

Foreword

Before beginning this article that speaks to the brilliance and resilience of Black and Indigenous women, it is critical that I position myself in my work. I am a white, cis-gender, able-bodied woman who holds dual citizenship in Canada and the United States. I recognize the privilege I hold in being a citizen of two powerful North American countries, and also recognize the internal bias that I face through growing up in systems that uphold white supremacy and patriarchy. I also recognize the privilege of my whiteness and my inability to understand or speak for the oppression that People of Colour have, and continue to face. My goal for this article is not to overwrite the voices of Black and Indigenous folx in Canada, but rather to uplift and learn from their experiences that have shaped how Canada functions today.

I am finishing up my undergraduate degree at the University of Waterloo, pursuing a double major in Gender & Social Justice and Political Science. Both areas of study have provided me with a unique lens when creating and analyzing research, most importantly helping me to recognize the greater systems of oppression and their deep and persistent effects on Black and Indigenous communities. Although I am focusing on the historical impacts of racism and sexism, it should be noted that these problems are not in Canada's past and are very much a present and urgent crisis. Although not discussed in depth within this article, Black and Indigenous folx still face the damaging effects of colonialism that are reinforced within our white Canadian society and institutions.

When re-envisioning a Black Nova Scotia, I was careful to read other Black scholars' works and their own imaginings for a Black society. This was a critical component of my research as I constantly worked against trying to envision my own Black society as a white person. I have also had a deep fascination and appreciation of matriarchal societies and believe there is immense value in learning more and incorporating this type of harmonious living. I mostly drew ideas from Heide Goettner-Abendroth, a German scholar whose life work was researching matriarchal societies around the world. Goettner-Abendroth does an excellent job of identifying the core parts of matriarchies and how they function by learning firsthand through immersing herself in these differing cultures.

There are elements of my own work, specifically the idea to weave in Mohawk matriarchal practices within a Black society with the intention of creating a new form of societal living that incorporates Mohawk and Black matriarchal practices; however, I want to fully recognize my limitations in this research because of my experience as a white person. When possible, I drew from Black and Indigenous scholars, including personal autobiographies of Black women like Carrie M. Best. These intimate sources allowed me to better grasp what Black women experienced throughout the 18th to 20th centuries, helping me to center and celebrate their strength, bravery, and activism.

Introduction

Colonialism in Canada is not a new topic, however, the continuation of the painful and oppressive acts of colonialism continues to be often overlooked. Colonialism brought a patriarchal, white supremacy ideology that is deeply rooted within Canadian institutions and politics. This oppressive ideology is something that Black and Indigenous folx have been trying to combat, even before Canada declared its independence. Black and Indigenous women, in particular, have been most affected by the toxicity of colonialism through the added layer of misogyny and sexism, leading me to focus on them, their survival tactics, and their contributions to Canadian society.

I begin this journey by examining Indigenous matriarchal societies in Canada, namely Iroquois and Mohawk societies. Matriarchal practices were historically common in Indigenous communities in pre-colonial times in Canada. Colonialism brought patriarchal ideologies which quickly de-valued and marginalized Indigenous women. I observe how genders historically contributed to a matriarchal society economically, socially, and politically pre-colonization, proving the benefits that come with practicing this type of matriarchal living. I argue that there is value in matriarchies that allow for equal treatment of all people and suggest this type of ideology be brought back to life in Nova Scotia.

Within the next section, I pose a Black Future where Nova Scotia is a strictly Black community with its own functioning government and economic support. Within this society, all genders would live in an egalitarian, matriarchal community and practice

matriarchal ways of living. This society would permeate peace and stability as all members would be valued equally, disposing of sexist and racist ideologies.

Lastly, I will focus on the historical impact of Black women in Nova Scotia in the 1700s. I have chosen Nova Scotia because historically, it was a hub for Black communities and held one of the largest Black populations in Canada (Nova Scotia Archives, 2021). Within this period, most Black women were enslaved people, an essential detail to keep in mind when studying their resilience. Black women did not even have the right to bodily autonomy, ownership over their children, or any other property rights, making it hard to advocate when one cannot even provide for herself legally. I decided to next focus on Black women in Nova Scotia in the 1900s, moving into more of a contemporary study of what it was like to live and function as a Black woman during this time. I use Carrie M. Best as a case study and observe her life experiences of growing up from a little girl to an extremely successful Black woman through her autobiography *That Lonesome Road*.

The purpose of this article is to expose and celebrate Black women in Canada and their historical impact which carries on today, alongside Indigenous matriarchal practices that were in place pre-colonization. Through this historical analysis of Black societies and Indigenous matriarchy, I will provide an alternate reality in which all genders and races are seen as equal and valued within a Black Nova Scotian society.

