisionism, probing the premises of established language theory. Writing orality not only provides a distinct cultural identity, but also creates a counter-colonial discourse that aims at emancipating the peoples of African descent from the stranglehold of colonial misrepresentation. Oral/written/African/European/Indigenous intertextual quality of language is made complex by the socio-cultural aspect—racialization in colonial societies. The literature functions as locus or epitome of community-created culture and counter-colonial discourse, portraying the speakers/writers as self-assertive community agents with the potential for forging a new historically informed identity.

Each discrete story in this study is told in the language of defiance and liberation and should be reproduced in individual stories to fully represent the subjectivity of each teller. Woven together, the stories produce a compelling new narrative about the uprising in St. Kitts in the 1930s that disrupts the monolithic categories of the masses and working class found in previous textual representations of the event. Their stories defy the researcher’s category of sugar workers used in the interview in her predetermined economistic interpretation of event and forced a shift in the preconceptions with which I began the project. Margaret Ledwith’s (2005) argument that mini-narratives had displaced meta-narratives, which was in one sense positive, but in another served

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to *individualize* struggles and does not hold true for subjugated, unwritten knowledges in a world that privileges the written word.

Oral sources and methods are particularly instrumental in providing substantial insights on inferred meanings and values. Through this communicative process, individuals can then frame their ideas about the present and the future. There are several caveats, according to historian Mary Chamberlain (1995). Female life histories present dilemmas in terms of collection, content, style, and the interpretation of data, oftentimes due to the strongly based methods of social science. In addition, social scientists trained in the Western tradition find it difficult to describe women as autonomous personalities and as selves in their own right. Oral histories can be a prime or supportive source for understanding the histories of social groups who by reason of gender, class, race, education or culture are denied other conventional sources.

I have described the challenges of transcribing the stories of oral historians that were recorded in a language that does not have a written equivalent. The challenge of decolonizing scholarship is to present the language of the decolonizer to preserve its equity within the knowledges paradigm. In this study, I employ two methods of presenting the African oriented Kittitian language. Michele Johnson (2007a) incorporated the Jamaican Patwah in her study on domestic servants in Jamaica by footnoting the English translation of the quotations. I build on her format by inserting the English translations in the main body of the text alongside the nation language presented in italics, a method that Alleyne recommended during an interview with Walicek (2011). I also utilised Waterfall’s (2010) suggestion of utilising parallel columns to juxtapose the language of domination and the indigenous language, within the text. Oral sources can recover more stories of African-Kittitians in their first language to stem the tide of Kittitian cultural epistemicide.
4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed a methodology to guide knowledge production, using story telling in a previously unwritten language. The methodology emphasises the storytellers as agents and central to the process of decolonizing a moment in history, but more importantly liberating the knowledge from Eurocentric interpretations. The stories are as much about a protest as they are to disseminate the knowledge that remained only in memory and among a close circle of intergenerational subjects. This act of a scholar Kittitian and her foremothers’ memories inserting our story in an academic setting in the north is a political act, which initiates the liberation of the language and reinforces its epistemological value. In the two chapters that follow, I present some findings from the stories.
Chapter 5
Subjects of the Protest – The Texture and Context of their Lives

Historians’ renderings of the social unrest that occurred across the Caribbean in the 1930s cast the protestors, comprised largely of a socially and economically disadvantaged, racialized, and colonised African descended population, as the masses and working class, which was peripheral to the constitutional and institutional raison d’être of the uprising. Implicitly, the concept of masses was a monolithic other that helped to fulfil the aspirations of the elites vying for leadership in political parties and workers’ organizations. These conventional accounts record the protestors as faceless masses, except for the few individuals whose names appear in court documents and newspaper reports of prosecutions related to the protest, thereby pathologizing the event and the protestors.

Chapters Two and Three demonstrated that Marxist and Marxist feminist interpretations of the period, by Caribbean scholars, silenced and displaced the subjectivity and agency of the women and men who were the targets of brutal force by the combined imperial army and local police and defence force on the streets of Basseterre and the rural areas of St. Kitts in 1935. Feminist scholarship on the period celebrates charismatic Caribbean female leadership within the colonial institutions and their contribution to inchoate nationalism, leaving the opportunity for future scholars to introduce a narrative of the untold stories of ordinary protestors.

In this chapter, I explore the women’s gender subjectivity and their accounts of their conditions in 1935 that illuminate their living and working conditions at the time of the protest. I argue that gender sharpened the women’s awareness of the conditions under which they lived and laboured
and shaped their strong political consciousness based on notions of justice, fairness, and the desire for liberation.

These accounts provide the background to the women’s participation in the protest. Their stories answer the questions not addressed in previous histories: Who are the protestors? How do they view their life experiences during the period? What circumstances motivated them to participate in the national protest? These stories, in which the individual narrators make sense of themselves, social situations and their history, illuminate collective action and meanings of the space they inhabit as tellers.

I examine how historical processes shaped their genders and how memory can serve as an essential medium for defining the past and understanding the present. It inscribes the subjectivity of female protestors, my foremothers, who retell the story from their perspective. We co-construct a narrative of subjects who were neither silent, incidental, nor apolitical, using the language of the oppressor to fulfil the university’s requirement, interspersed with a scribal format of the story tellers’ oral language to honour their presence in this work. This chapter represents another phase in the scholarly struggle to excise irritant vestiges of coloniality that haunt the written histories of Kittitians of African ancestry and formulates the ontological precedence of the interviewees, unschooled in the language and ideology of academia, as the epistemological anchorages of the study.

Black women’s bodies, in protest, signify that the colonial civilising mission had failed to transform enslaved African females and their African-Kittitian descendants into gendered replicas of Christian white women, despite centuries of British colonial welfare policies based on the Eurocentric discourses to inform the policy decisions. The female protestors’ bodies highlight the failure of the British authorities and their local surrogates to control the women’s
bodies and to regulate these bodies physically and discursively into a compliant, stable, reliable work force.

Each story of the women’s stories is different and open to multiple readings, but collectively, they weave a new narrative framing their disposition for active involvement in the 1935 protest movement. The women’s interpretive recollections of the event include their reflection on affective ties that enunciate their familial and friendship relationships, how they recall their roles as protestors, and how they perceive their relationships with the employers and the state. The storytellers articulate the vulnerabilities of their bodies to violence, including the perpetual threat natural disasters and capital exploitation and how they negotiated their survivability in an afterlife of slavery.

The women in this study were determined to communicate the tone and texture of their lives as an integral part of the narrative of protest. I argue that the tone and texture of these women’s lives, as they recall it, reveal complex gendered narrators who refused to be confined by the hostility of their lived circumstances. I further demonstrate a conceptual understanding of gender of Black females in a colony of exploitation, performed within multiple layers of hegemony using storyteller Oinee’s concept of gender as the reference point for the interrogation of the gendered, dispossessed African-Caribbean woman encountered in text. Secondly, I want to engage with the testimonies micro-biographically, to dissect and analyse strategies of survival and protest that are empirically grounded in these women’s experiences

5.1 African-Kittitian Female Bodies

The interviewees had little formal education beyond age 10, the highest age being 12, but never beyond the onset of de mensiz [menstruation] as Florence Jarvis recalls. Many girls began menstruating by age 13, which marked the legal age of consent and culturally accepted the
signifier of female adulthood and termination of childhood education. By age eight, their initiation into adulthood began with providing assistance to their parents in field work, assisting with picking cotton, weeding, or serving as psychological shields for mothers who were subject to rape during solitary work as weeders in the sugar industry. They also began their initiation into adulthood responsibilities by collecting water and firewood and sweeping the area surrounding the home.

By their twelfth birthday, all the interviewees, except Veronica Byron, who was apprenticed as a seamstress in her mother’s business, obtained full-time employment in the sugar industry as field hands or domestics. Their truncated childhood and early initiation into the socio-economic arrangement formalised the platform for sexual and economic exploitation as a practice of labour extraction, different only from slavery by the low wages and overt negotiations in the sex trade.

The women exposed the perennial threat of sexual exploitation of African-Kittitian females by male employees, co-workers, partners, and parents and the strategies they developed to manage their vulnerability. Women and girls’ bodies became no more secure after 1834 or a century later in 1935. Florence married her rapist, an older man who worked as a supervisor on a sugar plantation. Marie and Lilian provided graphic details of the sexual assault of a serial rapist who served in a management position on a plantation where they worked. I noted the resonances in their stories to Beckles (1989) account of Thistlewood, a Barbarian plantation manager who recorded the assaults in logbooks and diaries.

Oinee Hanley, who was molested by her mother’s partner, found full-time employment in the sugar industry at age 12 and moved out of the home. She explained her decision to leave home at an early age because of preteen sexual assault:
My mother’s co-habiting partner, I couldn’t continue to live in the house with that man, not me. I had had enough of his interference [sexual assault.]

She moved into shared accommodation with her friend Lona who had left school a few months before she did. Lona had settled for generating income in the sex trade. Oinee subsequently moved in with Elva Kelly, who paid her rent by bartering in sex with the landlord. The vulnerability of the women’s bodies from childhood to adulthood reinforced the gendered colonial discourse of a hypersexualised African-Kittian woman in the period was revealed in the participants’ stories, in the absence of an equivalent written discourse to counter the misrepresentation. These women made pragmatic decisions to protect their bodies from sexual assault and to negotiate pay or favours for forced or consensual sex. In some instances, perpetrators were subjected to extortion for a prolonged period in exchange for keeping a secret of sexual indiscretion from their family or the public, or they would be required reduce the workload of the employee, who was victimised, for an agreed period of time, the outcome would be geared to the victimized obtaining financial compensation. The stories these women revealed in their stories required in-depth discussion, to disrupt the suppressed, horrific truths and the women’s agency and a subjective conceptualisation of these women’s bodies.

Marie Edwards constantly returned to her story to express disgust at the insatiable desire of her employer, Yearwood, “to ponch out” [engage in brutal rape] Black women. She provided details of the little he paid for the sexual service and his failure to deliver on promises of benefits that would be tied to a future rape encounters. Florence Jarvis spoke of being stalked and “yuz”
[raped] by a much older male manager and her fear as a young woman and new migrant, working on her own weeding sugarcane plants.

The women understood the vulnerability of their bodies as an essential constituent of their gender. Irene Hamilton explained the most challenging vulnerability to which women’s bodies were exposed during the 1930s:

A ooman aawe be ent it me choil, aawe barn wid a wuk roit? You kou choose ou wuk it ou money ar wuk it ou low, but dem toim dei me no no ef you ha choice fa when iz no man force you is de wan who a wuk owa you. We are women, aren’t we my child? We are born with bodies to generate income. You can choose to use that body to earn or you can choose to surrender your body for love, but in those days we didn’t have choices, because you are likely to be raped by a male from your community or a male employer.

The declaration “baan wid a wuk [I was born equipped for employment]” was often a response by Kittitian women employed in low-wage, insecure positions who are threatened with arbitrary termination. The biosocial adage suggests prostitution as an alternative or complementary employment to avoid abject poverty. Donna St. Hill (2003, p. 62) discussed the role of bargaining in the subjective realities of women, citing Kandiyoti’s notion of patriarchal bargaining to correct the oversimplification of theory that embrace the victimhood versus agency duality. On the other hand, Young’s (1993) “force of ideology” that recognises prostitution as natural, oversimplifies the the markers of racism, classism, and colonialism that define the sex trade.

The storytellers understood their gender in its historical context of coercion and resistance in a process that subjected their bodies to maximum labour extraction and physical and psychological
brutality, by men in a colonial culture that dishonoured African-Caribbean women’s bodies. Marie observed that only Black males were prosecuted in rape cases involving African-Kittitian women, despite the high incidence of non-consensual sex perpetrated by non-Black men. Lilian Williams, deflecting provision of sexual favours from herself, described how women, recognising their susceptibility to sexual harassment and abuse, negotiate pay and benefits for rape and organized to demand increasing benefits for sex.

African-Caribbean women’s notion of gender neither required men to defend their honour, nor was chastity an option in the 1930s. The women defended themselves, their children, and the African-Caribbean men whenever the circumstances required it. The women in the study accepted their roles as head of household and/or breadwinner as a condition of their social and economic experiences in colonial society, and working was a condition of that responsibility. The interviewees, already in their 80s, remained involved in income-generating activities from their homes: Lucille sold bread and cakes, Oinee sold bananas, Eltruda sold confectionaries, Miriam transferred from domestic service to assist in the bookstore of her employees, others kept home gardens and bartered produce. These women continued to make choices to “kip bezee an mek me ooan lil cheanj [keep working to earn a small income]” is in keeping with the tradition of independence and some measure of economic autonomy associated with household heads.

Their recollections are the evidence of a new narrative of a historical event and the protestors who narrate it. These witnesses contest and contradict the gendered, colonised, racialized textual representation and initiate an act of decolonisation by informing intellectual thought through unscripted rememberings of that protest. The Black-bodied females, whose interpretations of the event have been silenced or devalued, emerge in this chapter as the agents of their stories and architects of their gender. The process, which minimalizes the incongruity of power relations
between teller and researcher, is not devoid of exploitation, as it is brought into elitist power relations of academic knowledge and Eurocentric relations.

Florence ‘Oinee’ Hanley recommends the concept oomanship that contests and engages existent feminisms and womanisms discussed in woman-centred gender discourse. Oomanship is Oinee’s conceptual understanding of gender performance of females who, like her, were involved in the protest. Her definition contrasted her from “de woite leardee dem an dem adduz who sedung pan dei arse wait ou man money an doan get dei oan money [white ladies in the and other women who do not earn an income except from their male partners].” Aspiring towards economic autonomy was highly valued among her gender, while depending exclusively on handouts from male partners is condemned.

Oinee Hanley offers a very clear perception of the complexity of her lived gender in the 1930s in her pronouncement that,

\[
\text{Oomanship iz wen yu go an yu oan. No moda ou help yu do nuhtn een yu plears.}
\]
\[
\text{Iz wen yu mek yu ooon desezhun, but nat a man kud mek yu do wat yu doan waant ewen ef dei liw wid yu, expayshaly ef dei liw wid yu. Fah oomahnship iz haard loif.}
\]
\[
\text{Yu gat ou wuk fah yuself ahn waash, cook an oyon fah ehreebadee een yu hoas anless yu haaw a eendostreos gyul choil ou help yu. Dat wha mek me goin look after me gyul choil dem ahn me tell dem no ley no mahn wuk dem ooat ahn den go lef dem.}
\]

With ‘oomanship’ comes independent decision-making and full responsibility for the affairs of a household. The woman does not tolerate coercion from anyone who attempts to impose their will on her decision-making process. She is especially opposed to interference if she owns the home. A woman endures and undertakes onerous responsibilities in her lifetime. She must earn an income and assume the domestic responsibilities of the home, sometimes with the assistance of a daughter who is willing to be trained in ‘oomanship’. Young women are highly
valued and given special attention. Their training involves advice on how to avoid the pitfalls of overwork and desertion by male partners.

Oinee’s complex definition of her gendered experience combines economic independence, autonomous decision making, income generation, domestic responsibilities, and gender relations that assign priority value to girls. She understood “hard loot [hard life],” the difficulties that a woman experiences throughout her lifecycle as a historical condition of her gendered and material existence that can be mitigated by her own actions. Lucille reflected: “Look me nung, hard loot kou owacome. We gatto liw [Look at me, I am an example that one can overcome difficult life experiences. We will survive it].” She indicates that there is pride in overcoming which is fuelled by determination and a conviction to achieve the goal of overcoming. It also suggests that her socialisation prepared her to survive arduous work and other ordeals that taxed the survival of African-Kittitian women.

These precepts recurred in the women’s stories, extending the gender experience beyond an individual perception. The women, regardless of their conjugal arrangements, generated income for household use and made important decisions without deferring to an adult male. Anita Ward, who was married, explained that she worked as a weeder, and she supplemented that income by selling herbs for teas and seasonings at the time of the protest. Eltruda, who was married after the uprising and demonstrated the same level of independent decision making in her household as Anita, worked in the sugar industry, sold chicken feed in the community, and sold rock aggregates to building contractors before finally settling into vending ripe bananas from her home. The general consensus the women communicated was that with the right level of support for the household, they would have ended employment with the sugar estates. The female
household head also assumed the full management of domestic responsibilities, including the
delegation of tasks for operations inside and outside the home, which reinforced her centrality in
the household.

Oomanship is the subjective definition that Oinee presents of dispossessed, Kittitian females in
the 1930s, for whom autonomy was a rite of passage for womanhood. Autonomy, however,
should not be interpreted as an atomistic lifestyle, for never-married women with children
predominate in Caribbean societies and are prevalent among African Caribbeans in the socially
and economically disadvantaged sectors. Additionally, female-headed households were more
likely to develop into multigenerational, extended family forms than contract into nuclear family
forms.

Caribbean family forms have been an obsession for social scientists and social workers. This no
doubt stems from the Eurocentric bias that pathologized African familial arrangements, which
were transferred from the continent and adapted in the Caribbean and other regions. Caribbean
scholars, but more particular Caribbean feminist researchers such as Barrow (1986), St. Hill
(2003), and Massiah (1986), sought to depathologize the perception of African family forms with
their cultural adaptations in from the period of enslavement to the present.

Joycelyn Massiah (1983), in her work on female heads of households, defines a household as:

> One or more persons voluntarily living together and sharing at least one meal. In general, the
> household comprises a father, mother, children and other relatives as well as other
> persons sharing in their household arrangements. . . . A member of the household is not
> necessarily a member of the family, nor will all members of the family be members of the
> household. . . . A household may include more than one family. A household is construed
> in terms of domestic relationships. (p. 15)

She has provided the most comprehensive description based on data drawn from a woman-
centred research project conducted in 12 Caribbean countries.
5.2 Household Relations

_Yeh, de gyzl dem rule, me kou put truss pan de gyzl money, man no ha’ no money in ya yu know._

Yes, the girls (in this house) rule, I can depend on the girls’ financial support. You need to know that no man contributed here.

For decades, researchers and census enumerators, who conform to the Eurocentric descriptors of the term head of household, failed to capture the accurate information on heads of household and produced statistics that skewed outcomes with a male bias.  

_A 1960 Eastern Caribbean Statistical Centre report defined head of household as:_.

. . . usually the husband or common-law husband. Where the husband or common-law husband is not the head, or where no man lives in the household, the person who claims the position or who is so regarded by other members of the household is treated as head.  

The 2000 census report in St. Kitts and Nevis recognised the interpretive conflict reported by culturally sensitive enumerators and recommended the term “reference person” to replace head of household and to capture the sphere of influence of the individual identified in that position.

A concept of household, which offers fluidity in relations and composition of the residents in a home, emerged from the findings of the Women in the Caribbean Project conducted in the early 1980s (Broder, 1982). Its location within a gender-specific agenda in the early stages of feminist research and practice may have attributed to the sluggish acceptance of the term as an equivalent to the Eurocentric term “family” and to avoid the gendered, racialized discursive interpretation of

47 The St. Kitts and Nevis Census Report 2000 acknowledges the challenges that still persist in mainstreaming head of household as a culturally appropriate term: “While there appears to be no consensus on the issue of who should be designated head of household, some accommodation has been made in using the term ‘reference person’ instead of ‘head of household’ in the data collection process” (p. 181).

“household” as the code for dysfunctional family. Even after several official revisions intending to Caribbeanize the definition, head of household remains a highly contested term. Notable Caribbean researchers, Blank (2013) and Chevannes (1998), based on a study among African Jamaicans, concluded that women are only considered to be household head if men are absent from the home. What I wish to underscore is how the discursive construction of family normalises the nuclear family and continues to displace the empirically sound, culturally appropriate concept of household, even when the actualities present themselves to official data collectors.

Demographic data referenced by Fog-Olwig (1993), Higman (1995), and Momsen (1993) confirmed the predominance of African-Kittitian women as household heads beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, when female heads of household in St. Kitts ranged between 51% to 57%. All the women in my study were, at some point of their lives, daughters of a female-headed household or heads of households themselves, which suggest the female-headed households could be more prevalent than the statistics reveal. In my experience, adult males residing in the household, whether they were relatives or partners, recognise the female head. Official statistics, however, convey a different reality than what is perceived to be real within the African-Caribbean communities, where the scope of a woman’s independence, autonomous decision making and influence is much more pronounced than the statistics indicate.

In small communities, the head of household is known to community groups and organizations, with cultural awareness of female leadership. Bernice Caesar, whose conjugal partner joined her household, retained headship of her home as her mother before her. For Bernice, retaining the position of household head facilitated shielding her children from the vicissitudes of the serial
conjugal relationships in which she had been involved and guaranteed consistency in leadership, which she felt is essential for stability in a household.

The determinants of household headship include such variables as who owns the home, who supports the household members, and who has held traditional authority over the household. The household head is the main decision maker regarding the upkeep and maintenance of the home. Margaret Richardson affirmed her headship by declaring “ehrebadee mus hear wha me say, fa who me no bring ya, kom aafa me [Everyone in the household recognises and respects me as the head. I decide who lives here and who is allowed to join the household].” The head of household undertakes the domestic responsibilities for training children and assumes responsibility to assign or carry out major household chores. Management of scarce resources, such as water and pooling finances to avoid wastage, was of primary concern to the heads of households who took personal responsibility to transmit resource management skills through practice and advice.

The concept of oomanship challenges the centrality of heteronormativity, male-dominated hierarchy, the notion of the male gradient and oppositional, male-female polarity in understanding gender among poor African-Kittitian women in the 1930s. Arabella, reflecting on the complex composition of her household, recognised oomanship as a platform for equity between the sexes and genders.

\[
\begin{align*}
Yeh \ dei \ ha \ tings \ fah \ man \ ou \ do \ an \ ooman \ ou \ do, \ but \ yu \ kyarn \ weat \ till \ de \ man \ kom. \\
If \ yu \ cou \ moo \ it, \ moo \ it. \ Doan \ wait \ say \ man \ ou \ do \ dat
\end{align*}
\]

Yes, there are things that men should do and there are things for women to do. But you should not wait until the man gets home to carry out a duty that you can do yourself.

This statement also infers a sense of self-reliance that guides gender performance among the women of the period and which many have been engrained as a value and passed on to younger
family members. This perspective contests the notion of victimhood found in liberal developmental literature.

The women’s theorising disrupts a polarising gender politics and focuses on gender performance. The story tellers’ living and working conditions militated against specificities of gender based on sex differentiation. The women’s lived experience in the 1930s predates the recent discussions on gender performance and escaped the lens of liberal researchers, social worker Clarke (1957), and anthropologist Herskovits (1929), who conducted research on African-descended populations in the Jamaica and Trinidad.

