Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), the second novel after she published *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), is set on a fictional Caribbean island called Bourne, where the Jewish-American anthropologist Saul Amron supervises the development project for the Bournehills community, which bears a history of failed development schemes. Inspired by the sociocultural and political changes in the 1960s, as Bernhard Melchior suggests, Marshall in this novel turns to a deep analysis of her “West Indian background and of the US’ relationship to and treatment of the African and Caribbean island nations in general, basically pitching ‘white America’ against the black Caribbean,” while examining “the clash of cultures when North American social scientists arrive there to set up a development scheme for a remote and notoriously backward village community” (Melchior 129). Similarly, Edward Brathwaite sees the novel as a site in which the historical and cultural coordinates of both the present neocolonial imperialism and the Eurocolonial and African past clash with each other. To him, the novel's main concern lies with “the effects of the colonial condition and experience on a people” (230). However, the novel invites a deeper analysis: While it examines the issues of the colonial past, the postcolonial situation, and neocolonial strategies, it also negotiates the discourse of whiteness as a power-laden discursive formation that privileges the cultural space of the white Western subject.

Whiteness is more about “the discursive practices that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and
sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews” (Shome 108). Although whiteness has historically been associated with universality, it affects people in different locations through neocolonial strategies. The fictional Caribbean island of Bourne has a relation with imperial whiteness in a different way from the relation of Vere (Vereson Walkes), for instance, as an African American subject in the US or Merle Kinbona as an African Caribbean (mulatto) subject in England. Merle’s mother is a West Indian who was murdered in front of Merle when she was a kid, and her father is a white British colonial who has never cared for Merle, whose socially mixed identity can be associated with Bourne Island itself as an ex-colonial territory. We need to understand Bourne’s own historical relations with its colonial past and the strategies in which that past impacted and informed the cultural psyche of the nation in its postcolonial moment through neocolonial discursive practices that the Western people exercise over the future of the island’s people. The “politics of location” becomes important since we are encouraged to read whiteness from the perspective of “situated knowledge” (Shome 109) in that whiteness should be examined from the perspective of location. Situating whiteness in a politics of location, we need to explore how Merle Kinbona’s identity is circumscribed in the historical and spatial sites such as in the postcolonial Bourne Island and neocolonial England. Merle, who was an economically underprivileged, Western-educated woman and a diasporic subject in England, “enters” the critique of the ideology of whiteness in an effective way from a privileged position: an economically privileged, educated, postcolonial subject in Bourne.

Merle’s “ambiguous position in relation to Bournehills is represented in the contradictions which surround her” (Macpherson 79). Her car, which used to belong to a colonial governor, is almost falling apart, and she abuses it by giving it harsh treatment as the symbol of her discomfort
and anger at her people's lives of misery and poverty, which are a legacy of the colonial past. Much like the hybrid language she uses at times by mixing Creole with English, her appearance reinforces the sense of hybridity that she has experienced so far: Her clothes present a strange combination, "each item of which stood opposed to, at war even, with the other, to express rather a diversity and disunity within herself, and her attempt, unconscious probably, to reconcile these opposing parts, to make of them a whole" (5). Her West African dress, her West Indian bracelets, her European earrings with saints on them are all signifiers of the Other in different ways. The earrings were token gifts from her white British benefactress in England when they used to have a lesbian relationship, connoting the ambiguity of white philanthropy. Merle's lesbian relationship was built upon financial help when her father, Ashton Vaughan, "the man [she was] supposed to call father, . . . stopped sending [her] money when he heard [she] had left school" (328). He wanted to force her to come back, but Merle decided never to return when he was alive: "I thought it quite something to have a rich Englishwoman taking such an interest in me, an almshouse child, who couldn't even remember her mother and whose so-called father had for years passed her by on the road without so much as a word" (328).

The relationship between the two women takes the form of an economic exploitation representing Merle's experience of possessive whiteness in England as if she were a colonial subject. Her West African dress and West Indian bracelets seem to show that she is not controlled by the Western conceptions of Otherness, while her hybridity complicates the problematics of Otherness. The hybridity that her clothes represent seems to speak for the conflicting values of the Bournehills people, "some being aligned to a Eurocentric, others to an Afrocentric, world view. This circumstance results in the fragmentation of con-
sciousness and contradictory attitudes toward the self” (Rahming 3).