Indigenous Matriarchies in Canada and Beyond

Although Indigenous people have inhabited this land long before the colonization and eventual independence of Canada occurred, a point that is often missed is the study of how Indigenous peoples lived before the Western influence of white supremacy and patriarchy. In pre-colonial times, many Indigenous communities lived in matriarchal societies, meaning typically their society followed egalitarian practices that allowed both men and women to have leadership roles (Natives Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 3). In a literal sense, matriarchy meant that the mother acted as the head of the household and descendants would take her family name (Natives Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 3). Matriarchal societies, however, are much more than that as they create a deep sense of equality and care towards community, families, and a respect for the environment (Natives Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 3). Matriarchal practices are a strange concept for many North American societies that have been surrounded by patriarchal examples of men dominating and controlling governments and communities around them, however, this type of living is a reality to many. The concept of a matriarchal society is essential to the work of this article because it lays a foundation of what a new functioning society could look like in Nova Scotia. This alternate reality would include matrilineal practices that many Indigenous peoples in Canada have exemplified within a society built solely for Black Canadians. This society would recognize both Black and Indigenous cultural practices that encapsulate freedom and equality for all members of society.

Indigenous matriarchies are complex structures that allow for all members of society to be equally valued and heard in social, economic, and political areas of communities. Although it is imperfect, a matriarchal model is as close as it comes to an egalitarian society (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 49). Within the article *Matriarchies as Societies of Peace*, written by Heide Göttner-Abendroth and translated by Karen P. Smith, discusses these three areas of the community in depth, explaining the reasons why they are so successful. Göttner-Abendroth is an expert in this field of study and characterizes matriarchal societies in four key points. Firstly, there is economic equality amongst men and women alike, for example, through an exchange of gifts (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). Secondly, kinship is matrilineal and matrilocal with mothers being the core of the community (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). Third, decisions in communities are made based on a consensus, and lastly, spirituality revolves around the divinity within an ecosystem (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). Through her research and discoveries, one can better understand how a matriarchal society functions and the direct benefits it has on all members of the community.

Socially, matriarchies function around the concept of motherhood, whether in a literal or figurative way. The feminine nature is highly respected because it can reproduce and create future generations, something that is essential for the survival of any society. Unlike patriarchal societies which don't respect the process of motherhood, matriarchies understand and celebrate the importance of new life and the power that women have in performing the act of birth (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). Motherhood doesn't just refer to a biological birth, however, it can also have a broader meaning that includes all women in a society that works together to raise younger

generations (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 50). This is an important point because it includes and respects women who may not choose to have children, or maybe infertile but are still wanting to be a part of the larger parenting process.

Another matriarchal social aspect that differs from patriarchal norms that we face is the concept of matrilineality. Matrilineality is the concept that “kinship is acknowledged exclusively in the female line”, meaning that family resources are shared through the maternal line (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 50). Matrilocality is another important social practice in which a man moves in with his partner's family, typically after marriage (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). In addition to these points, when people from different clans join in matrimony, it is seen as two clans joining together through marriage as well. This bonding symbolizes a system of mutual aid, another important part of living in a matriarchal system (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 50).

Systems of economic wealth function very differently in a matriarchal society as well, with the community being the center of economic decisions. Individually, some families may be wealthier than others, but their wealth is shared among everyone around them through communal meals and festivals where they provide the means necessary for the events (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 52). Any goods that are found or earned are seen as presents that circulate the community, preventing some from accumulating massive wealth through the hoarding of these possessions. Women as the matriarchs also have power over all the goods that are brought to their homes and the larger clan. They collect and then distribute them evenly amongst their families, distributing a motherliness value that helps maintain stability and fairness within their

communities (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 52). This matriarchal economy may also be referred to as a “gift economy”, creating a balanced society based on mutual sharing and peace (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 52).

Matriarchies also have long-standing political practices that help maintain equality throughout their communities. Matriarchal societies are based on a principle of consensus, meaning every member of the community has an equal vote (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 51). Only one vote can be cast per member of society, including the matriarch, ensuring that no opinion is valued higher than another (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). Every decision must be unanimous within these communities, which may sound impossible to some, however, these practices have been perfected over time. Every decision is discussed thoroughly within each household, or the wider community if it involves them, before reaching a consensus. If a decision needs to be made between different clans, a delegate is sent from each clan as a representative, however, these representatives do not make decisions on behalf of their clans (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). Instead, they bring back information and share it amongst their community and deliver their overall consensus. This back and forth continues until a unanimous decision is made, allowing for all member’s needs to be met peacefully and fairly. There is no accumulation of power by one or two members of this society, but rather a shared power that is held with each individual. Through this practice, all members of a society are honored and respected equally with no domination from a minority over a majority of people (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008, p. 51).

Although there has been some debate over whether all Indigenous societies held matriarchal practices, it can be assumed that any Indigenous patriarchal societies were likely influenced by white Judeo Christian beliefs before fur traders and missionaries came to Canada (Brodribb, 1984, p. 86). Prior to colonization, Indigenous women held high positions of economic, political, and legal power (Natives Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 4). White, Eurocentric colonizers enforced their patriarchal beliefs onto Indigenous communities, quickly cut Indigenous women out of important decisions, and eventually stripped away their rights through the creation of the Indian Act (Native Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 6).