Lucille was equally pragmatic as she reflected on the woman’s obligation to the household and summarized what she considered a useless perception of gender hierarchy and oppositional gender politics between African Kittitian males and females. She stated:

_Arl aawe iz poor people, wayda yu iz a man or woman. E doan mek sense foit gens de man dem fa de crumb, fa iz wan dutt floor aawe woz a share. Ain dat he betta arf an yu koo. Yu ha to look out fa dem to._

We are poor people regardless of your sex. It does not make sense competing against men for the scarce resources. We share the same earthen floor, he is no better off. Women have to be protector and demonstrate concern for everyone in the household.

This tendency to assume responsibility for the household demonstrates a combination of strength and protective elements in oomanship, but it does not preclude the woman from being "a weak waysl [fragile]", which Oinee presents as a predisposition among women to express empathy.

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49 Sen (1995) argued that women’s greater concern for the welfare of others is interpreted as a lack of personal welfare, a dialectic that in part sustains gender inequality and the difficult conundrum of women’s perceived lack of
Weakness in oomanship refers to the qualities of empathy and deference, rather than physical and mental frailty associated with the Eurocentric essentialist construction of women of that period. Oomanship also challenged Sen’s (as cited in St. Hill, 2003) argument that the concern for the welfare of others, which is perceived as a natural, nurturing trait among women, is the premise on which power is conceptualised in gender relations and on which gender inequality is founded. Social relations in colonized, racialized environments between genders of formerly enslaved provide a different result, as is evidenced in the performance of oomanship.

Oomanship contests Eurocentric, gender role theory that suggests the women assume male traits and responsibilities, which leaves males denuded of masculinity. It questions the validity of discourses that construct notions of the emasculated Black male and marginalised Black male as emergent from gender relations among African Caribbeans. The concept offers a fluidity in gender relations as historically structured and culturally informed, rather than normatively determined, to pathologize gendered populations, constructed as inferior deviants of the Eurocentric standard. It allows women and men to behave in ways that are culturally appropriate for the period and within the socio-historical exigencies that affect the population.

Florence Jarvis explained that she migrated to St. Kitts at her grandmother’s urging to find work and to act as her surrogate to safeguard her “anty-man [gay]” uncle from “nakboat [targeted abuse].” Florence’s migration was in response to the instruction of her mother’s directive that


50 Anti-man translates as gay, but the term has cultural nuances that Quashie explains in “Genesis” a literary work published in Glave (2008) Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles.

51 Nakboat is used to express a combination of extreme forms of abuse which include bullying, verbal, sexual and physical abuse and stalking.
she assume household headship in the home of an older male relative who needed protection.

The prevalence of female heads of households among the Kittitian women contests the Eurocentric gendered construct of males as household heads and reconstructs gender relations of male authority in the family.

African-Kittitian female heads of households first became most noticeable in the 1850s following the passage of the act to abolish slavery, when officials recognised that male emigration among descendants of the enslaved was affecting labour supply to the sugar plantations. By the 1930s, African-Kittitian females had close to a hundred years of experience as household heads as free women. This is consistent with Mills’ (2013) findings on a poor community in San Anton, Puerto Rico, with the majority population descended from enslaved Africans, which had a high incidence of female-headed households, dating back to the 1840s52. She also found that property transfer occurred predominantly through female lineage.

Girls inducted into the harshness of oomanship were considered better prepared to survive the physical and psychological hardships that they were expected to encounter. They inherited property from their African Kittitian mothers, contradicting the laws of primogeniture that governed family inheritance in British law. Eltruda DeCosta inherited her mother’s “trash house [thatch house],” which she passed on to her daughter, who demolished the original wooden structure and rebuilt a moderate home of concrete at the same site. Bernice Francis’ daughter was her benefactor, and Oinee gave her daughters ownership to the property, with conditions that they allow their brothers accommodation.

52 See Gender and Child Analysis of OECS CPAs, quoted in Linette Vassel (2014), which showed that women accounted for 57% of the heads of household in St. Kitts and Nevis, Women in the Caribbean Project 1992 indicated that women headed 51% of households in the Federation.
The preparation for oomanship facilitated a succession plan that combined inheritance with an obligation to “to look afta yu een yu ole age [to care for the elderly in the household],” in the absence of state support. Most beneficiaries remained unmarried and dedicated to their elderly parent to effect a smooth transition of head of household. The women in Ford-Smith’s (2005) *Lionheart Gal* expressed the mother-daughter relationships as recurrent, contentious affairs that often ended in irreconcilable differences. The age differences between the participants in both studies might account for the interpretations, or the purpose for the scholarship might have influenced how the narrators presented themselves. Ford-Smith’s narrators wanted to tell stories of abuses, while the participants of this study were more concerned with the heroics of the period and projecting positive images.

The women’s aspiration for home ownership and home improvement was consistent with their role as household heads and their responsibility for protecting the residents of the household. Pricilla and her sister bought a small wooden home before her husband joined them and complied with the cultural norms governing the correlation between property ownership and household decision maker. Lucille and her two children remained at her mother’s house until her partner complied with her mother’s precondition that he could provide satisfactory shelter for his new family. Pricilla, Oinee, Lucille, and Eltruda recalled the traumatic experiences of losing their homes to hurricanes and their mothers’ migration to St. Kitts from Nevis to rebuild their lives in the most hostile conditions associated with temporary homelessness. Home ownership provided authority, stability, and security for African-Kittitian women in their obligation to protect their households.

Other women recalled thatch homes being torched accidentally by feuding neighbours or at the instigation of land owners to effect eviction. The bodies of displaced and homeless women and
girls and, in rare cases, sons intensified their vulnerability to sexual and physical assault. The multiple vulnerabilities and desperation associated with homelessness served as a motivation for the storytellers to secure home ownership. Arabella recounted, “so dei bun, we bil back betta [Whenever the house is destroyed we rebuild a more robust homes].”

Overtime, homes were constructed as mobile wooden structures to replace the more flammable thatch homes and to improve responsiveness to land eviction notices, usually from the land owning class of employers. At the time of the interviews in the late 1990s, homeowners had purchased land, and most of the homes that I visited were concrete structures. The women’s involvement in the continuous improvement in the homes and home ownership status indicate the transmission of values between generations of women that do not reflect the gendered, racialized victims of the colonised countries found in Eurocentric texts and “third world” women’s development literature.

5.3 Edwantij - The Indignities and Oppressions

The histories of African Caribbeans stress the historical materialist perspective, highlighting the violent oppression of slavery and a crucial feature of capitalism as the lack of power of a working class. These histories pay less attention to the industry and creativity of the enslaved who manumitted themselves and the entrepreneurship of their descendants who straddle the capitalist, hegemonic world market economy and the informal economy “to make ends meet [manage scarce resources].” While the discourse on the 1930s protest focuses on higher wages as the premise for the labouring class discontent, the narrators’ concern for bodily dignity presents a microscopic approach to work and shines new light on the period.

Oinee’s definition of oomanship conceptualises work in continuum, contesting the Cartesian dualism of the public and private sphere and challenges the normative approach to sexual
division of labour. These assertions disrupt the conventional Eurocentric ideological approaches to work and find resonance in the prevalence of female heads of household in this study. They call attention to the onerousness of work to demonstrate the cycle of physical exertion, but express no aversion to hard work as documented in racialized ideology of the lazy subaltern subject. The narrators in this study recognised that their survival, like that of their foremothers, depended on their ability to undertake the arduous demand of manual work, requiring physical strength. They described paid employment as a state of unfreedom rather than an aspirational goal for liberation which contradict liberal western feminist notion of work outside the home as liberational.

Ismay recalls a varied work experience beginning as a child labourer at Shadwell sugar estates. She simultaneously helped her mother around the house and had responsibility for tethering the family’s pigs in a remote area before work in the morning, and evenings she herded the animals to the grounds immediately around the family home. Over the years, in conjunction with her household responsibilities, she hammered rocks to produce aggregates for the construction industry; worked as a mason transporting buckets of water, cement, and concrete mixture, but was never formally paid for the construction of walls. She explains, “Dei say meason no ooman wuk [They said masonry was not considered women’s work].” She also harvested sugar canes, stacked sugar cane in carts for transportation, gathered fodders of sugar cane leaves used by the sugar plantations as livestock feed, and deweeded fields of sugar cane.

53 Western feminism refers to the historical and political feminist movement in western Europe and North America which is informed by middle-class, white women’s experiences, perceptions and discourses. It is not intended to homogenize experiences or feminisms that emerge in those colonial, imperial or geographical locations of white domination.
Ismay expressed her disgust with the unfairness of unequal pay and her frustration with the indignities to which she was subjected many years ago when she recalled,

*Sometoim wen yu dun wuk, weeken kom an dei noin waan pay yu. Man feel dat de ooman dem had men ou wuk fah dem, so dei koo weat. Is loyk dei still waarnt yu go whore. Is dat does wex me ewen to today!*

Often, at the end of the work week the employers withheld your wages. They were of the view that women had men to provide them with money and there was no urgency to release our earnings. It appears that they wanted to force women into prostitution having completed a week of full-time work. That still makes me angry.

The colonial practices and the conflicting perceptions of racialized gender ideologies heightened African-Kittitian females’ susceptibility to various forms of exploitation and indignities as employees.

Eltruda recalled several incidents during which her mother and herself were subjected to indignities “*dat no ooman shouldn injua ou oan a bred* [that women should not endure as an employee].” She recalled the domestic abuse to her mother experienced from her partners for not preparing dinner on-time after long and arduous hours of field work, but which she made public by fighting back, verbally and physically. She witnessed and experienced penalties meted out to female employees based on employers’ proclivity to report poor performance of women who were known to involve children in completing the work, and she provided specifics of the verbal abuse and public shaming that employees directed at the women. Eltruda’s account presented the women as vociferous defenders of their work performance, but who had to resort to alternative income earning to maintain their household, in recognition of plantocratic hegemony.
Pricilla recalled managers often distributed food to female employees and cash to male employees as bonuses at the end of the year. She interpreted the action as injustice, devaluation of women’s labour, and the denigration of Black women’s bodies when she commented, “Dei want aawe wuk ou food, an hua ou money [They want the women to work for food and earn money through prostitution].” She reflected on the humiliation associated with the bonus distribution process and the managers’ insistence that parents attend and refused to recognize children who normally collected weekly wages.

Many storytellers recalled the humiliation of the bonus distribution process. Eltruda considered it a revenge activity by managers on women who were far more likely to verbally express their concerns about unjust management practices throughout the year. She described the bonus distribution process as a demeaning exercise:

Ley me tell yu, de manijah, a woit man, stan’ pan a stool nearboi an yu haw ou go an geniflex. Yu kno wat a mean boi geniflex? An say ‘tank yu sah.’ He haw de owalooker dere ou gee yu and fos yu haw ou geniflex to im. Yu know how to geniflex? Yu haw ou go dung an say ‘tank yu sah.’ Bow dung, eryting, yu knee eryting haw ou ben, fah ef yu ewa mek a misteak an go to de owaseer dere an hol e han e tell yu git oat de yard, wid de expression. So den yu glad, me moda glad fu de lil pone a food, so yu ha oo go an jenouflek, so she say, ‘Tank yu sa.’

And the manager, a white man stands on a stool nearby and you have to genuflect towards him. Do you know what I mean by genuflect? And say, “Thank you, Sir.” The overseer stands close by to distribute the bonus, but first you genuflect to the manager. Do you know how to genuflect? You have to bow and say “Thank you, Sir.” You have to bow and bend your knees. If you make the mistake of going directly to the overseer to collect your bonus, the manager orders you to leave using derogatory curse words. My mother was glad for the few pounds of food, so she bowed and said, “Thank you Sir.”
Her mother’s unwilling compliance with the process and the degrading images of that experience remained engraved in Eltruda’s memory. The use of “geniflex” suggests a term used by the white managers of British ancestry, which projects them as gods to reinforce their sense of superiority over the Black African female employees. At the same time, the women recognised the abuses and found caved out spaces to resist.

Working conditions featured distinctly for the women. They were household heads and breadwinners, with some level of authority in their homes and the community, but were subjected to egregious indignities in the workplace. By receiving the bonus in food, the women felt especially targeted for contempt from their employees and drew parallels between being enslaved and their working conditions. Irene Hamilton expressed dismay that in 1935, she had not experienced true liberation:

\[
\text{Aawe nar beg dem nutten. Aawe wuk foh de boarnus. Iz damn fawud, he fawud ou gie aawe food. Aawe look hungry? Aawe still slave? If he waant gie aawe food, gie aawe, but doan han it oat like aawe beg dem.}
\]

\[
\text{We were not begging for food. We are entitled to a monetary bonus that we earned by working. Do we look hungry? Are we slaves? If he wants to distribute food as a gift, we’ll accept it. But that is not what we earned. That’s an insult. We are not beggars}
\]

Her reflection emphasises the colonized, gendered experience of the storytellers and juxtaposes the management strategies that these women engaged to maintain personhood. These experiences put into perspective the women’s involvement in multiple concurrent and serial income-generating activities and food security initiatives in home gardens and livestock rearing or trading in sex as measures to preserve their humanity and dignity and to conserve their symbolic and material independence as household heads.
While the women were required to perform the heavy demands of masculinised manual labour, perinatal and menstrual cycles were considered an intrusion on the robustness required of their bodies. The accounts included the denigration of women who were unable to sneak away undetected to breastfeed their babies, having to arrange for the babies to be brought to the workplace during their breaks, the unpleasantness of overflowing breastmilk, and menstrual odour and hostility that these women received by their colleagues, partners, and employees. Employer intransigence in disrespecting African-Kittitian women’s bodies reinforced what Johnson (2007a, p. 94) described as constitutive of the construction of these women’s real and symbolic bodies as “unhygienic bodies.”

Eltruda explained how the female employees in the sugar industry utilised the free medical care available to them to avoid verbal abuse from colleague workers and supervisors pertaining to body and the personal embarrassment associated with it in the workplace:

*Dei jus dump yu een a kyart loyk yu ain peepl but das how yu get wa yu waant...well de scent of us...de scent, he ain’ coming dere, he ain nearin yu, an he dun wroit de prescription fah yu to get some koin a tablit, an yu nar tek none.*

You are forced into an (animal drawn) cart as though you are not human, but that’s how you manipulate the situation to get away. The doctor does not examine you and keeps his distance because of the unpleasant odour but writes you a prescription for tablets, which you never take.

The women were conscious of the gendered perspectives of African-Kittitian women workers as being sub-human, having unpleasant body odours and masculinized strength, and devised strategies to manipulate the to degrading the gendered constructions of them to their benefit. The strategies were most effective in the workplace where they experienced persistent attacks by employers and supervisors to deny them their dignity and personhood.
The women devised strategies, such as reporting ill, to counter consequences of their constructed unhygienic bodies; the employees often dismissed their claims as fallacious and demanded medical proof. Florence claimed that women she knew “rub arn simple woyree bush an gie dem de proof [applied herbal potions that carried obnoxious scents to their bodies to provide evidence].” Pricilla advised that one of the most effective escape strategies was to feign illness on the job and to endure the indignity of being taken by cart to a doctor’s office. She had calculated that the doctors, subject to bribery, were far more empathetic than the employers “if yu memba ou drap arf a pone a provezhun erey nung an den [Occasionally you should deliver ground provisions to the doctor]” to get his cooperation to accomplish the goal of outwitting the employer and having the day off.

Bernice expressed resentment towards the employers’ regular demanding for proof of illness. She concluded that the managers perceived them as abnormal women, “man ou cou breed [men who become pregnant].” African-Kittitian women were gendered as possessing masculinized strength, and they were assigned manual labour that they had to perform for their survival. By undertaking arduous tasks, the women seemed complicit in a dialectic that conceptually normalised the perception that the employers constructed of Black female employees.

They women described themselves in the 1930s as uniformly poor, vulnerable, and subjected to oppressions. However, unlike the characterisation in Clive Thomas’ (1988) oversimplified analysis of Caribbean descendants of the enslaved in his work, The Poor and the Powerless: Economic Policy and Change in the Caribbean, the women in this study, who were visibly

54 Thomas (1988) wrote The Poor & the Powerless as one of a group of Caribbean Marxist intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s who had not considered micro analysing the creativity and innovation of the poor in surviving within the capitalist world economy.
absent from Thomas’s structuralist approach, have proven themselves to be resourceful in finding reserves of power, moments, and spaces to recharge psychologically and physically. Much of that reserve lay in their reference to the lived experiences of their mothers, who prepared them for oomanship, which is revealingly critical of the epistemological fault-line that has resulted in marginalising the subjective construction of gender.

The women in the study expressed in different ways their anxieties with persistent shortages and their expertise learned through experience or older household heads. The transfer of the skill was made evident during the interviews when women advised me on spending, saving, and managing within my means towards achieving “poor proud [dignity in poverty],” for, as Lilian Fraser explained, “If yu mek do wid de little yu haaw, nobaddie doan know yu no haw it [If you manage the little that you have efficiently, the public will not be aware of how little you have].”

Conversely, poverty management coheres with the ideological construction of Black female colonised bodies, projected for cheap labour extraction and having responsibility for domestic affairs in accordance with the liberal notion of gender roles in family settings. Moreover, the efficiencies in the women’s work, waged and unwaged, conceals the debilitating effects of poverty on the bodies and social relationships. Irene Hamilton, however, recommended poverty management, as therapeutic to “mek yuself feel good [boost self-esteem],” is valued for achieving and maintaining respectability in an environment where women are disrespected.

The working conditions for the women in the sugar industry seemed far more oppressive than that for the males. The suffered a range of indignities to ensure that their children were fed and households maintained, which were the greatest motivating factor to them. They, therefore, had a most compelling stimulus to engage in the protest of the 1930s in an effort to improve their working and general living conditions. The evidence provided by the female employees
underscored their proclivity for their participation in the sugar workers’ revolutionary actions of 1935 in St. Kitts.

The women had been engaging in surreptitious activities to alleviate the hardships of everyday life. The evidence provided by the interviewees constructed a regimen of sexual harassment, sexual violence, general abuse against women and their families, and the disruption of relations within the African-Caribbean household. The relations within the African-Caribbean household continue to provide women with a measure of influence that is denied elsewhere. Women, therefore, felt justified in participating in activities that would create dissonance, albeit temporarily, in the systemic intrusion into their sphere of power: the household.

The tasks, which were conducted mainly under strict supervision by over-zealous supervisors, who usually were themselves workers in the same job category, also is also reflective of conventional Eurocentric notions that women need supervision to be productive and that they are best suited for routine, non-technical, low-skilled jobs. The combination of the invasive supervision, the constant threat of losing a week’s pay, and the unremitting heat or rain showers placed the women under undue physical and psychological pressure sufficient to drive them to become central participants in a revolt against their employees.

The pressures of overwork, extreme exhaustion, and the abuse from the employers often impelled the female sugar workers to engage unorthodox practices in the workplace. The repercussions were often swift, publicly administered, and excessive—responses which the managers felt would serve as a deterrent to any employee who may wish to consider similar actions. The managers seemed oblivious to the unmitigated hardship and overwork that many of the female workers experienced in the discharge of their daily tasks. Many women revealed that despite the possibility of being discovered “taking short-cuts” on the job and the repercussions
they experienced as a consequence, successfully outwitting the authorities brought well-needed psychic satisfaction.

Maud O’Garro revealed that she was in constant conflict with James O’Flaherty, a light-skinned Nevisian who had taken up an administrative position at Pond at Buckley’s Estate in the 1930s. In separate interviews, Oinee and Ismay Francis described O’Flaherty contemptuously as the “white people spy.” He seemed far more knowledgeable about the practices of deception that female employees engaged to optimize their time and income in waged and unwaged work. Many women who were forced to employ these deceptive measures knew that they would be subjected to continuous scrutiny, harassment, and threats to withhold their pay for several weeks. Yet, they took risks. Martha O’Garro reflected on a moment of satisfaction and relief that she gained from outwitting the one overseer known to conduct meticulous evaluation of work completed by weeders. She recalled,

*He would walk erry row a kyarn, en to en, to mek sure dat aawe no jus weed-up de barda ou fool dem. Yu see sometoin me choil sick, a gatto tek care a de choil and wuk ou foin money ou tek it dakta an still foin money fuh food fuh de res cheren dem. But is hell to pay if dei foin out yu fak dem. Well dei say he run bak a Newis when de trouble start fa it wudda hell to pay, so he tek it mek run way.*

He would inspect every row of cane plants to ensure that we had not cleaned the borders of the field to fool them into thinking the entire area had been weeded. You see sometimes your child is sick and you have to care for the child, work to earn the money needed to pay the doctor for medical care and to buy the household needs. If you are caught cutting corners on the job, the penalty is excessive, but you have to take that chance. It was rumored that he went into hiding during the uprising for he would have received his comeuppance.
The colonial plantocracy invoked laws to limit the employment of women and men to one sugar estate. It was especially daunting to women who needed to generate income from multiple sources to ensure their households against effects of arbitrary withholding of wages from any one source. Many of the women used pseudonyms, nicknames, to circumvent the law and to register as workers on other estates. Ismay Francis was also May Southwell and worked at Buckley, Shadwell, and Belmont estates; Florence Hanley carried the names Oinee Bassue and Aida Liburd and worked at Buckley and Needsmust; Eltruda DaCosta was also Baby Hanley and worked at Buckley and Needsmust sugar plantations; Irene Hamilton was also Irene Norford and Irene Duponte and worked at Mills and Brotherson sugar estates. The common practice of involving children as messengers facilitated the collection of the wages and reduced the chance of the women being detected.

Overwork, poor nutrition and sanitation, and discriminatory health care contributed to the high rate of chronic illnesses, short life spans, and high mortality rates among the women. They regarded early death as relief from the suffering on earth and illness with overwork, but resolved that their determination to leave “something” for their children motivated them to take risks.

*Kyan yu imagine? Yu get sick ou ketch a penny and in de end yu sick an yu get no money. Edwantij no good fu darg, much less martal, so as long as me gat loif me children nat to suffer loyk me.*

Can you imagine? Your hard work results in illness and in the end you are denied a just financial reward. Neither animals nor humans should be subjected to such extreme abuse, but I was prepared to do anything that would reduce the suffering that my children would experience.

Oomanship demanded risk taking: overt and covert actions to defend and protect household members and inordinate sacrifice to maintain households. The women in this study revealed
insights on gender that contest Eurocentric models and establish the importance of epistemological approaches that embrace the embodied subject. The chapter demonstrates how gender is constructed out of biological sex and how one’s gender continues to be shaped by economic, political, social, psychological, and cultural factors.