Merle’s refusal to continue the lesbian relationship with the white benefactress in Hampstead as she moves out of her house while having to cash her checks in times of need shows that she is not clear about how to resist the colonial subjugation. On the one hand, she resists the subject position she is forced into by Western historicizing consciousness, and on the other hand, she pays for her resistance by the breakup of her marriage, because the white benefactress soon turns into a colonizer.

Her African husband, Ketu, whom she marries in London, is a man whom Merle remembers as a strong anti-colonialist: Ketu represents a strong African subject. He specializes in agricultural economics because he works on “finding ways of improving the lot of the Little Fella out on the land” (331). Never having been carried away by Western values, he is a forceful contrast to the white benefactress with his “culturally-rooted security” (Rahming 5). To him African tribal/ancestral values are central. But, in fact, he is also constructed not quite independent of the Western constructions of Otherness and falls into conspiracy with the white benefactress, who sends someone to inform him about her dirty relationship with Merle. He becomes an agent in the white European woman’s construction of Merle as the Other by his further “Othering” her as his Other when he forbids her even to touch their two-year-old daughter. He almost reenacts the colonizer/colonized dichotomy similar to a slave master who refuses the slave woman to have any right to her own child when he decides to take the daughter with him to Africa. Joyce Pettis claims that Merle “reenacts the history of the island through her mixed birth . . . and through an experience in London during her college years (a power struggle between a wealthy white woman and Merle). The constant in these experiences is exploitation. Merle’s per-
sonal history includes irreconcilable loss: her husband’s desertion and the consequent loss of their baby girl” (97).

Merle’s pain of not being able to mother her own daughter all these years suggests the importance of how motherhood operates in the novel. Merle cannot remember the face of her mother’s murderer when she was murdered in front of her as a very young child. The rumors have made it clear that the legal wife of Merle’s father has hired a gunman to kill Merle’s mother. The absence of the identity of her mother’s murderer seems to be juxtaposed with the pain of losing her mother, a permanent absentee in her life. Denied the right to motherhood by a white woman’s decision, Merle’s mother fails to mother Merle in a somewhat comparable manner to Merle’s inability to mother her own daughter, prevented by her African husband, who has agreed to reinforce the white woman’s construct of Merle as a despicable Other. The discourse of motherhood is associated with the politics of colonialism, i.e., depriving the Other of any power to control her body or to mother her own child.

Merle’s status on Bourne Island gets even more complicated when the European/American researchers, local politicians acting as white or black neocolonials, intervene in her construction of herself. Much like Edward Said’s proposal of orientalism as the discourse which constitutes “a simulacrum of Orient” (166) in the consciousness of the West, Western people’s and their collaborators’ constructions of (what is best for) Bourne Island show how the Other is constructed within the discourse of whiteness. Somehow Bourne Island (as it is now) does not perfectly coincide with the image of the Other in the Western mind because the development projects fail in the process of Othering/colonizing.

Merle’s complicated status is closely linked to the complicated relations between the neocolonials and the natives that designate the territory of whiteness and the discursive space it occupies. Development projects in the
past aimed at progress are geared towards starting modernization in the developers' terms of value and therefore fail. In other words, they fail because they are built upon the discourses manufactured in the West (i.e., U.S./Europe) which have historically been used as devices for marginalizing Others. The supervisor of the new development project is Saul Amron, who comes to the island with his wife, Harriet—who belongs to the Shippen family, which funds the Center for Applied Social Research, sponsor of the project—and with his European assistant, Allen Fusco. The welcoming party in New Bristol given by the ruling class to these newcomers before they leave for Bournehills builds a “portrait of an ex-colonial bourgeoisie, cut off . . . from its roots, desperately chasing after status, which it identifies with all that is foreign: clothes, drinks, education, etc.” (Nazareth 114). In other words, these people have a condescending attitude toward the “peasantry for not becoming modernized, for being lazy, selfish and irresponsible in the same terms in which the colonial rulers condemned all the colonized people!” (Nazareth 116).