The Indian Act, created in 1876, did not recognize Indigenous women as persons or citizens in Canada but rather treated them as property. Indigenous women, therefore, had no power politically or socially, a huge shock when transitioning from a matriarchal society into dominating patriarchal ideologies (Native Women Association of Canada, 1992). Within a white, Canadian society, Indigenous women also were unable to own property, including having a final say in what happened to their children, causing women to become extremely dependent on men (Native Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 6). This dependency put many Indigenous women in danger of being forced to stay in abusive or unhealthy relationships as they were financially and emotionally attached to their partners. Another law enforced in the Indian Act caused Indigenous women to lose their [Indigenous] status if they were to marry a non-Indigenous person (Native Women Association of Canada, 1992, p. 6). This not only broke the long-standing matrilineal tradition of men falling under their wife's family line after marriage, but it also was an enormous loss of identity for many Indigenous women. After having a better grasp on

matriarchal societies and the importance women held within them, one can only fathom the impact the Indian Act had on Canadian Indigenous societies.

The purpose of explaining historical Indigenous matriarchies is so that one can better comprehend how society might function without the patriarchal practices that have been instilled in every aspect of our current society. It is possible to achieve a high functioning society that simultaneously respects all people within it without specific people holding more power over others, creating an imbalance in the system. Another interesting point of matriarchies is they do not hold the strong capitalistic values that many Western societies do (Göttner-Abendroth & Smith, 2008). There are no large economic imbalances and wealth is used to benefit the whole community, whether it be shared through banquets or other events. With these ideas in mind, we will next shift into imagining what a matriarchal society would look like in the context of Black communities in Nova Scotia.

Envisioning a New, Black Nova Scotia

Within this next section, the aim is to create an alternate reality in which all genders and races are seen as equal and valued within a Black, Nova Scotian society. As stated previously, I have decided to focus on Nova Scotia because it holds one of the largest Black populations in Canada, causing it to be a logical location for this vision. When referring to a Black society, I am encapsulating the entire province of Nova Scotia as this vision involves this province having an entirely Black population. This province would take on more independent characteristics in terms of government and economic

functioning, similar to an independent nation. The goal is not to create further segregation and division based on race, but rather work towards the radical expulsion of systemic racism through a unified Black province and government. The concept of creating a Black community in Nova Scotia is a rather large and complex topic, hence why I will have a narrow focus on the gendered and racial impacts a matriarchal society would have. Although all genders will have an important role in this society, I am choosing to focus predominantly on Black women and their part in the social, economic, and political spheres of this society. Black women are vital to this new society because this society will function based on similar features used in many Mohawk matriarchal societies where women are highly valued in their communities.

When discussing the concept of a Black future in Canada, it is critical to amplify and listen to Black experts on this topic who have already given thorough thought to this new society. I do not attempt to take credit for these ideas, but rather break them down and align them with matriarchal practices, creating a blended society of these concepts. When looking at Veen and Anderson's article on social movements and Black Futures, they discuss the idea of Afro-futurism, borrowing ideas from scholar Christina Sharpe (2018, p. 6). They define Afro-futurism as reinventing "meaningful black subjectivities, identities and becomings, social roles, spiritualities, and family relations "in the wake" of enforced black unbeing and anti-blackness" (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 6). Something I quickly realized, however, is that one cannot separate the damage of colonialism and a new Black society. To create a new, more just society, we must learn from the past and contest systems of power that have withheld Black futures from occurring, including countering neo-liberalism ideologies (Veen & Anderson, 2018, pp. 6,9). Interestingly,

within Veen and Anderson's article, they mention the use of Indigenous futurisms with similar ideas of removing patriarchal and white supremacy ideologies that have been surrounded by People of Colour since colonial practices first began (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 9) (Fricke, 2019, pp. 114-115). Both Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms build off of each other with the similar narrative that they hold social and political autonomy without oppressive forces withholding rights or power from them (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 9).

Anderson later discusses Afro-futurism 2.0 as a second wave of Black imagination is influenced by social media, climate change, and the shift of the American hegemony, among other current cultural effects (2018, p. 12). This trend is logical in the sense that as the Western hemisphere's influence deteriorates, in addition to the rise and acceptance of other cultures, People of Colour will begin having a more dominant voice as well. These contemporary shifts in society will allow Black scholars, artists, and activists to criticize Western narratives of white supremacy and colonial practices, as well as open a space for Black people to share their own experiences and stories (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 13). We can see the beginnings of Anderson's predictions of Afro-futurism 2.0 through social media movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM), Idle No More, and Time's Up, among many other important coalitions.