The women shared a consciousness of an acute level of invasion in their personal lives and the relations of power that governed their everyday lives. They were also keenly aware of their roles as breadwinners and guardians of the family (Barriteau, 2006; Jones, 1949/2009). They expressed this consciousness through their stories, punctuated with the word “edwantije,” which indicated their awareness of the pattern of severe abuse and coercion that they experienced. They repeatedly injected the phrase “me wuk some wuk [I was overworked],” which demonstrated the extremely burdensome conditions of work and the unfair employment practices to which they were subjected. The women involved in weeding often worked on different estates and recognized stark differences in the acreages, and they interpreted it as management manipulation and the deliberate action to extract work unfairly and unjustly. Margaret Richardson explains her experience:

\[
\text{Me use to weed cane at Brodasn, 2½ acre, some helluva acre; but if yu did tink dat bad yu go a Cranstoun weh dei ha some big, bamaco, hellowa soiz a acre. Yes Lord, dat is why de strike come on, we mek bada-rear-shun.}
\]

I was a weeder at Brotherson’s plantation where I farmed 2½ acres, extremely large lot, but the acreages at Cranstoun’s plantation were much bigger. Yes, Lord, that is why we protested. We had to express our dissatisfaction.

It is with this consciousness of unfairness and unjust practices that the women engaged in and supported the insurgent actions. They continued to protest beyond the marches by positioning
themselves as key defense witnesses in the judicial hearings that followed the violence inflicted on the African-Kittitian women and men involved in the protest marches in 1935.

While this chapter provides a keener appreciation of everyday life, clues to a popular understanding of the protest of January 1935 are needed. How did ordinary people, as distinct from officials, popular spokesmen, and historians view the changes and continuities they perceived in their lives? How far did they conceive their options to be constrained by gender and local circumstances? The chapter interprets female protestors’ oral accounts of the event and their strategies and actions to obtain alleviation from “edwantij,” a concentration of oppressions, very similar to the experiences of their enslaved ancestors.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the co-authors (i.e., the participants) provide a subjective perspective on their gender, which they define as oomanship. Oomanship is theorized as oomanism, a distinctive practice rooted in the actualities of the African Kittitian women’s experiences drawn from the cultural roots and wisdom of the African foremothers. It embeds a liberation imperative that values girls; assumes responsibility for the upkeep and protection of households, the community, and its resources; and accepts leadership for the transmission of values and history and the vestment of authority as community leaders.

In Chapter Six, *de ooman dem* [the women] in this study describe the agency proscribed by oomanism. The details of agency, resilience and overcoming predicates the organizational functions that women assumed in mobilizing community members of all ages to participate in the national protest and the associated events, in order to preserve and advance the liberation from *edwantij* [multiple oppressions] endemic in the colonized and racialized environment.
Chapter 6
Strategizing and Organizing

This chapter provides a glimpse into the organizing structures and collective resistance stratagems that protestors utilized in an intergenerational struggle to advance liberation. The accounts identify a tradition of overt and covert resistance strategies by Kittitians that began during the precolonial capture of Africans on the mainland, the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, enslavement, and in a period of coloniality (i.e., on the island). Protest on the island included violent uprisings, mutilation, marronage and migration, incendiary activities, gynecological warfare, spiritual intimidation, and general sabotage. The struggles for survival, liberation and human dignity remain a common thread weaving through the various expressions of conflict.

Caribbean Feminist theory has projected the rebel woman and natural rebels, which define African women in protest in Jamaica and Barbados. The scholars have wrestled with the notion of the “elasticity of resistance” to accommodate the multiple forms that female descendants of the enslaved employ to resist. The intellectual battle is reflective of the discursive power of coloniality to perform epistemicide, which continues to exclude and dispossess the historical and cultural contexts that inform the realities of oppressed collectivities.

The previous chapter discussed the women’s accounts of their everyday lives leading up to and during the rebellion in 1935. The oppressive conditions of life were not far removed from the circumstances that enslaved women experienced, as recorded in historical accounts. More significantly, the previous chapter established that African-Kittitian females were subject to
horrific experiences in their wide sphere of influence and involvement by persons in authority, who arbitrarily and consistently intruded inconsiderately in their lives.

The women, whose homes were erected on land owned by their employers, occupied rent-free, or rented accommodation provided to employees reflected on the risk of insecure tenure and invasion of personal space, which was a measure of control to their social, economic, and physical mobility. The women resented the property owners’ indiscriminate access and intrusion into their homes. They complained that although slavery was outlawed for a century, remnants of coercion control and other insidious practices, such as violent access to women’s bodies and their families, remained everyday practices of sugar plantation life. They described their daily lives as unbearable, except for the spaces of resistance and resilience that they carved out for their survival.

Current literature has established the time line for the start of the period of protest as January 28, 1935. The women contended that the protest began in October 1934, when workers at Bourkes Estate in Sandy Point were denied two weeks’ pay, summarily terminated, and then were offered reemployment by new management that refused to honour the outstanding financial commitment. Employees, in desperation, had destroyed estate property, broken into the manager’s house, and pilfered household objects, which they sold to recover their pay and cost of their “pain and suffering.”

Margaret Richardson is certain that incident was calmed by the intervention of two men and a woman, Wanji, Mosquito Champion and Turkey Snipe. Charges had been laid for larceny, and one of the men charged served a 3-month prison term. The unrest carried over through the Christmas season and into the following year. Persons who had travelled to Sandy Point in support of the workers of Bourkes Estate remained restive into the start of the sugar cane
harvesting season. Margaret’s position was, “Wha bun oy mek nuaz run [the injustice/unfair treatment meted out any friend or family member affects all relatives and friends].” She ended with a defiant hand folded across her chest, signaling dissatisfaction with the outcome of what occurred in Sandy Point.

The interviewees used nicknames more often than the birth names to identify others. Self-naming was both an act of resistance to British names and necessity for persons whose names or existence were not captured in the registry of births. It was also employed to circumvent institutional oppression, especially to elude identification in a judicial system that disproportionately targeted and punished African women. Multiple nicknames were especially useful to evade the authorities during protest.

6.1 The Political Analysis—Abba no betta dan sabba

The women distrusted the members of the Workers’ League, whom historians claimed were the leaders and instigators of the rebellion. Louisa Fraser described the members of the Workers’ League, the Universal Benevolent Society, and the legislature as “cut oat a de seam clart [have the family background and values]” and, therefore, acted as though government was an inheritance to which they were entitled. She expressed no confidence that replacing the current political group with the splinter group of elites in 1935 would have led to significant improvement in their living conditions or how the laws impacted them. She concluded, with hindsight, “So said, so done. Dei no lissn fa dei tink oo kyan read no gat no sense [Exactly as I predicted, they refused to listen to us or dismissed what we had to say because they thought that illiterate persons lacked the capacity to reason].”
Veronica recalls that at the time of the protest, government “does mek law an bruk law [pass laws and repeal laws]” without involving the public. She reflected that the uncompromising “brij a kantrak” applied in reference to the British legislation, the Masters and Servants Act, which when imposed and interpreted in colonized society, mirrored the effects of enslavement. Lilian was convinced that the laws remained in place because it served the interest of the employers who served as legislators and their sons, mixed race and fully white, who formed the Workers’ League and who were aspiring to be the next generation of legislators.

The women claimed to have observed a split between members of the Workers’ League in their commitment to the protestors. Louisa claimed to have obtained intelligence that Mr. Nathan, head of the St. Kitts Benevolent Society, had assured the Administrator that he would prevent a strike, while others members had joined the planters and government in condemning the protest, including Mr. Malone, who served as the lawyer for the protestors during the trials. They agreed that based on the actions of Mr. Manchester and Mr. France, there were only two men in the Workers’ League who empathized with the protestors. Lucille reflected on the conventional notion of political change that would have effected transformation in their social and material political condition. She concluded that voting facilitated the replacement of a group of elites with another, without desirable transformative outcomes.

Studies on the history of conflict in the Caribbean (Bush, 1982; Dadzie, 1990; French, 1995; Shepherd, 2012) indicate that African-Caribbean women, who appear to have the least power in society, would transform moments of vulnerability exhibited by authority figures into

55 Translated as breach of contract and bridge of contact, the latter referring to symbolic obligation between employer and employee that obtained in the application of the law.
opportunities for triumph. Oninee, a story teller involved in this study, encapsulated the historians’ sentiment when she explained, “Stuan gese gon no eekwol but dat no meen aawe mus loi dung an tek it [stones against guns are not equal but that does not mean the users of the less destructive weaponry should become immobilized].” The term also suggests that what may appear to be an unsophisticated response can be very impactful and, therefore, should not be underestimated. The storyteller recognized the importance of the cumulative effect of small victories gained through their persistent, obtrusive acts of sabotage and verbal harassment. The historians recognized a gender difference in resistance activities, but had not assigned the level of importance to finding or theorizing its existence as relevant to gender expressions that had the potential to disrupt conventional resistance theories.

The female protestors implemented strategies informed by the traditions of resistance and survival that they gained from oral knowledge transferred from their foremothers. Their stories indicated the deference paid to their mothers’ advice, which they indicated was as valuable during the period of protest as that of other elders in the community.

Anita Ward recalled the contribution of older women during the days of “troyol an treboolishon [trials and tribulation]” in 1935:

_Arl de toim when we a plan fa de nex day, me moda wud say yuo do dis, ar do dat an aawe do it, fa de ola hed dem doan leed yu rang._

We spent a long time planning for the next day, my mother would say you should do this or do that and we did it, for our elders have the knowledge and experience to guide us in the right direction.

Beckles (1999) argued that enslaved women had more access to the masters and their families and suggested that this access provided the women with more options to resist successfully than their male counterparts. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn’s (1995) perusal of studies on women in
resistance concluded that women in post-slavery Guadeloupe, a French colony in the Caribbean, demonstrated keen insight on the operations and routines of members of the plantocracy and were, consequently, well prepared to leverage their knowledge and position effectively in resistance movements against their oppressors. The women involved in the revolt in St. Kitts demonstrated that although access and insight were required for a successful rebellion, the consciousness to transform these elements into sources of power and the courage to act were essential for the gains to be realized. Moreover, they had to negotiate spaces to engage in activism to improve their quality of life, despite the burdensome responsibilities of work and the fear of retaliation from their employer-landlords.

6.2 Engendering Activism

In her work on how African American women confront injustices, Patricia Hill-Collins (1998) concluded that:

African-American women’s active participation in the civil rights movement cannot be explained fully by their skill in crafting critical masses. It took passion to confront fire hoses, dogs and guns, a deep caring linked with a vision of how their individual efforts constituted part of some larger ethical struggle. (p. 247)

Similarly, the agency and activism of the Kittitian women did not take the form of a marching army or in large numbers, congregated, and armed. They operated at all aspects, marching in open protest and in small groups, with connectedness, in different sites.

Viola Herbert was soft spoken. In the early 1960s, she travelled by steamship to England, sent for her two sons a year later, and then returned to home in the late 1990s. She explained that her preference for covert, subversive, coordinated small-group activities of the Kittitian women, which were effective when engaging with the powerful plantocracy, served her well in Britain. Regarding her experience in the 1935 uprising, she explained,
Viola suggests that the women were prepared to engage in covert activities to reposition the community for better treatment and to regain their dignity, in a country where systemic and institutional repression impacted on them as Black women operating in the margins of society.

To "play mumu" is to feign ignorance, a strategy that women adopted from a tradition of deliberately misleading the oppressors.

When Lilian Williams cautioned her employer Mr. Yearwood that his canes would rot in the field if he didn’t offer a raise in pay, as a domestic servant, she was trying to warn him about the impending protest. His response was dismissive and excessive. He threatened that employees would starve, as they had to rely on the sugar estate as their only means of a secure income, and then he immediately suspended her. His response strengthened her resolve in support of the impending protest. She threatened to turn the entire community against him, and she began a spate of slander as was the usual practice with domestic servants who had inside information of their employees. The women recognized the urgency of the situation and initiated the mobilization of protestors. Women transformed opportunities, such as water-collection points,
hair braiding groups, and casual contact, into occasions for discussing and planning their involvement in the impending protest.

Their subversive activities were strategic, targeted, and impactful in accordance with the outcome they expected. Mary Boddie, Marie Henry, and Lilian Williams were convinced that the rumormongering led to Yearwood’s transfer shortly after the protest. The plantation suffered severely from cane fires. Lilian Williams linked his departure to the dissipation of real and fabricated stories of sexual abuse against female employees. These substantive activities of protest by women escaped previous versions of the story, as they were excluded from the discursive of rebellion and revolt. Mary Boddie and Marie Henry’s stories provided verification to Lilian Williams’s claims. However, Inniss’s (2005) historical account, which posit the position of the workers, marginalised the women’s involvement as shouting encouragement to the body of protesters, ridiculing the authorities, and daring the armed forces to shoot.

Moreover, withholding labour and its aftermath offered the opportunity for women to engage the authorities in overt as well as less combative, covert subversion, but equally impactful strategic actions. Women reflected on being caught up in the tide of insurgence that they trusted would bring greater consciousness to the authorities of the abuse that their families experienced. The expected outcome was to obtain relief from the degradation and inhumane living and working conditions that they continued to experience. Many recognized that whatever the outcome of the days of disturbances, they would be affected, and so they chose to become involved. Irene Hamilton explained the women’s resolve through the use of a folk saying that she adopted from her mother: “Halfway is no way fah yu no reach wey yu goin [You won’t win if you are not willing to do whatever it takes to achieve your goal].”
The women’s stories reveal that their actions contributed significantly to limit the number of protesters arrested. The community appeared to have grown increasingly agitated on the days following the protest when the police began scouring the towns and villages searching for protestors. They shifted into defense mode as guardians of the family and hurled insults at the intruders. They used various methods of obstruction and distraction to ensure that those in hiding in various homes received the warnings and that families involved in shielding protestors could prepare to protect them.

Florence Oinee Hanley, one of the storytellers who had participated in the island marches and was also present during the shooting incidents by the military into the crowd of protestors, had found sanctuary in her mother’s house to avoid being found by the police who had been conducting searches to identify and detain alleged protestors. She explained how women would distract the police and communicate the police presence in the area by hurling verbal abuse vociferously against the police: a strategy to warn protestors to go into hiding, thereby initiating the defense of the protestors.

My mother and the other women began shouting. They were cursing the police and asking that they stop harassing the innocent citizens and to focus on finding the villains who shot the persons who had no way of protecting themselves. Child are you listening? This went on for days. I stayed hidden under my mother’s bed, only leaving the house to collect water, when it was safe for me to do so. I would disguise in men’s clothing with a hat pulled on to hide my face.
The female protestors were conscious that standard judicial processes rarely provided positive outcomes for them in the past and that they would have had to intervene in unorthodox ways.

Oinee and Louisa used the same figurative language to summarize the vulnerabilities of the protestors in relation to the plantocracy and those who defended the status quo: “Dei een ha de hangl an aawe een ha de bleard [They held the handle and we held the blade].” The women purposefully used the familiar social terrain- the streets, retail shops and other public spaces- to counter systemic colonisation and domination and wrest some level of success from the legislators, judiciary, and the economic establishment.

Women were quite aware of the force of the colonial plantocracy, but they were resolved to act.

Edna De Costa captured what can be clearly described as oppositional struggle:


This fight was not just about the sugar estate. The Judge, the Governor, the legislature, the lawyers and the jury all collude against us. We had no one to turn to for assistance and therefore relied on our own counsel. The members of the Workers’ League seemed to have retreated in fear. That was not right.

Lilian Williams concurred,

Aawe ha ou defen weself come hell ah hoy warta. Dei een warn ou mash dung aawe an if aawe noin foit bak aawe moita gu bak inna sleaw. Laard yu no know de tobolent toimz aawe een a bea.

We had to defend ourselves regardless of the circumstances. They wanted to crush us and if we didn’t resist we might have returned to the days of slavery. You will never be able to fathom the many ordeals we withstood during the that period.
This level of determination expressed by the storyteller, in the face of seemingly impossible odds, is consistent with the defiance that historians Mathurin-Mair (1975), Reddock (1986), Shepherd (2012), and other writers attribute to the anti-slavery activities of enslaved women and men in the Caribbean.

The women expressed a distinct political consciousness that included their reflection on the democratic political process that shaped their involvement in resistance politics of the period. Bernice Caesar revealed the complexity of her political consciousness when she declared,

*Imagin yu barn ya inna dis kontry an yu kyarn wote, yu kyarn liw wey yu waant an kyarn wuk wey yu waant. What koyna loif iz dat fah a umanbein. Imagine me iz an big ooman an istyat manija waan kom tell me ow ou run me loif an me hoas. At some point ee mus boil owa. No ery day de spirit gon stroiw wid mumunis.*

Imagine being born in a country and you are not allowed to vote, you do not have a choice of where to live and you do not even have a choice in where you want to be employed. What kind of life is that for a human being? Imagine being a grown woman managing a household, yet the sugar estate manager wants to dictate how I should manage my life and my household. At some point one will be forced to react.

Similarly, Martha’s political awareness embraced what can be perceived as a gender consciousness that informed how she interpreted the circumstances involving the protest and the neglect of women’s understanding of the situation or their motivation to participate. She stated,

*A doan tink dei feel de ooman dem kuda tink ou tek dem arn. Fah iz a lat a wrang dei do aawe an get way. Dis toim aawe wozn goin bak-bak, aafta arl aawe iz* I don’t think they felt that the women would have considered taking a stand in this matter. They have been committing many wrongs against us and have gotten away with it. This time we were not going
peeple aawe toyod a sheam. Dei wozn goin tell aawe how to tink to stay quiet or back down. We are human and we were tired of the disrespect. They were not going to dictate how we think or respond.

This differential consciousness, captured through the voices of women with the lived experience, represents the collective memories of women employed on the plantation at the historical moment.

The women’s sense of fairness and justice undergirded their opposition to the systemic oppression that they perceived as the overarching power of the colonial plantocracy. It constituted the four of the most oppressive sectors in colonized society: the economic elite, the judiciary, the legislature and the Eurocentric churches. Rather than succumb to the pervasiveness of the oppressions, they creatively found spaces for survival and to reenergise, for the preservation of themselves, their household, and community.

Louisa Fraser reflected on the perception held by the protestors of the excessive hold of power concentrated in the plantocracy, which the plantocracy used indiscriminately and mercilessly to maintain their dominance in the society. Yet the protestors were determined to carry out the political action:

Yeah aawe een no dat de manija dem an dei owalooka dem, de joj dem an arl de hoi peepl dem a hual wan head an aawe did a soucha ou dem. Dei haw arl koyna a propaganda dei roit, bout de debble roiz up inna wukkoz an de Wokkoz League was ojin peepl ou start foit. De Wokkoz League inna beg peepl ou no march. Dei wozn Yes, we knew that the managers, supervisors, the judge and all those who held authority thought alike and we were awaiting the right time to act. They published propaganda claiming that the protest was unplanned, that we protested without cause and that the Workers’ League urged us on. The members of the
Workers’ League were discouraging us from marching and urging that we end the protest. They didn’t help us. Do not listen to that nonsense, it was the exploitation and abuse that was the underlying cause for the protest.

The storytellers expressed consistently what they perceived as evidence of the complicity of those in authority to subjugate them, which had differential impact on the women. Oinee described the perpetrators summarily,

They are all have the same evil intent, some less than others and they colluded to bring us down. They believe that we are under their control and we are in a vulnerable position. We thought of being unemployed or how we’ll provide for our children after we got involved, but this was our chance.

6.3 Organizing for Protest

The data present heads of household as valued community personnel for their control of familial resources and their designated value in communal relations. The female protestors, conscious of their valued cultural currency in the community, organized themselves and the communal resources to achieve optimal impact for the community from their involvement in the protest. Their stories reveal that the African-Kittitian women assumed responsibilities based on the character traits for which they were known in the community, which acknowledged their competencies, required no major adjustment or disruption, and allowed fluidity between routine activities and political activism. The three major categories around which they organized their
oomanship, a subjective gender descriptor, were the tyrant woman, the forceful woman, and the praying woman.

Besson (2013), Gyekye (2003), and Martin (2004) describe communalism as permeating the traditional values and practices of African populations on the continent and its diasporas in the Caribbean and North America, which is reflected in the organic organizing strategies adopted by the protestors in the study. The women restructured their fierce communalism, which mitigated material deprivations and assaults on other women in cases of domestic violence or injustices perpetrated on the community by colonial institutions, to protest organizing in 1935. These organizational strategies persisted, despite repressive Eurocentric colonial discourses that excluded, denied, and patently sought to disrupt and discount their organizing during the period. The protesters preserved the memories of the period, which demonstrates their awareness of the level and significance of their participation in the disturbance and recalled their remarkable contributions in the anti-colonial resistance movement of 1935.

The organizing competencies were critical elements in the oral history of the revolt. The women’s activism ranged from public demonstrators to purveyors of information gleaned from positions of employment in domestic services. Women manoeuvred within the safe and unprotected spaces that they chose to engage in resistance activities.

6.3.1 Tyrant Woman Coalition

The term, tyrant women, describes the contingent who participated in the protest marches and other violent confrontational political action. They marched around the island, unhitched carts, used threatening language to planters, police and strike breakers, and were in the forefront of the overt protest action. Veronica Byron recommended Florence Inee Hanley as an outstanding tyrant woman of the civil unrest:
Go visit Oinee, she lives in the village. She is the last of the tyrant women from back then. She was fearless. She climbed trees and marched around the entire island. No man could beat her easily at anything. She does not tolerate nonsense. I don’t think she found work on the sugar estate after the marches because management was afraid of her.

Oinee Hanley rejected the classification, indicating that she hid under a bed for five days for fear of being arrested. She knew that the police were searching for her and had ventured out to collect water for household use, disguised as a man, for two weeks following the strike and the killing of protestors. She admitted, however, that she was a leading protestor during a 13-week strike in 1948, and she became an ardent canvasser for the St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party, joined the St. Kitts-Nevis Trade and Labour Union, and served in the capacity of a shop steward in the organization. She is adamant that if she were a man, she would have been a politician and that her name would have already appeared in the history books.

The tyrant women were identified as the line of women who joined island-wide marches and jeered at the police at confrontations at Wigley Avenue and at Buckley’s Estate, where the authorities shot at the protesters. Veronica Byron recalled a story she heard from her mother’s friend, Olive Allen, who described her experience at the front line of the protesters who confronted the manager and overseer at Buckley’s Estate. Olive Allen was shot during the protest and nursed herself back to health without formal medical attention.
Anita Ward described Annie Lewis, who had been injured during the stone throwing, and Mirrie Sherriff, who led the marchers up to the manager’s residence at Belmont Estate. These tyrant women were described as a handful of women who joined the hundreds of marchers and who were outstanding for engaging confrontational, intimidatory tactics, including shouting verbal threats and abuse at the officials, strike breakers, and the military.

Tyrant women used fierce glances, fixed gazes, hissing, and other non-verbal threats towards witnesses for the prosecution; they considered the judge and lawyers representing the authorities as coercive, oppositional strategies. These women operated as a pressure group whose actions were applied intentionally to influence the outcome of the legal process in favour of those who were charged with incivility or riot.

The tyrant women’s involvement in the unrest was equivalent to the level of their male counterparts. They marched, intimidated, cursed, and swore and were equally committed in their involvement in the struggle. Inee Hanley recalls,

A tell yu aawe moo farwud an moo bak, moo farwud an moo bak, ou muddle dei brain, but arl de toim aawe edgin farwud ou get cluasa to de reptibeat dem, Pan an Dobrij. Iz den ah hear pa-ti-pi, gunshat, an de kroad skyata. Yu kud see some haw blood pan dem, but dat wozn de en a it.