These white people can have condescending attitudes toward the Caribbean people and at the same time enjoy having sexual relations across the color line. George Clough, an Englishman with a sneering attitude toward the people of the island, is married to Dorothy, the white English woman who shamelessly leads an open relationship with Lyle Hutson, the Oxford-educated mulatto. Lyle seems to have made the leap from being a revolutionary in the past to an opportunist government official, an agent for supporting the neocolonial interests in the island, internalizing and sharing the same colonial attitude of George toward his own people. Harriet also fails to understand the Bournehills people, because she always positions herself as a white colonial to them. Her complaint about the bad food on the island sounds ironical when Lyle says: “But do you realize that some people up your way made their fortune in the old days selling us these delicacies?”
Later in the novel we learn that Harriet's ancestors were in fact responsible for the slave and food trade in the island. Harriet perceives the natives of the island as the Other, as we see in the scene when she just cannot understand why Gwen does not cook the eggs for her children instead of selling them to earn money. She cooks the eggs for Gwen's children out of pity for their having a "bad mother"; she does so with a veneer of a positive female role-model for them without bearing any respect for the native inhabitants of the island as people. In fact, Harriet and Dorothy, much like some of their white male counterparts, have only one way of relating to the Bournehills people, and that is by enjoying the purchase of the cultural products made on the island—"commodity fetishism" (Quayson 13) at its best. Unlike his wife, Saul starts with the outsider's attitude toward the Bournehills people but gradually learns to understand and respect the people and their needs through Merle's agency. His frustration over his breakup with a Peruvian nurse; his sense of guilt over the death-bed accusations of his wife (a Holocaust survivor), who dies of miscarriage during his research project in Honduras; his marriage to Harriet after her divorce from her husband, a nuclear scientist; his Jewish heritage, which represents a potential Other in the world—all prepare him for a relationship with Merle in which he can shape his sense of rootlessness. However, he can transgress his Otherness only when he is with Merle, an indication that he will always remain as the potential Other/Outsider who fails to bring about any real social change to help the Bournehills people in their uplift from poverty. Harriet's failure to see through Saul makes her disrupt Saul's whole project, thus risking the future lives of the Bournehills people just to save her own marriage. Her effort ironically works to no avail, as also her attempt to buy Merle off like a commodity: Harriet, who cannot grasp how Saul can even touch a black woman, offers to pay for Merle's one-way ticket to anywhere so that she will
never come back. These discursive practices of buying Saul and Merle off fail and thus deprive Harriet of the power of whiteness that designates her colonial subject position. Once Saul and Merle quit her, she is practically left with nobody to measure her whiteness against, and has to commit suicide.

Similarly, Vere represents the Caribbean counterpart to Harriet, for he has internalized the desire for the signifiers of whiteness that Harriet has always represented. Vere goes to the U.S. to work in Florida for a three-year period as part of the government's labor plan for West Indian men and sends money to his girlfriend and his son; while he is still in Florida, the baby dies. The U.S. becomes a site to show how the industrial West can exploit an individual like Vere, a site where his life is circumscribed by "isolation in barracks, poor food, exposure to extreme heat and cold, severe bosses, and a contract that in effect enslaves the workers" (Pettis 91). He comes back with "scarred and swollen hands" (30) at a moment when his girlfriend does not even want him back because he falls short of her notion of manhood: "[W]ho told you the child was even yours? Who said you was man enough then to be giving anybody a baby . . . ?" (274). Vere is carried away with the dream of rebuilding a car and winning the race in the Carnival. Finally, he manages to rebuild an Opel with a German motor, making it almost a symbol of even a more gorgeous car than an American can have; he plans to win the race, during the course of which he tragically dies. He misreads the signs of whiteness, for his car almost falls apart in the middle of the race, and he is destroyed by his own lack of "cultural literacy" (Hirsch 2). For Merle, Vere's death is as tragic as the closing down of the Cane Vale Factory built upon the disempowerment of Bournehills people: "He went to America and you people turned his head with a lot of nonsense about cars and he's dead . . . to kill the boy one month and shut down Cane
Vale the next! They must really be trying to finish us off down here in Bournehills” (390).