When envisioning a Black Nova Scotian alternate reality, I find myself relating most with Valorie Thomas's Afrxfuturism, described as "African-derived futurist cosmologies and the ethos of the crossroads that destabilizes polarizations of time, space, gender, and raced identity." (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 14). Thomas highlights Black women and the radical force they bring to Afro-futurism, paying close attention to

the destabilization of gender and racialized identity, two main areas of focus for this new Black Nova Scotia (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 14). To have a just society that does not function or profit off of marginalization and oppression, all genders and races must be included in this equality. Afrxfuturism can only become a reality when Black masculine identity, which has been wrapped up in white supremacy and misogyny, has been healed (Veen & Anderson, 2018, p. 14).

Heide Göttner-Abendroth distinguishes the difference between matriarchal and patriarchal societies. She finds that many assume matriarchal societies are a substitute for patriarchy where instead, men are dominated by women. She responds to this way of thinking by explaining that matriarchies have never needed patriarchy's hierarchical structures to function, thus, women would not dominate over men (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018, p. 5). In this sense, many of us cannot imagine what this society may look like as it is out of a realm we are comfortable or familiar with, however, this does not mean it's unachievable. The idea of a Black matriarchal society ties in with Black masculine identity and the need for a power shift. Black men have been involved in patriarchal ways of thinking and being and must unlearn this before entering into a matriarchy that works towards the equality and benefit of all. This healing may involve Black men listening to women's experiences and connecting how their actions can influence positive change or perpetuate harmful ways of living, followed by actively resisting patriarchal ideologies. In a Mohawk society, it is stated that "Aboriginal men also respected women for the sacred gifts which they believed the Creator had given to them" (Chartrand et al., 2001). Similarly, Black men must recognize and respect the unique contributions that Black women can bring to this society. Carrie Best also speaks

to this issue in a speech written in 1973 at the N.B.C.C. Conference where she advises Black men to begin respecting Black women as a step towards Black liberation (Best, 1977, p. 80). Best states “Black people should be left alone to make their own decisions, eventually, they will find out who the oppressors are and thus will be on the road to a united front” (1977, p. 81). In order to reach an equalitarian Black society, women should be encouraged to take on leadership roles and be equally respected as members of society no matter what social setting they are in.

There needs to be space for Black women to also heal from the misogyny and colonialism they have endured for this patriarchal society to succeed. Historically, Black women were seen as property and, therefore, as a reproductive vessel rather than a person and a mother (Barr, 2008, p. 76). This type of trauma cannot be glossed over in a patriarchal society where birth is celebrated and respected, and thus should be reinforced through the understanding that not all women need to have children. As mentioned previously, not all women in patriarchal societies have children, nor is it seen as their social and moral duty to society. Women who chose not to have children are equally respected and are still seen as taking on a nurturing and mothering role within their wider community. This way of thinking allows women to understand that their value does not lie within their reproductive abilities and can contribute to society in whatever ways they are comfortable with. A woman’s social role is not limited to reproduction, however, as they also serve as “custodians to their clan’s property” as she is responsible for the overall wellbeing of her community (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018, p. 9).

Within patriarchal society, men are seen as the typical 'breadwinners' of the family who predominantly provide stability economically. Men's work is generally valued higher than women's, leading to fewer job opportunities and financial growth for many women today (Bertrand et al., 2010, p. 229). In matriarchal societies, however, all genders provide economic value where the contributions of everyone are equally appreciated (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018). The matriarchs of the family tend to look after and distribute the collective wealth equally among their family and community, giving them a significant role in economic decision-making (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018). This type of sharing of economic wealth differs vastly from the capitalistic ideology that breeds hoarding and greed. There is no need for someone to hold more wealth than another as that would disrupt the balance of power and equality. Similar to this way of functioning, these economic responsibilities would also apply to Black women matriarchs in this re-envisioned Nova Scotia. Men and women would both contribute to economic growth, which would be supervised by the chosen matriarch of the community.

Politically, women play an important role in the decision-making process within their communities, however, they would never hold special privileges as this would contradict the equality that matriarchal societies are based on (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018, p. 17). Although the matriarchs of the household and larger community are held in high regard, they cannot make any unilateral decisions without a unanimous agreement from every member of society involved in the process (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018, p. 17). This way of living is practiced currently by the Mosuo people in China as they function in a matriarchal society, proof that this kind of decision-making is possible (Göttner-

Abendroth, 2018, p. 17). Similar to the Mosuo people, Black communities in Nova Scotia would also follow this type of lifestyle and governance whereby every member's voice is taken into account before making a decision.

When performing my research, I observed that race is not a spoken issue in matriarchal societies. Within this re-envisioned Nova Scotia, however, we must consider race as it is taking place on colonized land, in a society previously built off of white supremacy. Matriarchal societies are so successful because of their careful attention to maintaining equality among all members of society. Because of the lack of information on this subject, it is impossible to assume that there would be no racial hierarchy whereby the color of skin determines a person's worth, however, this should be a goal regardless. Although the purpose is for this to be a space for Black people to flourish, it can also be assumed that if white people were welcomed into the province, they would abide by this racial equality ideology.