I tell you, we moved forward and then slightly back ward, forward and then lightly backwards, to confuse the soldiers, as we got closer to the undesirables, Pond and Dobridge. Then we heard the gun shots and the crowd scattered. You could see some protestors with blood streaming down, but that was not the end of it.

Ismay Francis reflected on the satisfaction she obtained from the actions of tyrant women who had entered Buckey’s Estate to confront the manager and supervisor, who had been considered excessively exploitative and disrespectful to employees when she mused:
I tell you my child, it was signs and wonders with the women for they were the ones who were cursing and encouraging the men. And you know how we are. I worked with Mr. Pond and I know the man. He had his daughter throw water on me when I fell asleep under a tree during lunch. The women became his equal. The standoff was bound to happen.

The stories indicate the tyrant women involved in the protest had taken equal position with the men who were involved in the street protest and encouraged the marchers to remain steadfast. They assumed the same level of leadership that they held in their communities, and therefore, alongside their male counterparts, they had to defend their reputations as protectors of the community interest and that of their families.

The tyrant women were also described as those who would make disparaging comments publicly about the sexuality and sexual prowess of males, and they used the same strategy to embarrass the managers, jurors, prosecution lawyers, and other males whom they perceived to be in support of the authorities’ position. They were often described as childless women who lived on their own without direct descendants to be affected by the repercussions to what persons in authority might perceive as insubordination.

Anita Ward compared tyrant women to a mule, and an animal that did not reproduce and attributed with being stubborn, unbreakable and fearless. She commended their participation in the marches and confrontational protest action in her account not only in words but got up to dramatize her story:
They have no children so they take more risk. Bertha Lampee, Mantee, Maud and Rosie Barney were right up front with the men. They are ‘mantana.’ I don’t know whether its embarrassment or fear that caused the managers (Pond and Dobridge) to shoot at the protestors, but their action appeared to have angered the women into greater defiance and they remained on the site after the majority of protestors retreated.

Mantee is a shortened form of “mantana,” a colloquial term used to describe women who were perceived as having the cultural mannerisms of males. Many of these women had children and visiting male and/or female partners. The closest equivalent would be bisexual or transgender. The descriptions of women did not reflect the same notion of lesbianism as obtains in Eurocentric literature and needs further research. Kempadoo’s (2003) feminist work on Caribbeans’ sexuality has begun interrogation in that area. Current issues of hypersexuality in performance literature and the performing arts in relations to colonized perceptions of hypersexualised African-Caribbean males and females will shape the new discourse.

The tyrant women category highlights women’s organizing mainly in the area of the marches and other obviously overt and traditionally visible acts of the protest that were considered high risk in masculinist conceptual interpretation. In the 1930s, when colonial policy on reproduction promoted birth control, tyrant women who appeared to comply with the policy were in the forefront of an anti-colonial resistance movement. The women’s stories bear out the complex gender issues that played out during the period.
This category of women is equivalent to the concepts of rebel woman, lionheart gal, and natural rebels found in studies Beckles (1989), Ford-Smith (2005) and Mathurin-Mair (1975, 2006) conducted on enslaved African-Barbadian women and African-Jamaican women. Tyrant activities were the women’s strengths, but not their exclusive involvement. They were also involved in covert resistance activities dominated by women.

6.3.2 Praying Women Coalition

Religion played a very important role in the lives of the women. Without exception, they referred to their spiritual experience and commitment to Christianity and attributed their longevity to their spiritualism. They were convinced that they could pray their oppressors into the grave and that prayer and psalms, if appropriately selected, could “heap wrath [bring difficulty]” on the oppressor and their descendants. They quoted Bible verses that they claimed supported generational curses and spoke of their part in causing ill to affect certain members of the plantocracy and their succeeding generations: “Wa farl pan hass bak mus run aanda ee belly [The evil that the parents perpetrate will cause succeeding generations to suffer].”

Praying women held prayer vigils reflected by side walk services in public view to warn of impending doom for those who dealt unjustly with the protesters. The women were convinced that the Europeans and their descendants in the Caribbean had become fearful of the power of obeah, an observation DeBarros (2007) made in her study of Obeah in Guyana and its syneclectic version. Authorities refused to intervene to apprehend those who practiced it, although obeah was outlawed in many British colonized countries.

The combination of Christian prayer and obeah was attributed with great spiritual potency, although this could only be understood through the codified messages in the telling. They understood the power of Obeah and would not admit to participating in the practice because of
the stigma that had been developing from the officials in society, who allegedly were afraid of the power of obeah.

Margaret Richardson was convinced that the prayers of one evangelical preacher caused the judge to acquit the majority of those who appeared in court on charges related to the civil disturbance:

_Iz ehree noit is a open-air. Yu shouldda hear Sista Woit. She did fram a Moanstrat an yu know how dem monstrat peepl doz mixup in dei obeah. She preach say how dei moit as well kos Gard an doi fa wat goin fall dung pan dem ef dei only touch Gard pickney dem._

A know some a dem de fraid, ewen Raywon Williams de Morawean Minista dat did read the Royot Ak.

Every night following the marches a service was held on a sidewalk in different places around the island. You should have heard Sister White. She was from Montserrat, and you know that Montserratians are known to practice obeah. In her sermons she cautioned those in authority that ill would befall them if they convicted the children of God. I know that many persons in authority became fearful even the Moravian Minister, Rev. Williams who read de Riot Act.

Much has been written about the eclectic practices of African and European religions in the Caribbean, which found its place in the protest movement in St. Kitts. While a male hierarchical structure remains predominant in the European-based religions, the eclectic practices in religion and the non-traditional European religious practices are led mainly by women in St.

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56 Diana Patton and Maarit Forde (2012) provide a relatively comprehensive look at various religious practices. Although none of the chapters is dedicated to St. Kitts or any of the member countries of British colonised Leeward islands or member states of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), there are a few inferences that can be made.
Kitts. Therefore, it was predictable that the African-Kittitian women would engage that space in organizing subversive activities during the period of protest.

The power of religious practice for good or evil continues as a prominent part of Kittitian culture. During the 2015 election campaign in St. Kitts, praying women became a feature in one of the parties contesting the elections, and at the start of each rally, a woman would deliver a motivating invocation to the audience. Social media posted pictures of politicians conversing in a grave yard, and a large proportion of the party that lost cited the practice of obeah by the victorious party as the cause of their success. Rumours circulated, citing children, who are invested inertly with a more accurate “spirit of discernment” than adults, saw evil spirits attached to the backs of politicians. The dialectic of obeah, as an African-based religious practise that was introduced by Africans during their forced migration to the Caribbean, is pervasive in the Kittitian culture.

Religion was used in the protest as an organizing medium, ostensibly adding to the covert resistance practices. Louisa Fraser, who claimed to be a practicing Christian, justified her involvement through prayer and other secular support to the protest activities:

*Gawd no loyk ogly an me iz a instrument a Gawd so nobaddie kou tell me wha a do ou Gawd someting rang wid it. A newa oidl ou tell de ewil peepl wha Gawd say wen a git up ou testefoy. Dem Minister noin waant no testefoyin in de chuch but a do it anyway. An wen qrwe done, aawe go kip open air sowis. Is den aawe does tell dem what aawe say.*

*God does not condone evil and I am an instrument of God, so nobody can dare tell me that my Christian actions are wrong. I am never hesitant to convey to evil people the messages I receive from God when I testify in church. The church leaders did not want us to testify in the church but I did it anyway. Then I join with church members and have church services on the*
street, where we can be even more outspoken.

Open-air services or side walk services afforded worshippers the opportunity to conduct eclectic religious rituals in public spaces on the street. Women formed the majority worshippers in hierarchy and among the congregational base. These services afforded the worshippers opportunities to give individual testimonies that openly condemned acts of unchristian behaviour by the authorities and those who were unsupportive of the protest. The subversion cloaked in religion provided protection for the protestors. While religion was introduced to control the enslaved, their descendants had transformed it, incorporating the spirituality of their ancestors, to revive its use without attracting the suppression by the authorities.

The praying women also referred to as “prayer warriors” were identified as possessing the power of prayer. People believed they had been endowed with the mystical talent to have the focus of their prayers materialise. These women would receive prayer requests from members of the community and served as trusted and respected mediums, who were thought to be able to cause good or evil circumstances to befall an individual who became the focus of their prayers. Many “Christian” African-Kittitian women wore guards—necklaces bearing tiny pouches containing elements to provide protection, associated with African-based religious tradition, Obeah, while proclaiming Christian prayers and psalms.

Karla Frye (1998) explains Obeah as a system of beliefs grounded in spirituality and the supernatural. It is not considered contradictory for one to be a devout Christian and still consult an obeah practitioner or for the English plantocracy to uphold Protestantism and consult with an obeah woman. It is generally divided into two broad categories. The first involves the casting of spells for various purposes, both good and evil; protecting oneself, family, loved one, or
property; harming real or perceived enemies; and bringing fortune in love, employment, or business pursuits. The second is healing through the application of herbal and animal products with medicinal properties. Obeah appeals to all religious and ethnic groups; there are varying conceptions of its meanings, both positive and negative, throughout the Caribbean. Nunez-Harrell’s *When Rocks Dance* (Frye, 1998) challenges the widespread negative view on it and describes Obeah as a cultural and religious practice.

The women’s stories provided examples of the outcomes of what they alleged were the consequences of prayers “heap pan dei hed” of individuals. The praying women of the 1930s were the equivalents of the “spiritual mothers” that Beckles (1999) described as having claims to “direct contact with the ancestral world” and who were revered, recognized, and respected among the enslaved. Inee and Marie Henry used the term “Gawd no loyk ugly [God does not like unfairness].” Eltruda observed that “woit peepl cheeren ah go ah skool wid shooz an een buggy, an sun a bun arf yu foot fa yu no gat shoes ou go skool, ahn yu gat ou kaarl dem dei Massa Dis [white people’s children wearing shoes, are taken to school by buggy and car while the majority of the children walk, barefooted to school].” These examples of social injustices that resulted from the unequal distribution and access to resources, power, and status were reported to spiritual leaders whose prayers were critical to protect the African-Kittitian community from further harm and to create disquiet among the perpetrators of evil.

Anita Ward expressed the awe that she felt with regard to the supernatural powers of one praying women whom she claimed was also invested with powers of healing:

*Aun Seh-Seh, she woz a medsn ooman. She een get she carlin fram Gaad. Ee no ongly use ou Aunt Seh-Seh was a medicine woman. She received her knowledge from God. She not only knew what medicine to use*
know wha medsnu ou yuz ou git peeplu betta, but ee bin know wha prayers ou use ou gard yu ar bring pokatery pan yu an ee did do some prayin. Yu see ow tings enup? Dei say An Seh-Seh yuz ou dabble but me no kno bout dat. Dei een ha some ooman wen dei pray pan yu head, ain nutten yu koo do ou git way fram wha dei pray fa.

to cure illnesses but she knew what prayers would bring you protection or to bring you great difficulty and she did a great deal of praying. Did you notice the good outcome of the protest? Rumour says she [practiced obeah] but I distance myself from that claim. There are some women once they utter a prayer there is nothing you can do to avoid results of that prayer.

The protestors with leadership from spiritual leaders organized from their homes and the church, where they risked “back-benching”, that is, suspension from active participation in religious rites, including complying with an order to sit at the back of the church and reputational damage, to counter hegemonic repression and to prevent the reversal of the freedom they anticipated from emancipation. They conducted rituals in various sites that they claimed would ensure the success of the protesters and the demise of their oppressors. Netti Richardson observed an increase in distribution of “gyard [guard]” necklaces that held a pouch containing potions for protection, which had been offered for special prayers designed to fortify the protestors and terrorize their opponents.

Veronica Byron reflected on the circumstances surrounding the untimely deaths of some members of the plantocracy who supported actions to suppress and punish the persons who were involved in the demonstrations. She was convinced that the planters’ ill-will attracted retributive justice that was unleashed in intensity proportionate to the request of a spiritual mediator.
All who were involved died tragically. Boone drove over a cliff into the sea and died. Herbert was found dead dead in his car between two fields of cane, not in his big house that he robbed poor people to build. A hex was placed on Jack-in-the-Box that caused him to wander aimlessly and suffer mental illness. He died under mysterious circumstances.

Some of the instances that the women quoted may have had scientific explanations, but they were convinced that praying woman were critical to the protest and its outcome. Jack in the Box was the nickname assigned by the protestors to Moravian cleric, Rev. Williams, for his presence at every public occurrence related to the march and the curfew announcement. His early dementia was interpreted as a signal of the effectiveness of the praying women.

### 6.3.3 Forceful Women Coalition

The subversive practices of forceful women were mainly covert and indirect. Their goal was to force the opponent to temper his or her views and actions towards those who are negatively affected and to become more compliant. The forceful women were expected to have influence and access to the oppressor. Their resistance strategies were mainly covert activities applied to pressure perceived opponents to relinquish full control, thereby shifting from a fully oppositional position and yield in response to the woman’s intervention.

Miriam Matthew, who worked at Mills Estate with Arabella, introduced the concept of the forceful woman, who assumed roles in the protest to mobilise support and organize caucuses and strategic planning meetings:
Don’t underestimate Arabella. Did you talk to her? She appears quiet but she has a powerful presence. She is tall, plump with muscular built, black woman, she looks African. She is one of those forceful women. She only has to stare at you and you become fearful. Early in the morning she would travel over five miles by foot to town, to await the arrival of the jurors to stare at them as they enter (the courthouse). They normally avoided her stare by hanging their heads. She has that power to make you comply with what she wants done without being physical.

Lilian Williams also recognised Arabella as an imposing, quiet force, with a commanding presence, and the women who knew her acknowledged her embodied leadership in the political sphere. According to Miriam’s account, Arabella had the kind of presence that caused some of the most powerful in authority to lower their gaze. This power was admired and projected as essential to the cause of liberation, in a society where Africans were expected to lower their gaze in the presence of the whites who held official authority.

Forceful women negotiate respectfully with the status quo from their seemingly powerless positions as housekeepers with access to the dominant in society. These women may have served as confidantes to wives of planters who experienced constant betrayal by their husbands’ marital infidelity, especially with Black women whom they considered inferior. Their work included persistent verbal interventions to wives of the planters, lawyers, and other men who could influence the outcome of the court cases. They held secrets of planters’ wives’ infidelity; as well,
these holders of secrets used this knowledge when appropriate. For Lilian Williams and Irene
Williams, the power was used coercively for bargaining in the interest of protestors.

Forceful women knowingly used their bodies to gain access and incremental privilege for
themselves, their children, and favoured community members. Florence Prentice, nee Jarvis,
realized the overseer at Cranston’s Estate had been directing lewd glances at her despite his age
and professional seniority in comparison to her. She rationalized submitting herself to him during
the disturbances as significant to obtain leniency towards her brother who was alleged to have
been involved in the protest. She had migrated from Nevis a few years earlier upon her
grandmother’s instruction to protect him. What appears as conflicting positions were
reconcilable in Florence’s negotiating life skills. Florence Jarvis rationalized her action this way:

_Hilly een liw dung a Hilden. Iz he who a did liw wid wen a moo a Sin Kitt ou foin wuk. A wud do anyting ou kip im oat a jyal and a woz to earj anywear._

Hilly lived at Helden’s. I lived with him when I moved to St. Kitts to find work. I would do anything to keep him out of jail and I was old enough to protect him.

They included women who used the power of the purse and convinced other woman to avoid
purchasing from retailers who served on the jury or who expressed support for the authorities
during the trial of those charged with rioting or any other crime committed in relation to the
uprising. The category was also used to include women who deliberately risked perjuring
themselves to prevent family members and accused friends from facing conviction.

Veronica Byron revealed the level of organization that forceful women facilitated during the
protest and its aftermath. They kept abreast of the upcoming activities so that they could
coordinate the women’s responses. She recalled,
As soon as the names of jurors became known to the public, we boycotted their retail outlets and other businesses, for we knew the power of a juror. We couldn’t allow his business to flourish while he was preparing to send our martyrs to jail.

Mary Boddie attributed the main achievements that the protestors gained from the resistance to the involvement of forceful women. Boddie, like other storytellers, expressed her conviction in passionate lengthy prose. Her reflection on the women’s contribution missed previous interpretations of protestors’ actions. She summarized her perspective on the women’s contribution this way:

There was a lot happening and women had to be involved for whether you were a man or woman you were impacted by the difficulties to which we were subjected. The protestors demanded higher wages and we called for better equipment to work in the fields. In the end none of our demands was met. What we achieved was mainly as a consequence of the part played by forceful women in the resistance. o you understand what I’m saying?

These women, in their various capacities, were determined to intervene to protect the protestors from what they considered unfair and undeserved punishment by the authorities. They provided safe havens for the marchers, cared for the injured, and were prepared to engage in perjury to ensure that protesters escaped arraignment or unjust punishment. Moreover, the women seemed convinced that a march designed to bring attention to low wages of sugar workers had been
grossly mishandled by the authorities. In addition, they argued that a protest march by a few hundred men neither warranted a response from the state using gunfire nor the requisitioning of warships and additional forces from abroad. Women supported the march action.

The categories allow for a definition of resistance that span a wide range of actions by the female activists. They included direct confrontation, sabotage, undermining, and fractioning of the members of the plantocracy and religious intervention. The actions the women undertook are indicative of their involvement in the decolonizing, liberation movement of the 1930s. It also demonstrates the expectations of oomanship/womanhood as inclusive of a range of resistance activities that that were required of them as integral and valued members of their households and communities. A gendered perspective on the protest has introduced a varying political consciousness and organizing strategies that eluded previous accounts of the protest. The next chapter discusses the story-tellers’ reflections of their involvement in marches and other overt forms of activism during the resistance. Also presented are their perspectives on their indigenous mobilization techniques in the marches, confronting armed forces, providing sanctuary for protestors, and participating in court trials.

6.4 Conclusion

The stories recalled a tradition of organizing that proved very effective during the period of national struggle in 1935. The storytellers challenged the narrative of an unorganized response, by outlining the organizing mechanisms they employed and their expressed objective to protect their families, the community, and themselves from further erosion of their liberty and their way of life. In the next chapter, the women reveal their overt resistance activities and covert strategies to subvert the judicial system and advance.
Chapter 7
Revisiting Protest

“We wanted something for ourselves and our children so we took a chance with our lives”
Anonymous. Inscription at Buckley Estate, St. Kitts

Through this thesis, I argue that witness testimonies to the public protests that occurred in St. Kitts in 1935 contain multiple narratives that have been occluded by the official designation of the incidents as the “Buckley’s Riots.” The absences in the existing records of the event are filled in, providing new knowledge that depathologizes the protestors and reconstitutes contests and the performance of silencing and pathologizing as signifiers of domination.

In this chapter, the minutiae of the story telling reveal the various levels of overt involvement in the protest. It begins with the women’s recollections of the protest marches that occurred nationally and, collaboratively, highlights the establishment of a network of sanctuaries and to protect protestors from the police. An accounting of the activities designed to thwart the judicial abuse of the activists who faced prosecution is also provided.

7.1 Women and the March

The start of “crop,” the sugar cane harvesting season in January 1935, began with the usual bustle on and around sugar estates and communities. It marked the end of the “dry season,” a period of low-economic activity in the sugar industry reflected by extreme financial hardship. Women were up at 3:30 am starting wood fires to prepare meals for their families. The adult males in their households, themselves, largely employees of the sugar estates who were required to report for work at dawn expected to have three meals prepared to take with them—breakfast,
daysayuna, a mid-morning meal, and lunch. Harvesting season, which lasted for approximately six months of the year, constituted the most grueling work-life for a female sugar estate employee, who was also a wife, domestic worker, and mother. They too reported to the various sugar estates for a 6 am start of operations.

Sugar cane workers who were resident in Basseterre had attended a meeting a few days before the start of the harvest, where they had been briefed by the executive members of the Workers’ League, an organization sympathetic to the employees, that the planters had decided not to grant an increase in wages. Oinee Hanley, a resident of Basseterre, reported that no women were invited to the meeting, but only head cutters, men identified to lead groups of workers during the harvesting of sugar canes. Oinee was one of the women who stood outside a window to listen to the raucous exchanges inside. There were frequent loud outbursts and constant shouting that occurred. From that, she surmised that those present at the meeting had considered the message unwelcome news. She returned to the Village before the meeting ended to tell persons what she found out and encouraged them not to work for the same wage as the previous season.

By the next morning, most sugar estate employees around the island were aware of the march that was to ensue. Estates were on average no more than five miles apart, and so word travelled fast. It was customary for females involved in visiting relationships to see their male partners at evenings, and they passed on the message. The stories revealed that women had well-developed communications networks to relay information to nearby villages, which they incorporated in disseminating information of the planned protest. Children were a part of that network, which relayed information from village to village in the same way that word would have been sent announcing a death, sudden illness of a relative, or other emergency news. The women had assumed the lead in initiating the mobilization of protestors.
On January 28, 1935, despite the rumour that there would be no increase in weekly wages for that harvest season, workers expected to be rewarded with a raise in pay. They had anticipated a Christmas bonus in December 1934, but which was honoured by only one property owner, Mrs. Wade. At the start of the 1935 harvesting season, the managers collectively refused to grant the pay increase.

The majority of sugar cane cutters who formed the bulk of the employees during harvesting season refused to work without a guarantee from the planters of an increase in their weekly wages. The men on estates wandered off and huddled into groups to discuss the next step. Women with families returned home in support of the strike, to get a lead on the daily chores they would have had to undertake after their workday, and to prepare for the outcome and follow-up actions regarding the withholding of services. Eltruda reported that young women and female heads of households joined their male counterparts to strike in order to force the planters to pay a wage increase that was due.

The news had begun to disseminate by word of mouth. The women and men who had reported to work at Buckley’s Estate convened on a lot of land adjacent to the estate to discuss the next step. Soon after, they learned they would not get a pay raise. They had learned that employees at the adjacent estates of Shadwell and Needsmust had also been refused a wage increase, and they decided to meet with the group from Buckleys. Together, the strikers committed to take protest action and plotted a route to involve sugar workers from the entire island.

The women were vociferous in their support. They explained the unfairness of the position taken by the estate managers to all who would listen. They provided detailed information on the lavish parties held at the great houses on the sugar estates during the Christmas holiday season, while they as workers had taken a wage cut and received no holiday bonus. Oinee, who joined the
protestors on their journey along the western coast of the island, was adamant that the planters were being deliberate in withholding the wage increase:

\[
\text{Ah jus feel peep pl get toyod ou wuk fah nuttn. Dei kuda pay mo... ewen some ah de bukra deiself say dei kuda pay mo}
\]

I think the employees were tired of working for so little. They (the managers) could have paid more. Some of the planters said we deserved an increase but none of them delivered

The women felt they were effective in galvanizing support for the strike.