In contrast to Harriet (infatuated with what her whiteness signifies in terms of privilege and power) and to Vere (infatuated with the white myth of progress and humiliated by the social lack that non-whiteness signifies), Merle survives because she inhabits a subject position that be-speaks the political implications of reading the (colonial) past and the (neocolonial) present. The process of exposing whiteness reveals how whiteness re-secures its discursive space: when Sir John, the owner of the Sugar factory, comes for a visit, Ferguson becomes almost speechless and acts in an overly humiliated manner. Ferguson fails to tell Sir John directly that one of the rollers is not working due to “the impact of the long history of oppression” (Nazareth 121). Unlike Ferguson, Merle raises her voice, building a discourse on dissidence. Merle’s occasional outbursts at Lyle’s reinforcing the local government’s unfair economic proposal as if he were a colonial and at Saul when Vere dies in the race (“Kill! Destroy! . . . That’s all your science and big-time technology is good for” [391]), or when the Cane Vale sugar mill crisis breaks out, places Merle within the Caribbean subject position, thus making a serious critique of the disastrous effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism: the economy of the people must now depend on white British business interests embodied in Kingsley & Sons and on American neocolonial presence. Her outbursts expose the ideological drive of neocolonialism behind humanitarian assistance that the Bournehills people are seemingly given: as she tells Saul in an earlier scene, she does not approve “of any white man, even a decent sort like yourself, coming here . . . with all sorts of plans for us, even if they are meant to help” (226). However, Merle’s postcolonialism represents an anticipatory discourse; she recognizes that the condition she works for does not exist, but she struggles to bring it about. She seems to start the real process of postcolonializing, which
means, in Ato Quayson's words, "the critical process by which to relate modern-day phenomena to their explicit, implicit or even potential relations to this fraught heritage" (Quayson 11).

In this context, the Carnival represents the most pivotal moment in the novel as it not only challenges the master narrative of whiteness but also deconstructs the discursive practices of whiteness as social space. Re-creation of Cuffee Ned's slave revolt on Pyre Hill historically informs and intervenes in the postcolonial moment. The Carnival creates an emotional outburst commemorating a time when they "had been a People!" (287). The heroism of Cuffee Ned is reenacted by the Bournehills band; the guerrilla band from the poor of Harlem Heights joins while the dancers create a fearful sound by clashing bracelets and stomping feet: "It was an awesome sound—the measured tread of those countless feet in the dust and the loud report of the bracelets, a somber counterpoint to the gay carnival celebration" (282). The reenactment of slavery and its violence becomes equally discomforting for some of the white middle-class people like Harriet or that of the black middle-class people like Miles Wooding. The intervention of African pride in Cuffee Ned's historical revolt (acted by the cane cutter Stinger) against the white colonizers seems to create a sense of fear in the comforting position of the colonizer's position, implying a potential for resistance to the white Western-inflicted values. The Carnival also becomes a site where diverse people from all races and classes converge with one another, ironically with no permanence after the Carnival. This lack of permanence means a fearful lack of control for Harriet, who can never recover from it, but it is a playful game for Lyle and Dorothy, whose interracial relationship will not be permanent once Dorothy and her family return to England.

The Carnival disrupts the postcolonial moment of those who are satisfied with the colonizer's gaze towards the
Bournehills people. In some ways, the Carnival serves as an oral narrative of history that Merle tries to teach the students in her history class at the expense of being kicked out of the school by the director, who accuses her of “trying to incite the students” (229) and demands that she follow only the Western history book, in which there is nothing pertinent to the Bournehills people's history. Forced historically and culturally into absence, the people's historical consciousness is threatened by the Western historical narratives and by the Eurocentric school director, who believes that history should be taught from the colonizer's position. He treats Merle as the native Other, with no right to re-write history from the perspective of the Other. The sense of the classroom as a democratic social space is challenged by the discursive practices of hegemonic whiteness, producing an educational system in which Merle is “Othered.” Hence, the Carnival creates an open classroom situation as social space in which the young people feel excited about their people's history as lived experience enacted from the perspective of the colonized. Much like the Carnival itself, Cuffee Ned and Merle both intervene in the ideological discourses of modernity embodied in the development projects bearing the veneer of bringing a “hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples” (Bhabha 437). Furthermore, Cuffee Ned's spirit is embedded in Merle's attitude in subverting and challenging the effects of the colonial past to set up a better future for her own people. The Carnival makes it possible for Merle to indirectly help Saul to see that canes can be saved from drying if the lorries can be hauled to Brighton—an act that helps Saul see that the place will not change, “at least not [on] any terms but its own” (453). Saul's subject position in the development project, which starts out as a version of colonial enterprise, is transformed into a somewhat postcolo-
nial agency, however short-lived, under the Merle-impacted postcolonializing efforts.