An area of critique I have throughout my research is the consistent lack of inclusivity of queer, two-spirited, and other members of the LGBTQ+ community who may not fit within heteronormative gender roles. When looking at matriarchal societies, the language used is heteronormative, only referring to men and women when discussing community relationships. I am curious to know where members of the LGBTQ+ community would fit into previous and current matriarchal societies. Patriarchal societies reinforce cis and heteronormative ideologies and reject those who do not fit within these narrow boundaries. Within the Black Nova Scotian society I envision, patriarchy and all its limitations do not exist, giving me a reason to state that

people of all genders and identities would be fully accepted into a Black, matriarchal society.

Black Women in Nova Scotia- 1700s

Within this last section, my aim is to highlight the historical significance Black women have had within Canada. Black women in Canada, namely Nova Scotia have been strong and fearless since the day they arrived. They have had to fight twice as hard as their Black man counterparts, and even more so than any white person they have come across. Their resilience and brilliance are something that should be not only recognized in Canadian history but celebrated loudly as they have contributed so much to our current society. Canadian Black women's success is not without struggle, however, as they have battled through enslavement, racial rights, voting rights, property rights, and so on with little to no government support or allyship.

Black women came to be in Nova Scotia through the enslavement of Black people in North America, where Nova Scotia was no exception. It should be noted that there were enslaved peoples in Nova Scotia as early as 1749 as they were brought over from mostly British and American households (Nova Scotia Archives, 2021). Most slave trades occurred within Halifax, causing roughly 400 people to be enslaved out of a population of 3000 in 1750 (Nova Scotia Archives, 2021). There were a mere 17 freed Black people at that time, however, that number continued to grow as time went on (Nova Scotia Archives, 2021). By 1767 there were 104 freed Black people living in Nova

Scotia, likely doing unskilled labor work, farming, and construction as a means of living (Nova Scotia Archives, 2021).

Black women have been underrepresented throughout Canadian history, and the enslavement period is no exception. It should be noted, however, that Black women were fierce and brave as they fought for their lives, their children's lives, and the freedom of their race. There have been a multitude of written occurrences of Black women taking white men to court over injustices that have been inflicted on them and their families. In the book, *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, Sylvia Hamilton focuses on Black women in Nova Scotia and the impact they had on their communities through their activism and bravery. Women like Mary Postell, Susan Connor, and other Black Loyalist women went to court to protest the treatment of themselves and their children, advocating for bodily autonomy and respect (Hamilton, 1994). Out of the many cases that were heard, very few Black women were able to win, highlighting the deep and suffocating systemic racism that cost many their lives and freedom (Hamilton, 1994). There were also cases of Black women and girls running away from their owners with the hopes of taking freedom into their own hands. Archived records show statements of young Black girls being searched for through newspaper ads that were released by their white male owners, hoping to retrieve them (Nova Scotia Archives, 2021). In the end, many of them were left in wills as property to be passed down to the owner's family, a stark reminder of how Black women were dehumanized and used by white families for their personal gain.

Black Loyalists were a group of previously enslaved people who were offered freedom if they fought with Britain against the Revolution, a military tactic by the British army (Kyte et al., 1990). Around 1782, many Black Loyalists came to Nova Scotia in hopes of building a new life, despite the war still raging on (Kyte et al., 1990). Black Loyalist women did not share the same struggles that enslaved Black women experienced, however, one can still draw many commonalities in the wider barriers of sexism and white supremacy that all Black women were forced to face. Black Loyalist women were also tasked with building the communities around them, helping them to be functional and successful. Black Loyalist women were known to be active in the church as well as in their family households, having leadership roles even in the late 1700s (Hamilton, 1994). Black Loyalist women contributed to the church not only through attendance but also through ministerial duties which they performed alongside their minister husbands (Hamilton, 1994). Violet King and Phyllis George are two Black Loyalists who helped minister their community on top of the responsibility of raising their own families (Hamilton, 1994, p.25). This involvement was not approved by everyone, however, and many Black women and their families were targets of violence from people who disapproved. This painful backlash caused many of these families to go into hiding and relocate to neighboring towns in Nova Scotia, but there is no evidence showing that this stopped women from continuing to be ministers in their communities (Hamilton, 1994).

Black Loyalist women also took on the job of educators for the community. In 1787, Catherine Abernathy helped create and instruct a school near Halifax where she taught roughly 20 students on her own (Hamilton, 1994, p.25). Abernathy created a

long-standing line of Black women teachers in Nova Scotia communities that carries on today, another example of the ongoing impact Black women have had in Canada (Hamilton, 1994). It is important to note that for many women, this added role was on top of other societal responsibilities that fell onto them, such as raising a family, cleaning, cooking, and contributing meaningfully to their larger communities.