The following morning, January 29, workers, mainly men, returned to the estates hoping that the managers had changed their minds, but they were prepared to travel on an island-wide march. That day, Florence Hanley, one of the few women who joined the protesters on the journey eastward, disguised herself in male clothing, complete with a bowler hat. She was of the view that hiding her identity as female would allow her to blend in with the largely male contingent of marchers as well as make it difficult for managers to identify her should there be “trouble.” The protestors transformed conch shells into wind instruments, which they blew loudly to inform persons willing to join that the march had started. The conch shell became the signature signal of the approaching protestors.

The marchers travelled from Buckley’s Estate to Shadwell Estate then to Needsmust Estate, where they implored those who had turned out to work to join them. Employees from Pond, Salt Pond, and Friar’s Bay had been interrupted on their journey to the South East Peninsula. Reluctant employees were subject to public shaming by protestors, including verbal humiliation by women among them. For many of those who were hesitant to join, the cost of shaming and
ostracism in a small community to which they belonged was too great, so they joined the march or returned home.

As the marchers moved from estate to estate the numbers grew with the support of the unemployed and sympathizers from other sectors of the society. Villagers, mainly women, welcomed the protestors, offered them food and drink, access to their bathroom facilities—then largely pit latrines—made friends, and renewed acquaintances along the way. The women were prepared to maintain the support to the protest until they received the wage raise that they deserved and which they were convinced the managers could have granted. They recognized the ethical importance of taking a stand against the plantation establishment.

By then, those employees who were employed on the southern tip of the island had joined the marchers. That part of the island was extremely dry and not amenable for growing sugar cane; consequently, the estate owners focused more on salt mining, growing cotton, and rearing small ruminants, especially goats. The area was not easily accessible; consequently, employees who worked there were persons who had difficulty gaining employment on other estates. They tended to be extremely belligerent, were known to have committed petty crimes, and were considered unreliable, high-risk employees. However, they were willing to join in the protest march as rabble rousers and trouble makers and assumed the role as the security force for the protestors. Veronica Byron, who had accompanied her father to Shadwell Estate that day, observed that the manager remained in the safety of his home, sending his overseer to be accosted by the marchers.

Many of the children of sugar estate workers had been kept home from school, the parents being aware of what might transpire that day. Child raising was considered the sole responsibility of the women; therefore, they made decisions regarding the children. January 29, 30, and 31 many
children were kept at home. They complemented the numbers of the marchers, having received strict instructions on the distance they were allowed to travel before returning home. The parental approval to participate in the march was intended to instill in the youth the importance of the protest action taken by their parents as well as impart a greater understanding of the need to confront with conviction injustice in the society. The women understood the importance of optics of mass participation for injecting momentum into the march and that sustaining the size of the masses in the protest would convey to the opposition the seriousness of the position the protestors had taken. Children’s participation in a march confirmed their parents’ commitment to the event and served as their indoctrination in the purpose and history of their foreparents’ resistance.

On Tuesday, 29 January, 1935, one day after the official start of sugar cane harvesting season, the protest march resumed from Buckley’s sugar plantation on the outskirts of Basseterre city. Sugar workers had demanded of the manager Mr. Dobridge, as they did on the previous day, January 28, that their wages be restored to what they obtained before the reduction in wages in 1932. In the absence of unions, in the months and days leading up to the start of the harvest, the Workers’ League, an aspiring political opposition, through its use of pamphlets and its mouthpiece, The Union Messenger newspaper, appealed to sugar estate managers to increase the wages of the sugar workers. The managers and parliamentarians flatly refused an increase in wages on the grounds that they could not afford an increase of any amount. One estate owner, who was the sole, resident, female estate owner on the island, Mrs. Wade, agreed to a small increase in the wages for her employees. She had led in persuading other estate owners to agree to provide a Christmas bonus to employees in December 1934.
The women had strong political views about the legitimacy and purpose of the march. They felt that the planters were abusing their power by not agreeing to restore the wages, whether in full or incrementally. Sugar workers had agreed to a reduction in their salaries at a time when there was a significant drop in cost of sugar to give their employers financial breathing space. The women were adamant that the planters were not acting in good faith, despite the understanding workers demonstrated in 1931 and 1932.

During this period, the workers and their families had endured some of the most agonizing experiences by adjusting to a decrease in their wages that they recognized were the lowest in the Caribbean. They recognized that by late 1934, conditions were unbearable for the workers, both male and female. They had confirmed through their normal intelligence grapevine that the planters had received the equivalent of a bonus from the sugar factory, a portion of which they contended the workers were entitled. The financial conditions had changed for the estate owners, according to Veronica’s story, and it would have been justifiable that the workers receive an increase in wages.

The women described in detail the start of the protest action. On January 28, sugar workers threw down at the feet of managers and supervisors or returned to the work shed, the tools, which included new cutting implements that had been distributed to them to harvest the sugar canes. The women argued that these tools could have easily been converted into weapons, but the disappointed employees chose instead to leave the tools on the grounds near the administrative buildings and to gather to plan their next step. Employees at Buckley’s Estate gathered in an open field to confirm that they would follow through with actions that they had been planning should the managers reject their demand for an increase.
7.2 The Confrontation

Lillian Williams and Marie Henry, who worked at Estridge Estate approximately 12 miles from Basseterre, confirmed that the workers, after confronting Mr. Todd and Mr. Yearwood, had also expressed their disgust to the manager at not agreeing to restore their wages to the pre-reduction rate after two years. There are no records of any actions by workers on January 28, 1935, in any area except Buckley’s Estate, prior to the interviews with women. Moreover, the women’s interpretation of the situation was a perspective quite unlike that held by mainstream writers like Glen Richards, who suggested in his writings and lectures on the topic that protest action was initiated at Buckley’s Estate and that the strike action, inclusive of the march, was spontaneous. He adopted the term “riot” and failed to consider the aspects of the event that did not conform to the condition for a riot.

My interviewees described the event as action taken in disgust with the managers’ position on the protest march, initiated by excited protestors who were told that there would be no increase in their wages for the harvest season. The strikers shouted expletives, and according to their stories, the women maintained that the protestors had not rioted. They were adamant that the officials, aided by the military personnel, were the aggressors. Several women felt that certain managers who had threatened the protestors with guns or fired at them ought to have been charged with rioting and the murder of the three unarmed protesters.

Ismay Francis made it clear that she did not concur with the view that the event should be considered a riot. She expressed her position very concisely and distanced herself from qualifying the confrontation as a riot by distancing herself from the use of the term:

What dei call de Buckley Royot, mark yu me no karl it so, iz wha dei call it een de pearpoz, wozn no royot. E woz jus a set a man a walk bout de place. Dei no had no gun. What dei was goin shoot back wid, stick?

What they call the Buckley’s Riot, that’s not how I’ll name it, its what they published in the newspapers, it was no riot. A group of men were walking around the island. They had no guns. What would they have used to shoot a stick.

Muggie Richardson argued adamantly that there is a difference between a march by strikers and their supporters and a riot. She explained the difference between a riot and a march and rationalised that the marchers were not prepared for nor did they instigate a riot: “March an royot is two defrunt ting, an dis wozn no royot till dei kom wid soalja [A march and a riot are different things, and this was no riot until they brought armed soldiers].”

Edna De Costa seemed agitated whenever she heard the word riot in the context of the 2-day incident. She seemed convinced that the state and the planters colluded to teach workers a lesson for daring to speak out against the injustice that they were experiencing. She summarized the sentiment of many of the storytellers who objected to the pathologizing of their actions as riotous. She was forceful in her objection to categorizing the protest negatively and explained that the term riot was to deflect the wrong onto the protestors and to cover up state sanctioned murder of civilians. She explained:


Riot? What riot? It is their excuse to shoot us down like dogs. How could we cause a riot and we had no guns? There was noise
peepl hear de wey-wey, dei mus go see wa appn. Ain’ did no royot; a dem mek de chobl an de killin. Yu hear anybaddie kill roan de oilan? Wha royot? No tell me nutten boat no royot.

The foregoing suggests that the women interviewed had concluded that the arrest and imprisonment of protestors under marshal law or as rioters was unwarranted, unjust, and arbitrary. They emphasized that the violent response by the authorities was excessive and stated that it was designed to intimidate and to accomplish chaos, in order to justify the killings and the call for additional troops from nearby islands, and to ensure that the status quo was preserved.

Oinee Hanley, Eltruda, and Louisa were adamant that the law was not being applied equally and that the sugar estate managers who had threatened unarmed protestors should have been apprehended and at least one of them ought to have been charged for the deaths of three persons. She explained that she was outraged, but not surprised, that there was no murder trial or riot charges brought against managers, for it had not been customary for the whites in the society to be brought up or punished for crimes committed against Black Kittitians.

Oinee Hanley’s militancy and anger resurfaced as she gave her eye witness account, a story she retold many times:

_Is Pond do it. We see it wid we oan oy, wozn no Dobridge ar de army. And noat a ting fah for dat. Chree peepl doy and nuttn fah it. Wozn no royot. Dei karl it royot ou leggo go de modaraz dem. Das edwantij._

Pond shot (at the crowd) We saw it with our own eyes, it wasn’t Dobridge or the army. Three people died and no one was held accountable. It wasn’t a riot. They labelled it as a riot to ensure the murderers
After all, aawe no darg. An as lang as I ha bret dei would nar ha dei way ou lak way poor people. go free. That is abuse! We are not dogs! So as long as we were alive (and present at the trials) they would not have their way to convict and imprison protestors.

Marshall Law was implemented on the first day of protest and remained in place for the duration of the trials that ended in May of that year. It involved a curfew from 6 pm to 6 am, arbitrary searches and arrests, and a ban on public assembly “of persons in a disorderly manner or to remain in knots or crowds otherwise about the streets” (Blackett, 1935d, p. 2). Eltruda DeCosta, like others, was convinced the protestors should neither have been arrested nor convicted:

De Sunde to de chobl, dei jus kom roan a lak-up peepl ewon ef yu wozn deh. Jus ef yu buez dem, dei jus say yu know bout it so dei go lak yu up, fa dei say yu tark loyk yu een see ereeting an say boat dei is here to uphol de la. Dei woz a law anto demself.

The Sunday following the shooting, they (police) came looking for persons to put in jail, even if they weren’t involved. If you cursed them, they’d take you to jail and claim that you had information and participated in the protest. There were there to uphold the law but they were a law unto themselves.

Pricilla David, who lived at Helden’s Point approximately 14 miles from the site where the shooting incidents occurred later that day, remembered seeing the protesters approaching. They had already travelled 19 miles of the 32 miles of road that would take the demonstrators back to Basseterre from where the march originated. She noted that some were singing, and others were chatting loudly. She observed that there were a few woman, but the crowd appeared to her as “a ton luard a man wid some hellowa stick, loyk dei playin Mummies”[a large number of men

58 Mummies is a male theatrical troupe of street performers whose actions depict those of ceremonial stick fighters in Africa and the Caribbean.
carrying long wooden poles, in the same fashion that a folk lore troupe known as The Mummies, carried wooden poles that were used as props].” She described a carnival-like atmosphere, with protestors making music by beating drums, kettles, and other home-made instruments. The description conjured levity rather than hostility.

Her interpretation contrasts with the testimonies of the police, managers, overseers, and other prosecution witnesses as recorded in the local newspapers, but collaborated with Oinee’s interpretation of the mood of the marchers:

_ Me bin deh de krad a peep l a wark in loin go up a Phillip go look a big drum an was loyk krismus fa aawe bin a jam. Den bam, jus loyk dat police an solja kom chobl aawe owa a esrtij kom lakup peep l an tek way arl de stick an ting wa bin a mek muzik. _

The crowd had marched to Phillip’s where they encouraged a drummer with his drum to accompany them. They were overtaken by the police near Estridge where several arrests were made and sticks and other instruments taken away.

Pricilla David further suggested that if the mood of the protestors changed, it would have been as a consequence of the hostility of the authorities. The marchers had chosen the start of the harvesting season in 1935 to communicate their dissatisfaction with working conditions, but had not anticipated the response with gunfire. The island march was designed as a show of solidarity, to garner momentum and to mobilize support for strike action among sugar estate employees.

_De man dem inna march roun de oilan who show dei no loyk wa inna go arn. Dei inna nak pan an arl koina ting. Dei woz still inna de Krismos mood but de big man dem pan de estate an de gowament feel loyk dei kou treat peep l as dei loyk. Aawe Mussn show aawe no happy bout nuttn. Is loyk_ The men were marching to show that they disagreed with their pay, there was music. The mood was festive, following closely after Christmas but the sugar estate managers and government officials felt they had the authority to mistreat the protestors. We were not expected to
express our dissatisfaction. They preferred if we suffered in silence. Noone expected that the police and army would turn up armed and to fire on the crowd.

There were very few women among the marchers who were charged for rioting. According to Florence Jarvis, Evelyn Warner, one of the women charged with rioting, had moved from Sandy Point to Basseterre a few months before the outbreak of the disturbance to find work as a housekeeper. She was a known leader among the employees who had agitated to be paid wages that they had earned, the equivalent of severance pay and a Christmas bonus, after the manager of Bourkes Estate died intestate, leaving the estate without probationary status and employees without pay.

No nearby estate was willing to hire Violet Warner. She had a reputation as a troublemaker. She was one of the women who had accompanied the protestors on the island march. Louisa Fraser, who was present when Marshall Law was being declared and the announcement was being read, reported that she heard Violet shouting above the voice of the reader, threatening, “Ef aayu waan mek yasoso loyk a Haiti kip it up. Inglan goin kyarn seaw aayu, fo Jomanee ready ou tek it owa [If you want St. Kitts to become the next Haiti, continue with your actions. England will not be able to save you because Germany to ready to conquer it].” She was knowledgeable about geopolitics of the period and seemed prepared for the great risk associated with defending the people’s right to protest against injustice in St. Kitts.

Like the male protestors, Bernice recalled seeing some women in the march carrying short wooden poles, which she knew they used for dancing in the march, to protect themselves from wild dogs, and to brandish during the standoff with the police and military. Louisaa and Maud, who have remained friends, were involved in shouting to drown out the reading of the Riot Act
and declaration of Marshal Law. Key witness for the prosecution, Pte. Frederick, identified Kirby, who was arrested in early February following the incidents, as a committed activist during the period. Oinee Hanley, herself an activist, conceded to me that Kirby was present, but “ain do nutn kremenol ou get lakup [committed no crime that that warranted him to be locked away].” Veronica reported that two women who were on the frontline of the demonstration, Olive Allen and Viginia Greaux, were seriously injured when the armed forces opened fire on the crowd of demonstrators in Basseterre, and Olive who fell and was further bruised, had to be hospitalized. She was later arrested.

Only one of the women interviewed admitted to having been actively involved in the marches and confrontation with planters and the military. Oinee Hanley recalled that her mother berated her for being “to fars [overly inquisitive]” and getting involved in “man business.” Other participants, including the most outspoken and seemingly militant women such as Ismay Francis, Margaret Richardson, Bernice Caesar, and Veronica Byron, concurred with Hanley’s mother, also described the marches as “man business.” Pricilla David described seeing “a ton load a man bus owa Madeira Hill [a large number of men emerge over the top of Madeira Hill chanting higher wages].”

Their views of women’s proper roles notwithstanding, these women expressed sympathy and support for Olive Allen and Viginia Greaux, who were among those protesters on the frontline of the demonstration. Although the majority of the women supported Oinee Hanley’s description of the period, as the “distoobans agens wikidnis [disturbance against wickedness],” a few women expressed disappointment with the violent incidents that some of the strikers perpetrated against perceived strike breakers, but also denounced the strike breakers actions on the grounds that “Gaard no loyk ogle [God does not like evil].”
Despite vocal support and visibility of tyrant women in the marches, the numbers of females were much fewer than the male participants. The marches did not attract many females among the ranks of marchers as their presence as sugar industry field workers. For the majority of female sugar workers, their domestic duties, including caring for the aged and children, were as arduous and time consuming as their work on the estates.

There were also domestic relationships that militated against their involvement, as Louisa Fraser was quick to point out, which was the dilemma that women faced in deciding to participate in the island marches. She pointed to the domestic abuse which had been normalized between adult females and males, involved in conjugal relationships, may have influenced the small number of women who participated in the island-wide march.

After we participate in marches with the men and we both get home and there is no food prepared we can be beaten. They won’t consider that you were with them in the struggle. You would be treated as if you had no right to join the march.

Women were well aware that they experienced a differential sense of security as sugar estate employees. Those who lived on the estates were at risk of eviction if they were seen participating in marches. Losing their homes would disrupt an entire family. Consequently, they were more likely to participate in surreptitious activities that would shield their families from additional negative repercussions at the hands of the planters, the state, or the police. Therefore, they focused mainly on covert resistance politics.

While most women did not join the march, they engaged in planning and strategizing activities. Oinee Hanley revealed during her interview that her friend Elva Kelly and she spent most of
the weekend prior to the unrest among a group of men and women who had congregated in her
neighbour’s yard. It was normal practice for neighbours to congregate in Mr. Derick’s yard, an
closed space, where entertainment, other recreational activities, and debates occurred. There,
men and women jointly began to strategize on how employees should respond if their request for
an increase in pay was not met at the start of the sugar cane harvesting season that had been
scheduled for January 29, 1935. This gathering was unlike the meeting that the Worker’s League
scheduled, to which only men were invited.

Many women saw their own gendered participation as valuable. For instance, Mrs. Fraser
pointed to the effectiveness of women’s involvement in the preparation leading up to the strike
action. She felt women’s covert activities were very effective. She also explained that the
element of surprise and the obtrusiveness of indirect action by the seemingly powerless often
cought, off-guard, those with power and the means to suppress opposition. The significance of
covet action was a delayed response from the more powerful defenders of the establishment and
the activist kept a step ahead of the status quo.

Viola Herbert explained the strategic importance of secrecy and covert activities, especially
when the opposing group had the support of the local military and British navy soldiers to
suppress violently any uprising:

*Yu doan have to mek no noise. Yu han ain haw ou to see wha yu foot a do. Malone an dem did woz mean well but arl dem a do a tark. Aawe arganoiz de chilren dem oo kery de message dem oat. Chiren arlweaz a kery oat mesij so ee look naamul naamul.* You don’t have to announce what you are doing to draw attention to yourself. Malone (Lawyer for the defendants) and members of the Workers’ League meant well, but all they were doing was talking. We organized the children to take messages. Children always carry messages so that is normal.
The older children set the cane fields on fire to distract the overseers.

The women’s strategy of using surreptitious action, integrated within the household and extended family network, served to be far more effective than employing public negotiation and direct confrontation against managers and the officials that supported them. Pricilla David explained what she considered a proven strategy:

*Iz erebady dat have to do someting and erebady know when to kip dei mout shut. While yu doing yu wuk home, yu children doin what yu tell dem do. Wedda is to loit cane, go see wey de police be, go carry a message, cheren come een wayree handy in de trouble.*

Everyone has to be involved, and everyone knows when to keep a secret. There is a lot you can do at home for the protest. Your children will obey you. Whether it's to set fire to the sugar cane fields, keep an eye on the police or to carry messages, children are very useful in carrying out protest activity.

The women revealed their involvement in incendiary activities to destroy large areas of mature sugar canes, which was a matter that the protestors knew was very worrisome to the plantation managers, the economic elite on the island. The women knew that the sugar content and the profit to be derived from a field of canes were significantly reduced if the plants were burnt before harvesting. They had witnessed planters agonize publicly and in the privacy of their homes whenever this occurred on a sugar plantation that they managed. Therefore, women and children, whom the protestors considered the least likely suspects of arson, lit sugar cane fields as another expression of protest.

Innis (2005) and Richards (1986) indicate that the oppressed population in St. Kitts had a long history of torching properties of elites. They suggest that the incendiary activities, as subversive action, were led and undertaken by males who worked on sugar estates and who had experience
in the controlled burning of canes to rid them of cowitch and other poisonous vines that caused delays during harvesting season. Margaret Richardson’s account of the organizing and burning of sugar canes during the period of protest demonstrates the involvement of the women in executing incendiary activities:

While the men are involved in loud protest marches, shouting higher wages, Christobel, Rosey Barney and Rhona were responsible for setting cane fires. In those days an adult could give instructions to any child and they had a group of children working with them. Today’s parents are upset if you correct their child. Nothing is more painful for Arthur Davis and other sugar cane plantation owners than to see sugar cane fields on fire.

The stories also included the measures they undertook to distract suspected, potential informants in the community. Louise identified them as persons who ingratiated themselves with the managers, their families, and other whites in society, and as the storytellers claimed, frequently used the court system to settle differences with villagers. Pricilla identified Nessie and Mooma Teeney as “faras [highly inquisitive rumour mongers],” who would “gie way dei arse an shit troo deh rib [perform acts to their personal detriment]” to gain the approval of the elites in society. The protestors knew that they had to organize surreptitious activities, giving consideration to the potential for internal leaks.
7.3 Sanctuaries and Protection

The women’s stories explained the importance to providing safe houses for persons who felt targeted for arrest following the protest. Viola Herbert believed that authorities (i.e., the state, the judiciary, and the employers in the sugar industry) exaggerated the incidents and were aggressively seeking to detain many of the African-Kittitian males, who migrated as seasonal workers to other islands at the start of the sugar harvesting period in January, when the marches occurred. She refused to cooperate with the police who were involved in gathering evidence to build their cases against those who were involved in the protest. Her explanation shows an understanding of the collusion between the management of the sugar estates and the state to deter persons, mainly the male migrants from seeking more lucrative wages in other islands of the Caribbean. She summarised her assessment of the detention of protestors:

*A wouldn even tell yu, if yu ask me, for is not yu bizniss. Dei did want kip dem from goin ‘way go wuk ou mek a penny more dan here. Dei jus waan ou kip black peep aanda dei foot ou sofaa. Dei wozn goin get a neam fram me.*

I wouldn’t even tell you if you ask me, for it’s not your business. They wanted to jail the men to prevent them from leaving the country to find work and earn higher incomes than they could earn at home. They wanted to keep black people oppressed and suffering. I refused to give the name of any protestor.

Anita Ward revealed that her “family,” Claude Liburd, who had joined the marchers, never returned home after the strike action ceased, but took up residence elsewhere on the island where the authorities would not locate him. Pricilla David confirmed that he had moved in with a

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59 Family is the word used to describe a relative who was not resident in the same household. It is a culturally specific usage that has retained the usage in colloquial expressions today.
woman in Cayon and remained there after the protest ended. The women seemed to have established a code of silence on persons who had marched or visited various estates during the disturbance, which seemed to have remained in effect even during the interviews conducted in late 1990s. They would lower their voices whenever they chose to reveal a name that they felt ought to remain unsaid, or using their finger, they traced an X across their lips to suggest that the information slipped out and ought to be kept secret.

