

Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women

By Simone A. James Alexander

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Focusing on specific texts by Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé, and Paule Marshall, this fascinating study explores the intricate trichotomous relationship between the mother (biological or surrogate), the motherlands Africa and the Caribbean, and the mothercountry represented by England, France, and/or North America. The mother-daughter relationships in the works discussed address the complex, conflicting notions of motherhood that exist within this trichotomy. Although mothering is usually socialized as a welcoming, nurturing notion, Alexander argues that alongside this nurturing notion there exists much conflict. Specifically, she argues that the mother-daughter relationship, plagued with ambivalence, is often further conflicted by colonialism or colonial intervention from the "other," the colonial mothercountry.

Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women offers an overview of Caribbean women's writings from the 1990s, focusing on the personal relationships these three authors have had with their mothers and/or motherlands to highlight links, despite social, cultural, geographical, and political differences, among Afro-Caribbean women and their writings. Alexander traces acts of resistance, which facilitate the (re)writing/righting of the literary canon and the conception of a "newly created genre" and a "womanist" tradition through fictional narratives with autobiographical components.

Exploring the complex and ambiguous mother-daughter relationship, she examines the connection between the mother and the mother's land. In addition, Alexander addresses the ways in which the absence of a mother can send an individual on a desperate quest for selfhood and a home space. This quest forces and forges the creation of an imagined homeland and the re-validation of "old ways and cultures" preserved by the mother. Creating such an imagined homeland enables the individual to acquire "wholeness," which permits a spiritual return to the motherland, Africa via the Caribbean. This spiritual return or homecoming, through the living and practicing of the old culture, makes possible the acceptance and celebration of the mother's land.

Alexander concludes that the mothers created by these authors are the source of diasporic connections and continuities. Writing/righting black women's histories as Kincaid, Condé, and Marshall have done provides a clearing, a space, a mother's land, for black women. *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* will be of great interest to all teachers and students of women's studies, African American studies, Caribbean literature, and diasporic literatures.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The mother/daughter relationship and the mother imagery are constant objects of study in Caribbean as well as Western writing. However, Simone James Alexander manages to open new perspectives by disturbing conventional ways of thinking and representations. She is an erudite scholar who thinks in a fundamentally creative way."—**Maryse Condé**

"A major contribution to African Diaspora Studies, which has gained much literary and critical energy in the past ten years."—*African American Review*

From the Inside Flap

Focusing on specific texts by Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Conde, and Paule Marshall, this fascinating study explores the intricate trichotomous relationship between the mother (biological or surrogate), the motherlands Africa and the Caribbean, and the mothercountry represented by England, France, and/or North America. The mother-daughter relationships in the works discussed address the complex, conflicting notions of motherhood that exist within this trichotomy. Although mothering is usually socialized as a welcoming, nurturing notion, Alexander argues that alongside this nurturing notion there exists much conflict. Specifically, she argues that the mother-daughter relationship, plagued with ambivalence, is often further conflicted by colonialism or colonial intervention from the "other", the colonial mothercountry.

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About the Author

Simone A. James Alexander is Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.

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