Eventual emancipation occurred in Canada, leading to many Black communities being formed throughout the province. These community formations were largely due to freedom seekers who had run away from their previous white owners to find a haven that would allow them to start a new life as freed people. Nova Scotia became a destination point for tens of thousands of recently freed people as they fled from the British troops and previous owners, becoming refugees in Canada (Best, 1977, p. 13).

Black Women in Nova Scotia- 1900s

As previously discussed, Black women contributed greatly in their communities, whether it be through schooling and raising children, daily housework, church involvement, or activism. Although these domestic jobs are often overlooked, they play a critical role in how a community survives and thrives and it has been proven that Black women are the backbone to success. The book, *Women in the Promised Land: Essays in African Canadian History* highlights Black women's contributions in Nova Scotia, specifically through oral interviews with fellow Nova Scotian community members from 1919-1990. These interviews show the complex nature that many Black women face as they are forced to look at life through an intersectional lens of gender and race. Black women

endure oppression from multiple angles as they attempt to function in a society that is built off patriarchal ideologies that insist women are second-class citizens to men. Black women also live in a white supremacy society where non-white people are viewed as a lesser race and these systems continue to be upheld in institutions today.

As Black girls in Nova Scotia navigated these systems of oppression, they actively resisted them by recognizing and stopping cycles of oppressive behavior that have been modeled for them in previous generations. Annie James, an interviewer reflected on her childhood and a conversation she had with her sister, stating “you know Lydia, when I get old, (growing up I said I’m not gonna get like my mom) I wanna be a mother, but I don’t wanna get up at five o’clock cooking nobody breakfast” (Bonner & Bernard, 2018, p. 162). The demanding role of motherhood in patriarchal society reinforces gender norms, such as women being submissive and controlled by men with the expectation that they perform their motherly duties without resistance. It is clear James is torn between understanding and resisting the patriarchal roles of motherhood, while also wanting to be a mother.

As stated in the chapter, *Labouring for Change: Narratives of African Nova Scotian women*, many women could find themselves relating to Jame’s statement as they struggled between loving and respecting their mothers, while simultaneously being furious as they watched them “being slaves to [a] man” (Bonner & Bernard, 2018, p.162). This statement encapsulates the complexities of sexism and gender roles that haunted Black women throughout their young lives, forcing them to decide which qualities they witnessed from their mothers to keep. Black women typically were forced to work harder than white women due to societal inequalities of the period where Black

people were paid less than other white members (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). This added layer cannot go unrecognized when reflecting on women's movements in Canada and the problems Black versus white women faced.

Many Black women were tasked with performing reproductive labor, which entailed several different areas of community work that helped maintain people in their daily lives (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). This type of work included cleaning, providing food and water, child care, sewing and repairing household items, church involvement, and activism, among other tasks (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). Although this work tends to go unnoticed and undocumented historically, and even currently, it is important to highlight how essential this work is to the survival of Black people in Nova Scotia. Women were not only expected to look after their family but also the wider community as they performed midwiving duties, took on seamstress roles, and helped with the Red Cross, among other committees (Bonner & Bernard, 2018).

Black women spent not only physical labor but also emotional labor when faced with the main role of child-raising. Socializing children plays an important role in the future of a community, however, the majority of this work fell onto Black women's laps. They worked with their children from schooling to important life skills of cooking, cleaning, and farming (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). Black women often had to be resourceful because they did not have the same financial stability that a lot of white women had, most having to work alongside their husbands in order to make ends meet (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). One interviewer recalled their grandmother growing nearly everything they ate, along with cooking everything homemade from scratch, allowing

their family to provide for themselves as much as possible (Bonner & Bernard, 2018, p. 168).

Black women's activism and involvement in church communities have also played a large part in the ongoing cultural perseverance in Black communities. Black women were at the heart of the community, allowing people to advance socially and politically, whether through racial, gender, or sexual rights. For many Black women, being a part of the church was more than just for religious gain, the church also gave the opportunity to be an active "agent of social control, forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and an area for the development and assertion of leadership" (Bonner & Bernard, 2018, p. 172). Their whole community relied heavily on their church congregation for support during tough times of racial discrimination and oppression. Women held leadership roles, participated in church services, sang in the choir, and visited people regularly on behalf of the church (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). Research has made clear that church and spirituality are something that the Black community held closely to them as they found strength in their faith and the people around them (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). The strength many Black people were forced to find is through the turmoil and oppression they faced daily, causing them to turn inward and pray for the small blessings they received (Bonner & Bernard, 2018).

Faith and activism often went hand in hand within Black communities across Nova Scotia as many people found it nearly impossible to ignore the inequality around them. As civil rights movements began to take shape across Canada, Black church communities were regularly involved in raising awareness and forming committees, such as the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People

(NSAACP) in 1946 (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). Another important group that was founded in Nova Scotia was the Black United Front (BUF) as it fought to defend the rights of marginalized groups through practices of racial justice and gender equality (Bonner & Bernard, 2018). Their work was connected to the church communities and focused on creating educational and social opportunities for Black people. One main goal of the BUF was for the Black community to hold more power in office through provincial and federal politics as a way to combat the systemic racism they faced (Bonner & Bernard, 2018, p. 174). The BUF helped equip people who wanted to get involved in the racial justice movement but did not know how by providing them with resources and building their confidence, something that the Black faith community encouraged (Bonner & Bernard, 2018, p. 174).