During the group session with Lilian, Mary, and Marie, the women agreed that far more persons had received injuries than were reported. They speculated that the eight persons whom I had told them were recorded as injured might have suffered serious injuries that required care at hospital and from formal health care practitioners. The majority of those injured sought care from the non-formal network of healers, including family members and friends.

Margaret Richardson spoke of the increased activity in the homes of various healers and folk midwives, on the days following the civil unrest. Healers were mainly women who practiced folk medicine. The healers served as the alternative to formally trained and licensed health practitioners. They provided health care to persons who received minor injuries during the strike and who wished to avoid the attention of the authorities. Violet Herbert described what women did to enable the injured men to avoid the authorities.

*Aun Seh-Seh woz busy fa de peeppl eenwarn ou cure quick. Fa az yu look loyk yu cut an yu iz a man, dei lak yu up an say yu woz dere, ou nobaddie but a few inna gie police statement. Aawe role een ou mek sure dei woz attended-to oat a de oy a de police an de peeppl who loyk run dei moat.*

Aunt She-Seh was busy for the wounded wanted to be healed quickly. If the males were found with blood or injury to their bodies, they would be jailed and the police would prepare a statement to place you at the scene of the protest, because the police were not getting much assistance from the
community. As women our role was to ensure they men received care and protected in places of refuge away from the police and those who would leak the the information.

7.4 The Trials

Women really shone when it came to covert actions undertaken during the trials. Armed with a strong sense of fairness and the desire to protect members of the community from unjust imprisonment, the women prepared to disrupt and obstruct the judicial process. The women’s resistance strategies surrounding the 1935 struggle in St. Kitts are associated with the acquittal of 11 of the 13 persons who were charged with the offence of rioting. Hundreds of protestors avoided remand as result of the protection provided by women who were prepared to act despite perceived gender constraints.

Some travelled for miles by foot to be at the courthouse during the trials, for they were determined to intervene to ensure the judge “trow oat de kears dem [dismiss cases before the court].” Much of the planning during the trials occurred on a daily basis. As groups of women journeyed to and from trials, they evaluated the most recent cross-examination and discussed the approaches to be taken for the next day.

Louisa Fraser described the daily routine of walking to the courthouse among a group of women, during the trials. She recalled having to sacrifice much-needed rest to arise in the early hours of the morning to prepare meals by the light of woodfire used for cooking. She reported on the constant plotting en route to the hearings to interrupt the proceedings at critical points of questioning. The female supporters had determined that the judge would be more lenient towards females for breaking court protocol than their male counterparts, for they believed African-
Kittitian women were emotional and lacked self-control. The frequent disruptions caused by women was orchestrated to influence the final ruling in favour of the accused protestors. The women recognised that the judge would not credit them with capacity for organized subversion of the judicial process, but rather would interpret their behaviour as ignorance with regard to court proceedings.

Veronica Byron explained that there was unprecedented interest among women in attending the trials. They organized their domestic life and public work around it. She also revealed that a greater number of persons were allowed in the gallery than was usual and suggested that had the authorities had expected a different outcome to the high percentage of acquittals. She summarized her observation and suspicion as follows:

*De courthouse woz roit weh e be nung, excep e woz a woodn bildin. Wen dei haw kourtz yu kudn wark near de bildin, de police wud mek yu wark arl de way roan if yu noin ha buznis insoid. Dei so tink dei wudda mek a example ov de peepl dei ha lak up, dat dei ley aawe een. A tink dei noin inten ou sheam dem arf infront aawe. But e tun oat defrunt. Dei ha dei plan an aawe ha aawe plan to.*

Court sittings were held in a wooden structure on the same site of the present judicial building. When court was in session the police would direct you away from the public street that was near the building. During the trials we were allowed to enter for the police thought that we would witness seeing the protestors being humiliated in court. But things turned out different they had their plan and we had ours.

Regular Sunday afternoon hair braiding sessions took the form of strategic planning and plotting opportunities for the legal defense of those charged in connection with the protest marches. The women would hold these meetings while occupying a portion of the yard space close to one of their homes. The planning took place in the presence of female children whose hair were being
braid or while the women braided each other’s hair. The main topic for months focused on the
court cases. Traditionally, hair braiding gatherings afforded women the opportunity to socialize,
to catch up on community information, and to engage in gossip. These gatherings, therefore,
provided a perfect cover for subversive planning activities. They went unnoticed as a form of
strategic planning or as a gathering that contravened the Riot Act, which had been in place for
the months following the marches.

Consequently, what was deemed by court officials to be spontaneous acts of childish behaviour
from unlearned women who were ignorant of appropriate behaviour in a court setting were, in
most cases, planned responses. The calculated risks displayed in the gallery as well as on the
witness stand were contrived by female strategists. To illustrate the point, Watson reported on an
everyday occurrence by which visitors in the gallery, mainly women who came in support of
defendants, were able to disrupt the Judge’s concentration:

Every day Rae treaten to trow somebody out. De judge does stop de examining and
point and say who doin what, and that if we want to stay we must behave like adults. De joke was on im, for in de end we prewayl.

At each sitting (Chief Justice) Rae threatened to expel visitor from the gallery. The Judge disrupted the cross examination,
points to an individual and accuse them of disrupting and cautions us to behave like adults. The joke was on him because in the
end we prevailed.

The women quoted above showed a sense of women’s place being different from men’s, but they
also saw women’s responses as valuable. They were far more pragmatic about doing what they
felt was right irrespective of the notions of propriety and impropriety that informed the colonial
notions of the self. They spoke frankly about sex, retribution, and the respectable thing to do for
the cause of the innocent, whom they felt were charged unfairly with rioting. In many instances, the positions that the women took demonstrated their commitment to the resistance movement.

O’Garro and Fraser’s stories of occurrences at the court confirmed Ismay Francis’ characterizations that they were the court warriors. They mobilized woman to attend court and sit in the galley and were able to persuade supporters from the rural area to attend. The women described, in detail, their involvement during the trials and in providing safe havens for known frontline participants in the marches. They also confirmed that many women “put respehk pan de shelf [disregarded the appearance of propriety and assumed the risk of gaining a bad reputation as a loose woman],” to serve as alibis for persons who were charged with rioting. Louisa Fraser reported on the court antics of Gladys Kirby and her mother Florence Gumbs, who were both arrested, charged, and eventually acquitted of obstructing the police on duty to locate and apprehend alleged protestors.

Aida Claxton, chief witness for William Fowler who was charged for rioting, testified that Fowler was sitting on her step when he was shot by a stray bullet and that the doctor had visited him there and then sent him to hospital. Louisa Fraser revealed that attempts to care for Fowler, who was severely wounded, failed. Days after he was shot, it appeared that he was at risk of losing his leg, and he was taken to hospital, where the police found and charged him with rioting.

Similarly, a very popular story was told of a woman who claimed to have been sitting on her bed, in an almshouse, when a stray bullet penetrated her wooden home and shot through her leg. This story, repeated by almost all of the women, has been entrenched in the popular belief of Kittitians. The story reinforces the conviction of the workers and their supporters that the authorities had overreacted, their actions had cost lives and injuries, and that the protesters were
being submitted to unjust charges and unfair arrest and trials. Consequently, many women established strategies to defend the protesters at the trials.

Martha O’Garro explained that Amy Huggins, one of the witnesses called in the trial, was her personal friend. Amy Huggins took the stand as an alibi for one of the accused and put her personal reputation at risk by providing evidence that the defendant had spent the entire day and evening at her home and, therefore, could not have been present at the time that the incident occurred. Amy Huggins served as an alibi for the Charles Samuel, who was charged for rioting. She claimed he spent the day and over-nighted with her on the day of the Buckley shooting.

Amy Weston, another witness called at the trials, testified that she had spent the day until late evening with Cummings, who was charged with rioting. They lived in the same property in a single room divided by a crocus bag. They shared a lamp that lit up both properties at night. Ann Weston told the court that she was Obadiah Francis’ kippa, and they had spent the day at home weaving baskets for sale. Alice Herbert claimed that Albert Sutton came to her home at around very early on the afternoon of the “kanfuezon” at Buckleys, and he stayed with her until she finished her domestic duties very late in the evening, after the sounds of gunshots had subsided.

Louisa Fraser claimed to have been present at the cross examination of Diana Georges, who stood as the main witness for her two “lil baay dem [young sons],” who were charged with rioting. She reported that Diana complained bitterly during the questioning; at times she feigned incoherence and intentionally used the names of her sons interchangeably, which confused the court officers and frustrated the cross-examiner into bungling his line of questioning. According to Louisa’s account, Diana may have won the empathy, if not the derision, of the court, but in the end, both sons were acquitted. The acquittals were personalised as victories and liberation.
The women seemed far more knowledgeable of the ways to engage the judicial system. They carefully orchestrated interventions among themselves to influence the outcome of the cases. Ironically, the women’s disruptive tactics were attributed to their ignorance of court protocol.

One of the witnesses of the court proceedings, Eltruda, who had accompanied her mother to the sitting, claimed to have sat next to a woman who was thrown out of court by the magistrate for signalling to the accused, Maud Moving, during her cross-examination on the witness stand. The woman pleaded to the judge that Maud’s child was calling for her from outside the court. The judge often had to interrupt the proceedings to request the audience of mainly women to be silent. Other distractions involved changing seats during the questioning of witnesses, which distracted the judge and lawyers, which the women knew would also result in producing gaps in the court records. Veronica Byron explained one strategy of distraction this way:

\[
\text{Remember de judge an laarya dem had was}
\text{ou roit dung wha de witniss say, so any lil}
\text{distobons gon mek dem doan hear and den}
\text{de ewedens wouldn be roit an dei goin}
\text{haw ou ley dem go.}
\]

Be reminded that the judge and lawyers had to write the witness testimonies. If they are disturbed they would miss parts of the testimony and lose valuable evidence that would affect their cases, and the judge would have no choice but to release the defendant.

The women created opportunities to protest within the colonized, racialized, and gendered discursive that pervaded in the dominant institutions. The risks they took were calculated to receive the paternalistic responses to their subversion of court protocol as they had anticipated. The judge was distracted and often had to return the gallery to order, as often he had to intervene in circuitous questioning and responses between the lawyers and defence witnesses. The stories indicate that female witnesses were deliberately challenging.
Ethel Phipps’ trial on the charge of rioting at Buckley’s Estate was one of the most disruptive. On two occasions, the magistrate warned her for “uttering threats.” The seemingly reticent, Arrabella Matthew smiled mischievously when she recalled that she had observed Ethel Phipps mouthing obscenities to the magistrate. For even in the simplest circumstances, she explained, “Ethel mout no clean,” which is a phrase to suggest that in her everyday use of language, the defendant Phipps expressed herself using expletives and abusive expressions.

Oinee recalled Ethel Phipps’ recalcitrance in her own defence at the trail:

Wa kudda be a easy keas tek lang, a hual day an owa bekarz Ettel stobon. Wan toim e look loyk Ettel gon lack up agen, fa ee een a provoke de majistrat. A ooman drap dung feant way. An aawe gyadda roan a tark till ee lif up an kyary oat. Mo sweet grass shake owa de ooman nuaz ou bring a bak an nuttn did happn to a. Iz de seam Ettel Pipp who moda sen frak ou she wear a kuat, fa she did lak up, and de hem ha een wha she ou sayinnacourt. She een moaty bad.

What could have been a simple case was drawn out for an entire day because when it appeared that Ettel had gone too far in provoking the magistrate and that she would again be remanded, a woman in the gallery fainted. Court was disrupted for a period because Ettel Phipps had chosen to behave in her usual stubborn manner rather that repeat the statement that her mother had hidden in the hem of a dress she was sent to wear to court. But nobody could control Ethel’s penchant to speak candidly.

Ethel Phipps was one of the most outspoken and uncooperative defendants. The women reported that the defiance that she displayed on the witness stand was equivalent in the rebelliousness that she demonstrated in public towards the police during their search for protesters on the days immediately following the marches. She was charged with obstruction.

Women’s belligerence on the streets, at work on the sugar estates, and in the courtroom in the aftermath of the protest was strident and persistent. They targeted managers and overseers who
served as witnesses in the trial for caustic verbal abuse during the trials. They identified planters, Todd, James O’Flaherty, Yearwood, Davis, Dobridge, and Pond, as the main targets for the verbal harassment because they had been identified as informants of the police, and they generally hated managers.

Margaret anticipated the outcome of expressing her opposition publicly to her employer, who suggested that all those persons charged with rioting should be punished to the full extent of the law. She recalled the circumstances that led to her and others losing their jobs when speaking out on matters related to the disturbance. She recalled an incident in which she responded to the manager of the sugar estate when he made negative comments about the protestors:

*Ah tell im gou huam go moine he creazy-arse woif an stap choble poor peep. Ee tell me no kum bak (to work) an me no went back. Ah so me hold orn to Mr. Hill. He naywah did married to me yu know, but me an he wuk fu we cheren dem.*

I told him that he should go home and care for his crazy wife instead of harassing innocent people. He told me that I was fired and I didn’t even try to get back my job. That’s when I became friendly with Mr. Hill. We never got married but we both worked to ensure we supported the children.

The women were aware of the power of the authorities, and they developed coping strategies to reduce the impact of the perceived injustices they experienced. They found opportunities to register protest verbally and did not hesitate to do so when the occasion arose. The women involved in the resistance activities were adept at inverting the negative stereotypes that had been attributed to them to manoeuvre in spaces such as the courtroom.

St. Kitts has had a history of unmarried female-headed households, which has persisted in current statistics. Approximately 49% of the households remain headed by women. A high
percentage of these women bear children for different fathers. Women in this category have been stereotyped as “loose and immoral” and are accused of contributing to a high incidence of promiscuity. Although women have rejected the accusations, they became quite useful labels that they assumed to disguise their involvement in the subversive activities in the 1930s.

Marie Henry admitted that the negative construction of African-Caribbean female by colonised discourse became a useful cover for female witnesses during the prosecution of protestors. She reported:

*Dei noin know wen dei karl aawe warahoon it wudda come een handy. Arl de ooman dem who stan up in de coutz ou de man dem say dei liw wid dem, no kay if dei did haw a hosbon ar nat. Wha sweet a goart moat, sour a ee tayl*  

They didn’t know when they call us warahoon it was going come in handy. Almost every woman who took the stand testified as alibis for male defendants claimed that they slept with the man on whose behalf they gave testimony, regardless if the woman was married and living with her husband. Ill-will against a person can be converted for good.

Outside the courthouse during the period of the trials, the women, mainly heads of household, discriminantly boycotted retail outlets that were owned by jurors who had been selected to serve on panels during the court hearings on the riot. Martha O'Garro spoke about the systematic boycott that also included occasionally entering a retail shops under the pretence of purchasing; they would request a list of items, and then leave the shop without taking the goods, leaving the clerk to return the goods to the shelves. The older children were recruited to participate in nuisance practices undertaken by the women. By boycotting the retail outlets, women and children eroded the economic mainstay of jurors and their families. The women were conscious of how vulnerable families can become when their economic welfare is being threatened.
They would jeer, stare menacingly at jurors, or burst out in song that would warn of impending ruin for their businesses or ostracism for themselves and their families should the accused persons receive punishment. The songs were simple and repetitive so that the message was understood quickly. One song rendered during the interview was:

\[
\begin{align*}
Shoo\ fly\ doan\ bother\ mee, \ Shoo\ fly\ doan\ bother\ me & \quad \text{Get away from me insect, get away from me insect} \\
Shoo\ fly\ doan\ bother\ me,\ For\ me\ an\ yu\ ain\ company & \quad \text{Get away from me insect for I don’t like your company.}
\end{align*}
\]

The practice of African-Kittitian woman’s boisterousness in expressing their opposition to the authorities has been well documented in conventional documents. At the start of the apprenticeship period, a legal requirement of the Emancipation Act of 1834, one of the stewards of the period wrote in his report:

Incivility and insolence to those in authority on the property were amongst the most frequent complaints against them at the commencement of the change, women and young people being particularly the aggressors, loose themselves from some of the former restraints, they set their unruly tongues also at liberty. (Magistrate Daughtery, June 1835,

Word dropping, a practice of directing derisive, obscene, or lewd remarks towards others became a choice oppositional tactic for many of the women involved in the disturbances of 1935. Some of the contemptuous comments spoke crassly to the men’s sexuality or sexual incompetence, as above. The women fought in the struggle at various levels, utilizing a variety of strategies to attack their opponents. Word dropping was used to embarrass their opponents, frustrate them, and create dissention in their domestic lives.

Irene Hamilton worked as a housekeeper for the manager at Mills Estate. She reflected on the time she was selected to work in the “big house,” the warnings she received from her employers that she should not mix with the field hands, one of whom was her mother with whom she lived.
As she recollected her act of resistance during the disturbances of 1935, she exhibited a stern facial expression. She commented in a barely audible, hissing sound:

*Dei does forget a who doz cook dei food, put enuf starch een dei clothes ou kut dei neck and kou trow cow-itch pan deh bed. De Troozde marnin oodle ah een mit arl a dem a scratch an a begin ou scratch too, and a say, since yestiday ah come ya, iz dis eechin. An yu smoil at dem, but arl skin teet no laugh.*

They seem to forget who does their cooking, add starch to their laundry in amounts that can irritate their necks and scatter cow itch dust on their beds. The Thursday morning following the protest march when I got to the house, they were all scratching and I began to scratch myself too. I said, ‘since yesterday when I reported to work I felt this itching’. You smile mockingly, with satisfaction.

The women who were resident in properties owned by the estate and those who worked as housekeepers on the estates were more inclined to engage in surreptitious, resistance activities. They all assumed responsibility to provide for their families financially and to protect them from becoming homeless abruptly. Tenure on the sugar estates, albeit insecure, provided a source of relatively steady income, and it was rent-free. The women gave priority to protect their households from arbitrary eviction during the period of uncertainty and instability surrounding the disturbances. Similarly, serving in the homes of the plantation managers was regarded as a promotion that few employees would want to have withdrawn from them. Therefore, they tended to select covert action as their main mode of resistance.

More women resident in private properties engaged open resistance, though their actions were rarely violent. They accepted the invitation by the marchers to “fall een [join the march]” and ignored the instructions of chant used by the demonstrators “man in front and woman behind.”

According to the evidence provided, the women who received bullet and pellet wounds were
heads of household resident in the Basseterre area, who had taken up positions at the front of the demonstration.

Women in all sectors of plantation work were directly and indirectly involved in resistance activities associated with the 1935 disturbance. Their motivation was not confined to the single issue of “higher wages,” rather the upheaval provided the occasion to express their opposition to a range of issues that affected women in plantation society. During the disturbance of 1935, the same observation was made by another official of the British Government:

The women meanwhile taunted the police with remarks such as, “Oh, you can’t shoot because you have no ammunition,” “You only have blank cartridges,” “See me here, shoot me if you have anything in your gun.” (Rae, 1935)

Irene Hamilton, then a housekeeper in the Great House, summarized her concern this way:

E ain ongly woz hoy a weaj inna eet oat aawe, aawe noin a git no good cheetment loyk aawe a ooman. Dei inna cheet aawe wuss dan floor claat an de chobl gie aawe toim ou tell dem wa aawe say. Iz a luaad a ting boil owa. Ou tell yu de shoot jus ou stan up to dem een enuf, for dei noin expec it.

It was not only for higher wages that we were protesting, it was for respect and dignity for us as women. They treated us worse than cloth used for cleaning the floor and the protest gave us time to ventilate our concerns. There were a lot of issues that came to a head. To be honest direct confrontation brought me satisfaction because they underestimated the magnitude of our response.

For Irene, the groundswell of support was a demonstration of solidarity among the large, subjugated population of Kittitians. It offered the opportunity for protestors to declare publicly their disapproval of the persistant indignities and that they intended to achieve the liberty they desired by force if the authorities continued to use coercive measures to sustainkeep them in a state of unfreedom.
While Lucille Morton, who worked as a weeder, expressed a pragmatic approach to the demand for increased wages, which confirmed that the chant by protestors for “higher wages” was also a demand for fairness and liberty. She stated:

*If dei nar pay yu fea ou wha yu wuk fa, yu expec dem goin gie yu hoya weajz? Aafa dei pay yu as dei aart, den dei kud raise yu money.*

If they are not paying you a fair wage they cannot pay higher wages. They must first give a fair pay and then they will truly recognise an increase in pay.

Margaret Richardson’s response was politically grounded and radically ‘oomanist’ by suggesting:

*Eqol pay ou equol wuk wid u poor man, no equol, ee no mek no sense wen yu gat a luad a peopl ou feed.*

Equal pay for equal pay among the lowest paid is a nonsensical concept. The pay needs to take in consideration the women’s responsibility to support a large household.

Margaret expressed the concept of each according to the need. The material conditions related to higher wages emerged as women’s concern, but equally important were the issues of sexual and domestic violence, housing insecurity, and the threat to family stability and personal safety. These were of personal and political interest upon assuming “oomanship,” a term that summarises the responsibilities, expectations, and everyday life experiences of the African-Caribbean, adult female in St. Kitts.

The fluidity of gender identity, whereby women adopted male persona to navigate the day’s hostile social environment, was also discussed by participants. Oinee Hanley reported that she disguised herself as a man in a bowler hat that she painted red, male-cut trousers, and assumed a masculine swagger when she was forced out of hiding in her mother’s home to do chores like collecting water from a communal tap at the side of the road a few days after the direct
confrontations subsided. She had been on the frontlines of the crowd as they taunted the military and when the estate manager at Buckley’s Estate had fired into the protesters who had gathered on the estate grounds. The disguise she assumed was to prevent her from being identified and imprisoned or called as a witness to the events.

7.5 Conclusion

Revealed in this chapter was poor African-Caribbean women as political actors whose activism ranged from the everyday struggles to survive in a colonized state to playing a central role in the major events such as the March, which historians have described as a riot. Their narratives contain a rich textural knowledge that escapes traditional constructs of recording and interpreting popular events of historical import. The women’s perspectives, borne out through their detailed reflection of their agency during the civil disturbance, demonstrate a level of organization and political consciousness that writings on the civil disturbance in St. Kitts have tended to ignore.

The wave of protest that erupted throughout British-colonised St. Kitts in January 1935 is the last major national disruption that occurred on the island to the present. Also revealed in this chapter was a complex narrative of how a generation of super-exploited Caribbean females, conscious of the what Turner (1995) describes as a “thicket of regulations, courts, prisons and a military with improved fire power” (p. 26), took the risk to participate in protest marches, disrupt court sessions, taunt armed forces, and engage in covert, strategic activities to mitigate the everyday hardships that they and their families experienced. Their silence in previous accounts was contested by locating the women as central to the narration of history, as they experienced it,

60 The use of the term super-exploited was adopted from Verene Shepherd’s lecture titled “Women, Slavery and the Struggle for Workers’ Rights” delivered in celebration of History & Heritage Week of Activities February 21, 2007, held at the UWI School of Continuing Studies, The Gardens, Basseterre, St. Kitts.
which has established an additional new pool of data to inform scholars’ interpretation of the event.