The question of who speaks for the Bournehills people is answered by Merle’s efforts to voice the people’s repressed thoughts, because she has already experienced what implications whites’ images of otherness have for postcolonial diasporas when she was in England. The oppositional positionality she has formed as a resistant subject in Diaspora is transformed into a strategy of speaking for the people in her struggle for postcolonializing the island. The problem of constituting identity within the “self-Other” dichotomy imposed by imperialism highlights Merle’s problem of constituting her own identity that stems from the confused state of “in-betweenness.” Merle has always been relegated to the position of the “Other” by her colonial father, from whom she fled to England, and by the white European benefactress, from whom she fled back to Bourne Island after he died, leaving her with the signifiers of the colonial past in his house with a black servant, Carrington. She is situated in a postcolonial reality while also working against interventionist policies that subject her people, including herself, to “dismissal.” She seems to be entangled by the postcolonial subversions and appropriations of the dominant Eurocentric discourses on the island and also by her past life.

Whiteness subjects Merle differently as the shifts in her subject positions in different sites cause her to experience whiteness and colonialism in diverse ways. She “reads” whiteness and colonialism in such a way that she can deconstruct the neocolonial strategies in order to bring people like Saul to action in transporting the canes of the people to a factory at Brighton when the roller in the Cane Vale breaks down as a response to her accusation that white people all along have been responsible for black exploitation. Saul realizes in some personal way that Merle’s outburst is rooted in “her frustration and rage, the
sense of utter powerlessness that had sent her lashing out at him.” (393)

Her location in the politics of whiteness and imperialism drastically differ from the location of a migrant/subaltern female worker like Gwen, for instance, in her ability to “speak” from within the structures of neocolonial power relations. Talking “has offered salvation from insanity and has been a significant asset in the initiation of her self-healing” (Pettis 104), an act that provides her with a positive sense of herself on her way to Africa to search for her daughter and husband. The Western-imposed Eurocentrism inherited by white/black islanders in Bourne Island’s cultural space subjects Merle to an experience of whiteness (historically located within colonial power relations of the U.S.) through the neocolonial power relations in the island. All these colonial conflicts on the island seem to be exposed even in her bedroom, where Saul visits her in her delirium at Cane Vale crisis: “It expressed her: the struggle for coherence, the hope and desire for reconciliation of her conflicting parts, the longing to truly know and accept herself—all the things he sensed in her, which not only brought on her rages but her frightening calms as well” (401-02). Susan Willis rightfully suggests that the “colonial system continues to shape not only the economy and daily life of all of Bournehills, but also Merle’s attempts to transform her life whether in London or at home” (81). The colonial past of the island is a pretext for her being positioned within the discourse of colonialism, where she is also subjected to whiteness as dominance through the local power relations informing these sites. How others see Merle marked as the generic Other and how she sees herself in relation to others generate a duality that exists on the Island which as a site localizes the discourse of whiteness and informs its people as the products of historical positioning.

The only way Merle can deal with the problematics of her Otherness is by going to Africa, where “she hopes to
discover, like Ketu, the primacy of her African ancestral values” (Rahming 5) and to discover the Africa within as a unifying principle of her selfhood: thus in taking off her earrings and feeling “unburdened, restored to herself,” (463), she seems to be on the verge of a real transformation. She feels, as she tells Saul, that “just being there and seeing the place will be a big help to me, that in some way it will give me the strength I need to get moving again” (468). Believing strongly that Bournehills is the “home” she will come back to, she has the vision of helping the Bournehills community to change in and of itself. It is only by coming to terms with the African values within that she can have the strength to struggle for postcolonializing the island. In other words, she has to postcolonialize the Bournehills and the African within in order to build a selfhood that can culturally integrate to form a Caribbean location from which she can speak as a power-laden subject. It is only then that she can fully negotiate the cultural space of the Afro-Caribbean subject that will intervene in the privileging of the white Western subject.

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