A personalized example of what it was like to live in Nova Scotia as a Black woman in the 1900s can be understood through Carrie M. Best, an activist, and journalist who greatly influenced those around her as she challenged the racial and gendered status quos. When following Best's life through her autobiography *That Lonesome Road*, she discusses her experiences growing up in Nova Scotia in the early to mid-1900s as a Black girl and the constant struggle she faced against sexism and racism throughout her lifetime. When she was four years of age, she had her first racist encounter. Henry Graham, a lawyer that she would meet again later, winked at her while passing by her house, making her feel as though she was a "two-cent dude" (Best, 1977, p. 41). She interpreted this action as implying that while she looked well dressed, she did not acquire the financial means to uphold that lifestyle (Best, 1977, p. 41). Best took this act personally at the moment but later reflected on the fact that her

negative thought process around the situation proved that her journey of self-evaluation began at the age of 4 (Best, 1977, p. 41). Although the enslavement period was long over at that time, she states that the slave-master relationship still existed in some minds of Canadians (Best, 1977, p. 41).

Later on in her life as a young adult, Best tried her best to defy the assumptions that came with being a Black woman when choosing her next steps in life. Best writes “I decided very early that this type of work [housekeeping] would be done for myself and never as a means of livelihood. Stenographers, clerks, waitresses, nurses, or in fact any position other than a domestic teacher in a Black community was unheard of in those days in Nova Scotia. So I would leave Nova Scotia, go to America and become a nurse” (Best, 1977, p. 44). Best had to leave Canada to obtain these opportunities as Canada did not offer this type of career training for Black people at that time. Although she tried nursing for a short while, she found that it was not a job well suited for her with her lack of tolerance for running blood (Best, 1977, p. 44). Finally, she decided to get her teaching license, which she describes as easy as obtaining a vehicle license today, and begin her teaching career at Delaps Cove (Best, 1977, p. 45). Best’s teaching career was also short-lived as she was called back home and never returned.

Throughout Best’s writing of her young adult years, there are consistent themes of her resistance to being ‘just another Black woman’. She shows this through her multiple career attempts and failures, as well as through the language she uses throughout her autobiography. When first introducing herself as a teacher to who would later become a good friend, she writes “I am Carrie Prevoe the *new teacher* for Delaps Cove; making sure to put proper emphasis on the word teacher-- for after all *she* was

only a housewife!” (Best, 1977, p. 45). Her language communicates that she is resisting a Black woman stereotype that assumes her value in society lies in being a mother and family caregiver. For some women, the role of a housewife may be seen as the only contribution they should make to society, an idea enforced through patriarchy. Although there is value in being a homemaker, it can easily be distorted by the patriarchal assumption that women only belong in that line of work, causing some women like Carrie Best to actively resist those boundaries.

Best resembles many of the characteristics of the Black women in Nova Scotia that have been discussed throughout this article. She was a mother and a daughter, an active member in her community, and an activist for racial rights, despite this detail being rarely mentioned throughout her autobiography. Interestingly, Best never writes about an important experience that happened just four years before Viola Desmond was removed from a movie theater in New Glasgow for the color of her skin. She experienced an identical encounter in 1942 where she was removed from the Roseland Theatre based on racial discrimination (Backhouse, 1998). Best went to a theater with her son and refused to sit in the ‘colored section’ of the theater and was later asked to leave because she was not following the theater’s rules (Backhouse, 1998). She protested leaving the building until she was forcibly removed by the police, at which point she went to court to argue her case (Backhouse, 1998). She lost this court battle despite having a highly qualified lawyer and a strong case against the perpetrator and ended up having to pay for the cost of the defense of the theatre owner, along with her own fees (Backhouse, 1998). Although she lost, this only fueled her need for justice, helping

her create *The Clarion* as an outlet to discuss human rights matters, among other topics (Backhouse, 1998).

Best began writing seriously as a journalist in 1945 when she first published *The Clarion* in a small bulletin, which soon turned into a newspaper (Best, 1977, p. 50). She began writing on both municipal stories, as well as current activist topics that highlighted the injustice happening in Nova Scotia (Best, 1977). A critical topic that Best often covered was Indigenous issues in Nova Scotia, an interest that was sparked after having an encounter with a principal with racist prejudice towards Indigenous students. After he refused to accept an encouragement award being used as an incentive for Indigenous students, Best was outraged at the blunt and unreasonable discrimination that these students were facing (Best, 1977, p. 53). She wrote an article that eventually became a column devoted to [Indigenous] problems, among other human rights issues. This column soon became a catalyst for her involvement and eventual title as the provincial executive of the Human Rights Federation of Nova Scotia, taking a special interest in the Mi-kmaq communities living in the province (Best, 1977, p. 55). Best eventually went on to have radio and TV air time, discussing poetry, philosophy, politics, and human rights, among other topics. She has been decorated with many awards, obtained a journalism degree from King's College, and worked extensively in Canadian politics (Best, 1977, pp. 78-80). Best greatly influenced the province of Nova Scotia and is one example of the profound impact Black women made in Canada.