Contemporary sources by colonial officials and local elites presented the protest as disorganized, illogical, and violent to justify to the British government the use of the military intervention against the protestors. The newspaper accounts constructed the protest as a series of riots perpetrated by defendants who were tried in court on charges of rioting that resulted in damage to property and the injury of one white manager. Historians’ interpretations of the archival sources focused on the protest as industrial action that required the legitimization of unions and the expansion of suffrage under liberal leadership.

The women’s detailed disclosure of the circumstances surrounding the episode expanded the protest events beyond the two days of marches, confrontation, declaration of martial law, injuries, and death, which were the activities on which the official reports and secondary historical texts focused. The stories contest the protest as a combustive, confrontational 3-day resistance, without limiting the women’s role to non-confrontational activities, to suggest a gendered approach illuminated the greater involvement of women in the resistance movement. The women described in minute detail the conditions of work that led to the days of political and industrial action, the protection of protestors from harassment, arrest, and imprisonment following the civil disturbance, and the strategies employed to obtain the acquittals of those persons charged for rioting.

The storytellers’ accounts reveal that women have a developed, but varying, political consciousness and political analysis. This led them to participate in the events in different ways. We retrieve from their accounts not only a sense of women as political actors, but also a detailed account of how they made their political choices and the constraints under which they did so.
Fundamental to the women’s political concern was that of liberty. I observed that the use of the Kittitian nation language provided the story tellers with a freedom of expression. Chapter seven is dedicated to analysing the three themes that emerged from the stories to address the issue of knowledge production and to contest the dominant discourse of the protest.
Chapter 8
Reflections and Imaginings

*Gnatola ma no kpon sia, eyenabe adelan to kpo mi sena. (Ewe-mina)*

Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter (English)

The women, whose stories inform this study, all descendent of enslaved Africans, were employed mainly as manual field workers in the sugar industry, a colonial relic of enslavement. They related their stories in their mother tongue, a language of resistance that disrupted the narrative presented in the English, the official language of oppression. All but two of the women are illiterate in English. Their stories related courage, creativity, resilience, defiance, and resourcefulness that inspire their descendants, but which were not captured in previous histories of the protest of 1935. Also undertaken in this study is an interrogation of the writer as a colonised subject, meandering hegemonic minefields in search for discourse of decolonisation and subjectivity of the subjugated and avoiding the pitfalls of the interpretation of testimonies that may presume the subject.

I explore how these women have been represented in history, drawing on the social scientific scholarship on the English-speaking Caribbean in the absence of feminist literature on Kittitian women. Their stories are my history, for one of the storytellers is my mother. Through conversations with the women who witnessed the uprising, I trace how the history of the protest is remembered and the contradictions in relations of heteronormativity. I argue further that the stories offer insights for an imagined decolonized St. Kitts that needs to be explored. How can we preserve, in text, for new readings by present and future generations, the archival memories
of self-emancipation of the female griots whose bodies are inscribed with our histories of our civilization?

The thesis acknowledges how women contest domination and challenges us to re-examine the subject. It utilised a case study approach involving African-Kittitian women who witnessed a national protest in St. Kitts in 1935. The women related personal stories of their involvement in the protest and their perceptions on the episode. Inherent in their storytelling are epistemological issues that deal with language as they confront the question of knowledge and evidentiary proof, ontology, and discursive dominance. The stories construct a collective narrative of a protracted struggle for liberation.

8.1 Reflections

From inception of this study, I attempted to resolve the marginality of the subaltern perspective and challenge the silence of subalternty in knowledge production and the discursive practices that maintain the inequality of knowledges. I believe that the subaltern speaks, but discursive practices establish a sound barrier that prevents it from being heard, recognized, or accessed in certain spheres. My personal politics regarding equity motivates my advocacy and activism, discursively and pragmatically, towards the goal that liberates subjugated voices and knowledges.

The study is instructive in many ways. It reveals the power and invasiveness of coloniality and the capital enterprise. It provides lessons in how domination reconstitutes itself in various forms to maintain inequality and how people’s lives are affected. It rehashed the fatalism that invades Marxism and neomarxism, colonialism, neocolonialism and coloniality, and the concept of difference in postmodernism. I shall not allow myself to be paralysed by the what next after the
subaltern liberates. I use the term liberates to suggest that liberation will not be an external stimuli or enablement, but an act of self-liberation.

The story of the January 1935 protest as told in this work is the unfolding story of Caribbean feminism/oomanism, riddled with contradictions placed on womanhood. The details of the historical moment are captured in the memories of African-Kittitian women. The retelling of these details reveals a script that is far richer than the linear history of the protest in contemporary official reports and historians’ interpretations.

One relates to the world in the way one experiences it, and for most people, their sex, class, race, skin colour, and level of education inform the ways in which they experience and react to the issues perceived as important in those experiences. It was no different for the story tellers. They were fluent and animated as their stories shaped the contours of a theory of protest and operationalised gender, class, race, sexual identity, and political action within the Kittitian context.

As the audience and scholar, I select the themes from the rich content of the stories that resonated with me. They satisfy the academic requirements of my research and gratify my search for an approach to introduce indigenous epistemology into academia in defiance of Euro-American cultural and military imperialism that threatens African-Kittitian epistemicide. Wane’s (2013) encouragement resonates with me: “To focus on one’s cultural identity and indigenous ways of knowing is a political act” (p. 102). The knowledge possessed by my foremothers, which has never been viewed as valuable, worth documenting, or incorporating into academic scholarship, has found a space to enter.
In the introductory chapter of this study, I laid out the journey towards completion of the study. It remained a work in progress, undergoing various iterations until the final chapter. The revisions are reminders of the significance of reflection as a mechanism for propulsion. At each stage of the reworking, Irene Hamilton’s advice, “look bak no mean jap bak [reflection is not equivalent to regression],” coaxed me to convert perceived oppositional sources and actions, including writer’s block, into positive reinforcements.

Archival sources and interpretive histories of the protest were reviewed in Chapter Two. The first included contemporary accounts from 1935 of colonial officials stationed in St. Kitts, British government documents, and periodical articles. Their documentation represented the views of state officials and the elite in society. The accounts excluded the perspectives of the majority of the population, discursively marginalized the protestors’ voices, and pathologized their actions. The accounts were reflective of the British colonizers’ racialized perspectives of Black populations in colonized societies.

The historians complied with the disciplinary norms of conventions and relied on the archival sources as objective historical sources of evidentiary value. They viewed the sources through a nationalist lens that focused on the protest as the alchemy for the formation of the nation and the emergence of national leaders from among the Black and brown educated male elite to replace the white plantocracy. The methodological approach excluded the voices of the protestors and presented a chauvinistic nationalism that excluded women and reinforced the Eurocentrist epistemology.

The histories constructed a neo-colonial rather than anti-colonial or decolonizing narrative. The term neo colonial/new colonial is attributed to Kwame Nkrumah’s (1970) description of the stage of indirect political control by European countries over colonized countries. In this case,
the historians retained the empirical and epistemological Eurocentric groundings to arrive at a slightly different conclusion. As authors of the protest, they proffered charismatic African and biracial Kittitian males as the protagonists in the resistance movement, whose role was to oust the traditional colonisers from their local positions. The protestors were projected as enablers of the neo-colonist cause. The historians had reduced the protestors as pawns not agents in the protest as consequence of their epistemology. Their approach assumed a liberal perspective that grants piecemeal improvement through the intervention of an enlightened elite faction of young, educated males.

The written histories ordered a grand narrative that peripheralized the protestors who demonstrated their needs, but were presented with outcomes reflective of what the colonial government and its proxies wanted. The historians’ focus on the protestors’ chants of “higher wages,” while excluding the subtexts of voices calling for freedom and good housing and good healthcare, organized a narrative around industrial action and labour disputes, claiming that they could only be had through a Westminster system and a union structure.

The theoretical framework for this study was provided in Chapter 3. I focused on Caribbean feminisms, with specific attention to African-Caribbean women. I discussed the components of slavery, colonialism, and indentureship as key variables in the formation genders and the various theoretical approaches. The studies projected the women as victims or represented. The concept of the strong woman recurred as a common thread in feminist theorising from the period of enslavement to present. The dialectic of strong woman, however, has not been problematized in Caribbean feminist theorising to expose the possible complicity with the racialized and gendered representations of the African-Caribbean woman and to correct any misrepresentations.
The concepts of “lion heart gal” (Ford-Smith, 2005), “rebel woman” (Mathurin-Mair, 1975), and “natural rebels” (Beckles, 1989) which equates with the strong woman in African American feminist\womanist scholarship, flattens the women’s lives and deny complexity of the texture of the women’s lived experiences. There is no doubt that the women’s resilience is demonstrative of strength, but more studies are needed to unpack the subject, yet retain the agency intimated by the concepts. The perennial presence of resistance in Black women’s lives requires the strong personalities, but the agency is occluded in epistemological approaches and dominant theoretical frameworks. The Caribbean feminist scholarship that has focused on women in the resistance activities in the twentieth century to present provided a masculinist approach and minimalized the African-Caribbean women as marginal to the pan Africanist movement and nationalist movements.

The data gathered from the Women in the Caribbean Project (1979-1981) generated wealth of data and the opportunity for theorising subjectivity of African-Caribbean women, but the opportunity was decentred by the Euro-American agenda that directed the focus to gender, which when translated into the Caribbean culture, introduced a polarising element into the intellectual and policy-based research. The centring of the Euro-American epistemological approaches to the study of gender in the Caribbean dislocates the focus of the feminist scholars. The analysis of the development and application of feminist theorising in the Caribbean indicates that Caribbean feminist scholarship was located in a Caribbeanist framework, which was indigenous to the fluidity of the culture prior to the active intervention of Euro-American conceptual frameworks.

Also provided in Chapter Three were lessons to avoid the pitfalls of the Eurocentric theorising about the power of academic writing and how adherence to the discursive practices accomplish a particular product. While the scholarship demonstrated an understanding of women-centred
focus and meaningfully conceptualised the complications of the gendered women, the writings
drew universally on the resistance theory as the interpretive framework consistent with the
period and the ideological understanding of uprisings and protest. Consequently, this approach
accomplished the single story of protest, which focused on the colonial imperative and the
interest of local officials and elites.

Chapter Four provided the methodology to obtain, read, and analyse the data obtained through
story telling as well as how to incorporate a subjugated language into formal text. Looking back,
I recognise the gaps that exist between the theories of social research and the reality of utilising
story telling, which is a more relational approach for research. The magnitude of data generated,
from ceding power to the storyteller and following her down her many associative trails, is as
intimidating as it is encouraging. It was intimidating because of the difficulty that I experienced
in selecting from the many themes that emerged and encouraging, sensing the value of the data
for future mining and new scholarship.

The natural environment of story telling in which griots of the art are involved resulted in an
inversion of the power relationship between the researcher and the storytellers. My familiarity
with the culture and nation language provided a complicated set of issues that many researchers
conducting studies in their own communities encounter and have discussed in scholarly articles. I
became concerned with the possibility of generational differences in interpretation of
paralanguage to the extent that I sought the assistance of an elder, who provided the verification
during the interpretive phase of the study.

One of the significant realisations that occurred during the data collection phase was a
rediscovery of a story telling method “pung toary,” a term that is referenced frequently within
my first language, which is also the language of the storytellers in this study. I reflect on the
contradictions and relations of dominance that have resurrected a dying practice that has now been repackaged for use within academic discourse, dislodged from its cultural rootedness. Pungtory is a method of discussing the minutiae, fine details of an issue. A few of the storytellers welcomed me with the invitation, “Kom ley aawe pung toary,” and I felt vindicated. My personal reflection was “nuttn hapm before e toim [nothing happens before its time]” and that I need to “tek toim kill anz yu foin ee belly [Use patience and attention to details to discover the truth/you’ll find the truth/ the truth will be revealed].” The significance of the process of pungtory is its use in this work to subvert the colonized narrative of the history.

Incorporating the subjugated language in the text provided technological challenges that were temporarily fixed, not overcome, by a combination of manual overrides and software updates. I reflected on the opportunities that exist for linguists and software producers to collaborate on ventures that involve computerizing subjugated languages. This would be critical for advancing the agenda and process of decolonizing academic institutions.

In Chapter 5, the first of two findings chapters, I focused on the performance of gender and understanding subjectivity among the women I interviewed. Narrator Florence “Oinee” Hanley’s definition of oomanship described how the women understood their gender and how it was performed from a subject position. The women’s quotations enriched the chapter with evidence in support of Oinee’s definition, ruling out a wide margin of error for interpretive misrepresentation or for researcher’s discursive authority.

Each woman’s story is different, as they provide specifics of the texture of their individual lives, which is woven into a collective tapestry through interrelationships, verifying language codes, and other cultural references. The analysis confirmed the findings of Caribbean feminist scholars that Caribbean women were comfortable as breadwinners, authority figures in the home, and as
priority contact for household affairs with external agencies and that strength and resistance pervades the discourse. However, the stories also demonstrate the vulnerabilities of woman as a "fajoil waysl [fragile vessel],” which was described amidst that concept of the “strong woman” also prevalent in African-American womanism and Africana womanisms, which provides a more holistic perspective of the African-Kittitian woman.

As they recounted the stories, they moved back and forth in the reflection of themselves in the 1930s and in the present, which sometimes created a fuzziness that I asked the narrators to clarify. There were links between the past and present with regard to issues such as sexual harassment and assault and low unequal wage rates were based on a masculinist bias in the wages and salary determinations. For example, the women’s stories indicated a strong tradition in entrepreneurship in multiple, concurrent income generating occupations.

Renowned Caribbean economist Arthur Lewis (1950) missed this platform for economic development when he misconstrued women’s withdrawal of labour from the plantations as an indication of increasing unemployment among heads of household. His recommendations for boosting employment, based on a false premise, replaced the agricultural plantation with foreign-owned, manufacturing plants engaged in light industries61 located in geographical sites that were designated as export processing zones.

61 Nobel laureate and renowned Caribbean economist Lewis (1950) justifying his industrialisation by invitation that led to the emergence of export processing zones in the Caribbean mistakenly argued that Caribbean women, Afro Caribbeans being the majority “have retired from employment into the home. Thus in Jamaica the ratio of gainfully employed women to total number of women between 15 to 60 have declined from 78% in 1911 to 50% in 1943. The same thing has happened elsewhere for example in the Leeward Islands where the proportion of gainfully occupied women to women declined from 73% in 1891 to 48% in 1946. The informal economy in higglering, huckstering and other economically viable entrepreneurial work were ignored in the analysis that led to a replication of industrial plantations as a solution for the reemployment of unemployed women.
The policy that promoted industrialisation by invitation throughout the Caribbean was founded in a Eurocentric epistemological base that has hampered the growth of the small business sector and the development of a strong indigenous industry led by women in St. Kitts. The subject was defined in Chapter 5 and confirmed the epistemological grounding for exploring the national protest from the perspective of the Kittitian women.

As revealed in Chapter 6, the issues that triggered the 1935 disturbance were not limited to higher wages as articulated in the rallying cry by the protesters and which was identified in conventional and secondary tests. Rather, equally critical, were issues related to improved working conditions and the elimination of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and child labour, which impacted on women differentially. The work further revealed that “de strogl [the struggle] was a persistent state of being for women that cannot be explained as surges of violent resistance. “Strogl” is characterised by the varying strategies that the colonised racialized populations engage in an effort to reclaim their dignity and live free from oppression. I also established that their women’s stories reveal a new perspective of the historical event of 1935. It is a new version. There is no privileging of versions, no grandstanding on epistemological cannons, simply another equally important perspective that will be included as reference when yet another version of the story is written.

The women’s narratives are central to this work. They return the history to a new centre. The stories provide the most accurate perspective of the protestors. They had different personal opinions on the value of the disturbances, but their recall of significant incidents was similar. No doubt, some of the information was influenced by the development of myths, legends, and hero figures over the years.
I was searching for my foremothers’ versions of the event in existing texts, and it was glaringly absent despite the mention in the written stories that the population at the time of the protest comprised more women than men (Beckles, 2003; Higman, 1976, 1995; Inniss, 1985, 2005; Richardson, 1983, 1998; Wallace, 1977). I wanted to add the women’s version. The gendered version unearthed a competing narrative inscribed in a language of the body and “decolonised” resistance codes of the racialized, gendered subject.

8.2 Kittitian Language

Central to this study is the epistemic value of the language. Language was key to the instrumentation of colonisation in the Caribbean. The colonisers’ imposition of English as the formal language signalled the dispossession of Kittitian, the language spoken by the majority of the population. In colonised societies, many came to accept and declare the language of domination as the mother tongue. The more schooling one has, the more estranged one could become from one’s cultural grounding, but one never loses one’s culture, and its elements surface during highly emotive experiences.

This study has caused me to reflect on my own complicity in devaluing my first language by not giving greater thought to its complexity, its depth, refracted images, emotive expressions, ambiguity, its emphatic tone, and the frequent use of anecdotes and body movements to communicate vivid messages. During the transcription phase of the research, I had become more concerned with its non-adherence to the structures that exist in the language of dominance and how I can represent the speakers as legitimate knowledge producers in a collaborative project.

Kittitian is a feisty language that speaks to the strength a resiliency of its speakers. It has survived colonial suppression. It has emerged as essentially complex, embraces ambiguity and anecdotes that convey hidden meanings to those who are culturally attuned to the it. The Kittitian
language originated among the Africans as their means of communicating among themselves, primarily. The composition of the Kittitian language include some elements of the coloniser’s language, but the cultural content of the ancestral protolanguage dominated. Adisa Alkebulan (2006, p. 203) advances a convincing argument, 

the distinctiveness of the creole languages is clear when we consider their patterns of grammar and pronunciation several of which mirror the West African linguistic patterns. For example, in many West African languages the English ‘th’ sounds are not present and countries’ creole languages and are is replaced by ‘a’ ‘d’ ‘t’ or ‘f’. Despite the recognition that there are elements of African languages the failure of many studies on creole languages in the Caribbean to acknowledge the role of African languages in the creation of these languages.

Alkebulan categorization of the West African based languages in the Caribbean as creole offers a nomenclature for contestation in the context of St. Kitts where creole is considered a bastardised form of English and separate from the Kittitian, the African grounded language.

I was forced to stop attempting to control the recording and scripting to allow the language to flow uncontaminated by the coloniser’s language. Bernice Caesar had reminded me in one of our conversations that “nuttn rang wid ow me a tark [There is nothing wrong with my language].” For Bernice, her communication skills were excellent, and her language conveyed a meaning that was understood by the listener. Her statement was concise and definitive, for her language ascribes a certain authority to her subject hood. Like many researchers of Caribbean nation languages, I had become preoccupied with placing English grammatical and spelling lexicographic rules. Those rules have the effect of suppressing the Africanisms that exist.

Placing the women at the centre is an invitation to learn from their voices as affirmative actors in history, rather than underprivileged dependent others who need representation. As the central figure, the status of the language is raised from what had been considered as object utterances of
the oppressed. It is a language characterised by opposition, resistance, and the speaker must receive full attention. It demands that one learns to talk, to listen, and to hear in a new way.

Inviting the African-Kittitian women to tell their stories privileged their language, a language that is decidedly codified. In this thesis, I argue that women and men constantly produce knowledge, regardless of their access to academia, and that knowledge is valued. The accounts of the stories found in the archives are written testimonies of the colonisers, representative of each individual’s perspective. Equally so, the storied testimonies of the foremothers provide valuable knowledge of the period, which is not only theirs, but also shared with me as a descendant, in a language that can best describe how protestors experienced the event.

Much of this knowledge now preserved in scripted, static form will also continue to exist in stories to be told and retold. The Kittitian language of storytelling, without precedent in script, is being used to construct scholarship. The struggle to move from the language and its speakers from object to subject is expressed in the effort to establish what Silvistrini (2003) names the “liberatory voice.” (p.175) The language that has negotiated a space in an academic centre can exist in all spaces.

Asanta’s (2010) article, “Afrocentricity and Africology: Theory and Practice in the Discipline,” underscores the value of using Afrocentric knowledge to incur an epistemological shift. He wrote,

> Central to the Afrocentric idea is the fact that Africans were moved off their intellectual, philosophical and cultural terms by enslavement and colonisation. In order to return to an authentic consciousness, rooted in self-respect and affirming dignity it is necessary for African people to see themselves in the midst of their own history and not located in the margins of Europe. (p. 69)

In the introduction, I spoke about the bifurcation in learning I experienced and that I hoped to get convergence and to create a cultural centre from my two sources of learning. This study effected
an epistemological shift; it introduced subaltern perspectives of the protestors, obtained through a method that involved them as competent knowledge producers. The stories convert the protestors into agents in the protest and subjects of their history. Their stories reveal that they required a far more radical change to eliminate the structures and systems that confined them to less-than-human conditions of everyday life—convergence of two threads that fractured into an epistemic fault line.

I have integrated the story telling in Kittitian, the language of resistance and survival of African-Kittitians, with English, the language of the colonisers, as required by the academic institution to construct, with my foremothers, knowledge of a period of protest in our history for acceptance by the institution. I began with textual versions of the events of 1935, identifying the sources of origin of that story, and I found that earlier narratives were masculinist and lacked the women’s perspectives, and those two gaps became the focus of this study. No doubt succeeding Caribbeanist scholars shall find new gaps and fill the “hole in our history” as described in Goodison’s (1992) poem.

How then do I translate the encoded meanings in Kittitian, the language of my African foremothers, to English, the imperial language of degradation with its cultural inadequacies? The Kittitian language represents the survival of elements of African culture in the Caribbean and the resilience of the African population to retain it as the main language spoken by Kittitians. The complex cultural codings ought to be unravelled to invest in the speakers the authority of the language for use in any forum and to encourage new users to participate willingly. This study initiates a first step in the liberation of Kittitian by incorporating the indigenous language of competent speakers in this study designed for the Eurocentred academic mainstream.
8.3 Reconstituting the Subjects: Oomanism

Womanism/Feminism and womanist/feminist theories have challenged traditional philosophy by legitimising woman as a subject worthy of study. The purpose of womanist/feminist theory is to examine and understand how gender relations work, are experienced, and what women think or do not think about the concept. This study is about knowledge production that involves an unlikely group of women who are central to the knowledge they produce. Their stories reveal pride in their *oomanship* that was summarised in this study. Eltruda clarified an observation that the storytellers provided:

*Struups. Me no who me be, me iz a ooman; aa we no need nobadee ou tell aa we who aa we be*

I know who I am, I am a woman; we don’t need anyone to tell us who we are.