Conclusion

Black women in Canada have a unique set of problems that they have been attempting to overcome for centuries. Race and gender intersect as they battle not only colonial ideologies of racism, but also sexism and misogyny that fall under patriarchal thought. These two points of race and sex weave and overlap throughout this paper, highlighting the moral complexities Black women face no matter what time they are a part of. These conflicting emotions are noted within works like *Women in the "Promised Land"*, and *That Lonesome Road* as they speak to Black women's experiences in Nova Scotia as they grow up and learn from previous examples of Black mothers set before them. These struggles are important to showcase because it grasps the damaging effects colonialism has inflicted onto Black women in Nova Scotia as they are faced with the burden of re-shaping their future using anti-colonial tactics.

Secondly, re-imagining a new, Black Nova Scotia is complex work, however, Black scholars like Sharpe, Anderson, and Thomas lay a helpful foundation in their works of Afro-futurism thoughts. They piece together gender and race by acknowledging the work that must be done, including the healing of Black masculinity and the space to process the colonial damages that have been felt for centuries. As this work of healing is done, elements of a matriarchal society harmonize and enhance a society built on equality and peace towards others. Within this matriarchal society, Black knowledge, wisdom, art, and experience will be at the forefront in the creation of new foundations that build and stabilize social, political, and economic systems in Nova Scotia. As Gottner-Abenbroth states "matriarchal societies serve as important models

for future societies beyond patriarchy that are just and peaceful. We can see that there is much to learn from traditional matriarchal societies” (Göttner-Abendroth, 2018, p. 23).

The research and ideas presented throughout this paper should be utilized as a starting point, rather than being thought of as a finished product. Due to the overwhelming amount of detail that is needed to create a new, Black society in Canada, this article only focuses on gendered and racial aspects, causing it to reach limitations. There are gaps in this research that cannot be answered in this piece due to their complex nature, including land and property rights, relationships with Indigenous peoples in Nova Scotia, relationships with non-Black populations, among other important aspects needed to make this society a reality. My hope is, however, that this research begins the conversation of what a re-imagined, equal future can look like with Black and Indigenous methods of thought at the forefront of this reality. Through the respectful borrowing of Black and Indigenous ideas, it has been proven that a society where all genders and races are equally valued is attainable through the recognition and healing of past traumas, along with the hopes and dreams for a more balanced and peaceful future.

Glossary of Terms:

2SLGBTBQ+: This acronym stands for 2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, and Queer, and the + is an inclusive symbol for other gender identities.

Afro-futurism: Afro-futurism is a term used when discussing new technological advancements along with imaginative futures that include Black and African cultures. These blended ideas create a Black future. (Veen & Anderson, 2018)

Afrxfuturism: Similar to Afro-futurism, this term is coined by Valorie Thomas with the purposeful use of 'x'. Thomas uses this word to break down gender and racialized identity within this imaginative Black future. (Veen & Anderson, 2018)

Black: I decided to use the term Black, rather than African-Canadian because not all Black people in Canada may identify as Afro-Canadian. Black is also purposefully capitalized as a sign of racial respect as it indicates a people rather than a color (Coleman, 2020).

Folx: I use the word 'folx' as an inclusive term for all people. I don't believe there is a 'right' or 'wrong' wording for the word 'folks/folx', however, some members of the LGBTQ+ community appreciate the use of the letter 'x' within these overarching terms. For this reason, I have chosen to use it within this article.

Indigenous: When using the word 'Indigenous', it is a general term for all First Nations, Inuit, Metis, and Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Intersectionality: A term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, the intersection between social categories such as gender, race, religion, etc, and how they interact to create a specific identity and worldview (Crenshaw, 1989).

Iroquois: The term 'Iroquois' encapsulates 6 Indigenous nations into 1 term, one of them being the Mohawk tribe. This group mostly lives in southern Ontario and Quebec and is an example of a matriarchal society.

Misogyny: The general hatred towards women or the belief that women are inferior to men.

Mi'kmaq: This term encapsulates 10+ larger Indigenous nations, and are the founding people of Nova Scotia that continue to inhabit the land still today.

Mohawk: Mohawk tribe falls within the larger Iroquois tribe. Mohawk people who live in Canada have historically practiced matriarchal ways of living and are used often as an example within this article.

Patriarchy: The term 'patriarchy' is used in a broad sense throughout this article with the general definition being- a larger system that is in place that gives (typically) white, hetero-normative men power and confines, oppresses, and excludes women and other genders from this system.

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