The narrators did not describe themselves as feminists at any point in the conversations. My attempts to introduce the term into the conversation received a familiar cultural sound of dismissal or disgust, communicated through a short hissing sound verbally described as *struups* as found in Eltruda De Costa’s response. Viola Henry’s response was more succinct, “*Yu done a ooman wha mo feminiss gon do ou yu?* [You are a ooman/woman. What is the added value of feminism?]” Upon reflection, *oomanship* adequately defines the complexity of the majority of Kittitian women, giving rise to oomanism as a theoretical concept that requires further analysis as an enabler for women and the girls.

The language and cultural practices of the women in the study did not require a separation of terms, as obtains in the use of English and essentialist western-european feminism. It shares the groundings for theorising, and equivalencies offered through womanism, a descriptor developed by African American scholars and increasingly embraced by African women on the continent.
and in the diaspora. Embracing oomanism in the Caribbean could be transformational for gender politics and liberational for Kittitian and Caribbean oomanist scholarship from its insistent grounding feminism, which is rooted in liberal Eurocentric, paternalistic premises. This work initiates a point of departure through oomanism.

The storytellers described themselves as diligent household heads and employees who dedicated long hours in manual labour at home and at work, performing roles contrary to the European assignment to white females. To reduce the ordeal of work, most women integrated members of the household, where possible, and were able to supervise and train assistants while telling stories, which appeared to reduce the arduousness of the work. Devi Mucina (2011) explains a similar system of household cohesiveness. They reflected on the 1930s as a period when they enjoyed personal and economic autonomy, despite the existence of extreme poverty, and held positions that were central to and in control of the distribution of the scarce resources within their households and extended family networks. They were conscious of their influence at the community level and their responsibility to provide protection and stability in their households.

The narrators had substantive experience in work spaces, domestic spaces, and public spaces. They demonstrated an awareness of the multiplicity of abuses that co-workers and neighbours experienced and a developed a consciousness of “strogl” that required persistent attention to practices and legislation designed to erode their progress to freedom. They had well-developed intelligence mechanisms to share knowledge so that individual troubles when shared become community concerns, for collective responses: “fa arl aawe a ooman, so dat when yu sisi hoas a bun, wet yu wun [for we all are women, so you’ll know when your sister is in trouble, you prepare].”
Their organizing strategies and participation were indicative of their embodied gender performance in their normal activities. The women’s detailed explanations for their actions reduced the probability of misinterpretation that can result from assigning interpretive values of conventional and often Eurocentric ideological frameworks. The storytellers challenged the notion of masculinised females and emasculated men by revealing themselves as social and political actors shaped by historical circumstances. They demonstrated the fluidity of gender roles.

African-Kittitian women exhibit a developed sense of cultural consciousness forged from their long history of straddling the layers of hegemony that discount and denigrate their bodies and genders. The prevalence of female heads of household remains in conflict with the laws that govern family, inheritance, Eurocentric Christian values, financial transactions, and formal interactions with government service, yet the practice continues. Their language expresses a complex of eclipsing the bifurcated notion of work, the tradition, and continuity to retain authority within the cultural milieu.

Gender emerges from a social context, where language and culture give meaning to how they experience themselves as women, men, transgender, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. It involves their personal feelings and thoughts. Kittitians must also begin to extricate the cultural elements of mantana and, antyman from definitions that subordinate their meanings. This subjectivity involves the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, which constitute one’s sense of who one is and the feelings that are brought to different positions within culture. Gender fluidity has not been sufficiently appreciated in Caribbean feminist thought, leading to liberal feminist policies in the region. This has proved counterproductive in the attempts of Caribbean feminist
theorizing to provide alternative understandings of the role of women themselves in shaping Caribbean society.

Throughout the process, I have used the terms African-Caribbean, African-Kittitian, and Black women interchangeably to describe the storytellers. The women did not describe themselves by advancing the hybridized identities that I have ascribed to them, which suggests that my scholarship is haunted by the dislocation complex that Asante (2010) advanced to describe the fracturing of the body from the cultural core. My foremothers’ stories have awakened my consciousness of their freedom from hybridized identities. This awareness instructs that I ought to divest of the trappings of hybridity in order to recognize and embrace their wholeness, and mine, as African women resident in St Kitts, the Caribbean, or Canada. It harmonizes the body with that cultural essence fundamental to intellectual and collective liberation.

8.4 Pathway to Liberation—*Aawe kankan*

Centuries of enslavement followed by global capitalist oppression have resulted in deferred liberation for the majority of the population in St. Kitts, comprising descendants of enslaved, Black Africans. The colonized history of the country is steeped in violence, genocide, dispossession, forced migration, dehumanization, and a tradition of struggle, survival, and overcoming that must continue to be researched and recorded using liberational methodologies to effect an epistemological shift in how colonised populations— we -perceive our worth and how we demand that others see us.

This study is as much about knowledge production as it is about how these women contested domination. The stories indicate that the protestors utilised multiple, simultaneous strategies of engagement, including confrontation, sabotage, and negotiation, which depart from the
Eurocentric dualism of fight or flight—riot or migration—captured in the histories of the protest. They reorient the readers’ focus from the dominant perspective that the protest was a riot, exclusively and factually. Thirdly, the stories contest the dominant discourse that the purpose for the protest was to dislocate and dispossess the power elite to effect reforms in government.

How did the protestors’ collective, public action to eliminate “
edwantij”—the practices to curtail freedom by controlling their bodies, the inhumane living conditions, sexual assault, harassment, and persistent poverty—come to be shaped as a combustive struggle over political and labour reform? Could legalising unions and political reform address the human rights breaches that affected the dispossessed majority?

The discursive practices of knowledge that exclude certain languages and perspectives establish a monolithic, dominant discourse. In this study, I learned from the storytellers that their involvement in the protest of 1935 was to obtain liberation that they deserved after centuries of enslavement and pseudo enslavement. I recognized that the written histories did not represent the protestors’ aspirations, for the histories represented the protest as a conduit in the struggle for leadership of the colonial institutions. Embedded in the historians’ representations was the colonizers’ arrogance that the exploited majority wanted to adopt their version of oppositional politics and capitalist exploitation.

The women’s stories contest the historians’ perspective and point to a colonial, masculinist, class bias that underpinned the organizations whose leadership they distrusted. The women’s stories indicate that chauvinistic focus and composition of the leadership of pressure groups excluded them. They reported that women were not invited to attend the meeting, which the Mutual Improvement Society organized to meet with sugar workers one week before the march.
occurred. In various expressions, the women considered the Workers’ League impotent and unsupportive during the protest, as summed up in Eltruda’s reflection: “Yu no de Sosoyate a de Wokkoz League kudn do much [You know the society of the Workers’ League couldn’t give much assistance].”

Migration as a strategy for economic improvement was not widely used by women until the 1950s, and the role of women in the other forms of resistance was marginal when recorded. The migrant women in the study, Lucille, Oinee, and Pricilla, had accompanied their mothers to St. Kitts from Nevis after their homes were destroyed by a hurricane in the 1920s, and Arabella had visited St. Maarten. The stories established that rioting was not a preferred option for resistance. Some storytellers objected to naming the protest a riot. Their involvement in the protest demonstrated that the women organized and executed covert, subversive activities and were especially proficient as court witnesses, undermining the judicial process, boycotts, and providing sanctuary for those protestors who needed it.

The women’s political consciousness extended beyond governance and the state. Consequently, their work wasn’t limited to association with the Pan-African organizations or with political party affiliations, where individual women stood out for their knowledge of party organizing or Marxist ideology or Pan-Africanist affiliation. The nationalist agendas of the local governments and international organizations permeated the feminist scholarship to discover female nationalist figures such as Elfreda Tapp in Belize (Macpherson, 2007), Elma Francois (Reddock, 1988), Una Marson (Ford-Smith 1995b), Nanny (Mathurin-Mair, 1974), and others.

The women’s political consciousness reflects civic and social justice issues that demonstrate the concentration on the state and ideology within the confinement of Eurocentric nationalism. They were aware of the dishonesty of the plantocracy and articulated an understanding of
dispossession and dislocation as central to the colonized history of St. Kitts and their place within it. They advocated for behavioural change among the members of the plantocracy. Louisa Fraser revealed that she had known for some time that the plantation owners had appropriated the lands they occupied. She explained her impression of dispossession:

_Dei jus kom, an dei tek up de lan, de bukra dem tek up de lan an arl de res a it, so dat iz wat a see, free lan an dei doan warn pay peepl wa dei wuk fa_

They arrived unannounced and occupied land and took control of the space and its resources. They got the lands free and yet they are reluctant to pay fair wage.

The women were articulate. Their accounts reveal that they have a developed, but varying, political consciousness. One can retrieve from their accounts not only a sense of women as political actors, but also a detailed account of how they made their political choices and the constraints under which they did so. Their political analyses include their perception of conventional politics, an interpretation of the contentious power relations between various factions in the population, and how it impacted on their lives. This complex consciousness that guided their decision to participate in the events in different ways escaped previous interpretations of the protest.

The stories demonstrate a tradition of activism and disruptive politics recognised in their communities and dismissed as disorderliness and rudeness by their employees and officials in formal institutions. Their actions are consistent with Hernandez’s (2012) study on the transformational resistance model, which concludes that the intention and ways that women engage in activism was dependent on their understanding of social oppression and level of
motivation for social justice. Alternately, Carol Hardy-Fanta’s (1997, p. 225) transformational process involves “a questioning of the conditions of life and a searching for alternatives within themselves and others” or a swift process known as “chispa.”

The tradition of strong women and activism in the family represents a questioning of the conditions of life and a searching for alternatives within the self and others. These foremothers’ stories illuminated individual and collective actions and meanings as well as the social processes that they became involved with in the uprising. They include politicised personal passions regarding human dignity, freedom, and protection from exploitation and manifested, as what Susan Krause (2011) refers to as civic passions that are both motivationally and normatively compelling.

Sheppard’s (1999), definition of political activism has offered evidence of extensive experience in political activism that demonstrated a genealogy of activism beyond the colonial experience. Her definition states,

Political activity involves any collective or individual action which aims to bring about change for the good of a people or a community and affects the distribution of power. When indigenous women resisted capture and enslavement and enslaved women engaged in resistance movements and in collective bargaining to consolidate privileges gained under slavery, they were involved in political activity. (p. 54)

The common thread that runs through these themes is Africa centredness as trans-generational and trans-continental. It confirms Asante and Mazama’s (2006) assertion that “Afrocentrists contend that human beings cannot divest themselves of culture, whether participating in the own

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62 See Ebelia Hernandez’s (2012) *The Journey towards Developing Political Consciousness through Activism among Mexican American Women*, in which she concluded that Latin American women’s engagement in political activism can be described as transformational resistance. It is the closest conceptual understanding of the Kittitian storyteller’s expression of political activism.
culture or that of another group” (p. 50). The women’s stories, their language, and perception of the protest confirm the predominance of the Kittitian female citizens as African subjects.

8.5 Reimagining Protest

I begin with a cautionary note that Chimamanda Adiche (2009) issued her video presentation entitled *The Danger of a Single Story*, which underpins the theme of this work. In it, she advised against relying on one story to understand a person, a family, a community, a nation, or an entire race of people. When I began this study, I was motivated to preserve my foremothers’ perspective on a period in Kittitian history, to which historians had assigned great significance. I read profusely the theories of resistance, decolonization, and subjectivity. I scoured relevant feminist theories and methodologies and local and regional histories on protest action that occurred in the 1930s. This preparation was required if I were to produce scholarship worthy of a dissertation. As I reflect on my preparation, I recognise how, as academics, we reproduce knowledge to justify the existence of academia, while we make pronouncements of academic freedom and emergent new ideas. Many of us resent this aspect of learning, but learning is addictive for scholars, and by convention and for our own survival, we ground our ideas in the scholarship of those that have come before us. It becomes especially challenging when those who have come before us, in whose learning we must ground our scholarship, neither exist within academia nor have the tools required to survive in the world of the scripted past.

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This work has taught me the danger of slippage into discursive patterns that reinforce my colonised self and expose my deep-seated fear to complete a work on my ancestors from within academia. Conversely, it has instilled in me the courage to inscribe my foremothers’ narratives into the stream of history to correct the monolithic version that has distorted and distressed the contribution of unprivileged Black bodies in the history of Eurocentric scripts civilisation. I have had to confront the dissonance between ontology and epistemology, the fracturing of how and what I ought to write, with the voices of my foremothers cautioning me, under the weight of authorship.

I began this work where I probably should have ended. I began with the colonisers’ stories and colonised interpretations that confirmed the dominant knowledge about the event that remains entrenched in the curriculum. Reviewing written histories and archival material in preparation for a study designed to centre the protestors’ stories immediately produced an epistemological fault-line. On the one hand, the process reinforced the knowledge hierarchy that the work seeks to critique, and on the other, it standardized the dominant narrative of the review documents. Secondly, the findings contradicted the theoretical framework that was established prior to the analysis of the findings. There is need to challenge the conventions that inform the sequencing of chapters to offer veracity to the grounded theory approach Glaser and Strauss, (1970) advance, and which is popularly used by qualitative researchers. I have concluded that this study could more meaningfully reflect the growth of the writer and any transformation that the work generates, and serve as a liberation troupe for colonized, racialized populations if the discussion of the findings were presented as a standard against which the existing material can be interrogated.
Had I entered this study from the epistemological groundings of my foremothers, I would have understood the protest as an ongoing struggle for freedom and dignity, rather than a combustive oppositional act against the planter class. This knowledge would have equipped me with the lens needed to probe the written histories and the documents for areas of omission, rather turning the lens on evidence of the storytellers to search for corroboration and verification. The process started with the premise that the women’s stories had less validity than the existing documents I would have understood that the class wars that underpin the decolonizing theories and post-colonial imaginings replicate the philosophies of conflict and oppositional arguments rooted in Cartesian dualities are Eurocentric in origin. This study, grounded in my foremothers’ stories has reconceptualised struggle as advocacy and action towards the advancement of or to secure dignity and freedom. This perspective contests Eurocentric conventions of struggle as an oppositional concept designed to displace and replace the opponent or oppressor. Consequently, while colonised interpretations of histories, focus on the oppositional aspects, the Africa centered perspective of the foremothers provided a different meaning and purpose for the protracted struggle by the majority Black population. The liberation of knowledge that has emerged from these stories provides a platform for the liberation of the people from a Eurocentric based education.

These are the discursive processes in academia that militate against the attempts by well-intentioned scholars to produce truly decolonised work. There are, of course, the material conditions that also influence how colonised people do decolonizing work. As Browne (2009) observe, “These struggles must be conducted with our own resources since Western Europe does not acknowledge responsibility for its role” (p.227) in reversing the damage it has inflicted during its long history of colonial rule and economic exploitation around the world. Liberation
requires the recognition and rejection of platitudes of coloniality that will encumber and reinforce relations of unfreedom.

Mazama (2003) cautions against the entrapment of Eurocentric concepts that can dislocate the Afrocentric intent of scholars. In this work, decolonisation is a recognizable conceptual tool to give recognition to this study, but the concept locates the work in the term colonial that this work intends to resist. Africa-centred resistance theorising releases the work from the complicitous coloniality that dogged this work, which was articulated in Bourdieu’s logically dichotomous notion of border thinking that foregrounds “the forms of knowledge that being critical of modernity, coloniality and capitalism, still remain ‘within’” the territory, in custody of the abstract universals” (as cited in Mignolo, 2000, p. 88).

I write amid a period of resurgent activism and protest, related to one of the most egregious cases of human trafficking and enslavement of Africans in modern history. Colonised people of African descent are seeking compensation from European nations, whose empire-building interests advanced as a direct consequence of and in contradistinction to human, economic, and social development in the Caribbean islands. Reparation remains a vexing and contested concern among Africans.

Simultaneously, immigration figures from St. Kitts indicate an increasing number of West African youth, mainly Nigerians, are voluntarily migrating to St. Kitts to live, work, and study at local and “offshore universities.”64 The result has been a renewed interest and celebration of

64 Offshore universities are private institutions owned by United States and European investors that essentially operate as United States educational facilities outside the United States. They occupy relatively large acres of land akin to sugar plantations and student enrolment are mainly white Euro-Americans. They have been designated as offshore because they offer US based curricula and certification to prepare students for work or further education in
African reality unmediated by the colonial and imperial interpretations. This study has relevance for the arguments being made for reparations for the years of “unfreedom” and cruel extraction of labour, for which the enslaved and their descendants have never been compensated. It also includes some lessons on reengineering a gender-sensitive African centredness during this period of its resurgence among Caribbeans.

Stories convey morals and amplify knowledge about the human condition. The use of stories and their meanings in this study implicitly calls to attention the moral tone of the institutions in which colonized and racialized populations learn and work. Do the institutions reinforce regimes of inferiority and place inscribed in the texts and administrative practices? Do they consolidate the notions of lacks and deficits attributed to indigenous knowledges? This study cannot adequately address all of those issues, but it is hoped that the reader would contemplate the implicit implications of this study. The next section lists some of the explicit implications and opportunities that can emerge from the study.

8.6 Recommendations for Future Study and Practice

The study brought into focus a few theoretical insights that would require further study. They include:

1. The need to theorize oomanism as a branch of African womanism
2. Explore indigenous language as a source of social change
3. Conceptualise the pursuit of liberation in the absence of oppositional intent or conventional notions of resistance.

The research has implications for scholarship and educational practice:

1. Produce a Kittitian language manual or reader
2. Alternative epistemology in the discourse of higher education and validation of the subaltern voice.
3. Provides a platform curriculum development for Language Studies in critical literacy
4. Provides a base for producing resources for English Language Learners programmes
5. The work needs to be reproduced as an historical text and accessible historical reading for students from elementary level education through to secondary.

8.7 Conclusion

The struggle to decolonize St. Kitts, its history and language must be cultural. The window of opportunity for sovereignty was deferred by the liberal colonial arrangements that the elites accepted from Britain and implemented as solutions to the popular disenchantment and demands for social transformation exhibited during the national protest. Consequently, the emergence of a nominally independent nation with a Westminster-based constitution and legislation that delegitimises indigenous organizing renders the country and its people politically and economically vulnerable. Swift military invasions and economic and fiscal strictures by the US in the immediate north terrorize its southern neighbours and visit hardships on the populations to maintain superficial political stability and peace.

The Jamaican experiment in socialism ended brutally with surreptitious actions by the US in 1980; the invasion by US forces in Grenada in 1983 that ended the socialist revolution (Carr, 2002); the US move to end online gaming, which had been a lucrative economic engine in Antigua through an expensive decade-long dispute that ended in Antigua’s favour in 201565; and currently, the US has engaged in imposing a series of laws to disrupt of the economic citizenship

65 See online article http://www.flushdraw.net/news/antigua-us-reported-near-deal-in-wto-online-gaming-dispute/ for details.
program in St. Kitts and other Caribbean countries. These hostilities are reminders of the sphere of influence over political self-determination. Consequently, Caribbean governments compliantly share essential aspects of their sovereignty with metropolitan officials.

Haiti won its sovereignty in 1804 against France, and in 1934, it evicted the United States from a military base that it constructed in the country. Had we listened to the voices of the protestors, unmediated by ideologies, things could have been different. Maybe we would be treated as a pariah, in the fashion that Euro-American hegemonic geopolitics continues to apply to Haiti.

The unwritten stories that the foremothers narrated drew on their individual and collective memories of the minutiae of their lives and struggles and of the effects of big events on their lives. When the elders die, they take their archival memories with them, and descendants, must mine these memories to reconstruct the stories as cultural inheritance to fill in the gaps of the archives and reimagine the landscape. In so heir of the memoriesdoing, we add our own understanding of their lives and how they intertwine with us. We inherit our blue print of trauma, defiance, and the will to overcome from the cultural reserve of our foreparents: “The past lives in the present to stimulate on our collective unconscious” (Browne, 2007 p. 127).

My reading of these stories is only one of the many that can emerge from the stories. I have endeavoured to read them through the lens of my personal and intellectual experience in appreciation of my ancestors’ wisdom and teachings and building on the work of scholars who have sought to champion the appreciation and inclusion of indigenous knowledges in academia. Beyond obtaining recognition for the value of indigenous knowledges in academia, its transformative value for colonized and racialized scholars who undertake this type of work is an area for further study, giving rise to radical, emergent narratives and new knowledges.
Chimamanda Adiche’s (2009) cogent exposition and conclusion on the danger of a single story is instructive:

When we realize there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise. This is why my story should be read as one voice among many voices which all have stories to add to our collective power, remembering that no one story can speak for all of us. (Youtube video)

For centuries, the aspiration for liberation by African peoples has been disrupted by the insidious pervasiveness of colonialism, whether in its overt violent form or in its liberal, paternalistic, covert existence, but liberation is still being pursued by colonized and racialized populations. The question of whether the colonized subject can achieve liberation or produce liberated discourse lies in our ability to develop the appropriate tools, crafted from our indigenous knowledges, to progress our transformation to recognizing ourselves and the work that do in its rightful place in any space. This work is intended to advance the enterprise of non-hegemonic, indigenous knowledge production towards the goals of social transformation and liberation.

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Appendix A

Map of the Caribbean

(This map was commissioned from Kwasi Anthony for this study)
Appendix  B
Witnesses in Court Trials in 1935 – St. Kitts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons Charged</th>
<th>Defence Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hubert Bridgewater</td>
<td>Joseph Albert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Corbin</td>
<td>Thomas Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Flaherty</td>
<td>Thomas Fergus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Henry</td>
<td>Theophilus White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Herbert</td>
<td>Joseph Crossley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel James</td>
<td>Thomas Saddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Dasent</td>
<td>Nathaniel Pringle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Gumbs</td>
<td>Norris Charles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladys Kirby</td>
<td>Sydney Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethel Phipps</td>
<td>Aubrey Mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Stevens</td>
<td>Albert Crawford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet Warner</td>
<td>Leo Pascall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Huggins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Liburd</td>
<td>Defence Witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Fowler</td>
<td>Hilda Brandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Woodley</td>
<td>Ann Hodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Ramphlin</td>
<td>Maud Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Sutton</td>
<td>Diana Georges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Donovan</td>
<td>Amy Weston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Samuel</td>
<td>Alice Herbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar Webbe</td>
<td>Ada Claxton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Sutton</td>
<td>Ethelma Matthew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Webbe</td>
<td>Amabelle Brownbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Williams</td>
<td>Anne Harrigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedrick Stephens</td>
<td>Malvina Sutton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Williams</td>
<td>Evelyn Stevens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon Prince</td>
<td>Alice Mardenborough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Christian</td>
<td>Sarah Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Palmer</td>
<td>Joseph Matthew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alfred Murray
Ambrose Francis
Obadiah Francis
Ralph Brown
George Woodley
Zacheus Roper
Samuel James

Martyrs/Fatalities
John Allen
Joseph Samuel
James Archibald

(Compiled from contemporary coverage of court trials in periodicals- The Union Messenger and the Daily Bulletin)
Appendix C

Map of St. Kitts

(This map was commissioned from Graeme Browne and Kwasi Anthony for this study)