I hope to pursue doctoral study in English at Cornell University. Broadly, I seek to further my study of ecofeminism in postcolonial and world literatures. Cornell houses a unique minority, indigenous, and Third World studies program and a renowned gender studies faculty. Cornell would therefore be the ideal place for a developing feminist and postcolonial literary scholar.

I began my literary career at Cornell, where I primarily studied gender and sexual politics in literature. From a class on food and gender with Professor Kate McCullough to a course on masculinity in Melville with Professor Barry Maxwell, my undergraduate studies exposed me to diverse literatures and to a variety of approaches to the study of gender dynamics in cultural practices. In a course on Medieval Icelandic literature I wrote, for example, a paper on the relationship between femininity and eroticized violence in Njál’s Saga. Outside of the English department in an environmental archaeology course, I examined the problematic gender ethics at work in Western scholarship on the Oracle at Delphi. My final project at Cornell was a thesis with Professor Kate McCullough in which I argued that Victorian literature, such as Alice in Wonderland and Jane Eyre, manifests a metaphorically anorexic “body-logic,” informed by class-, race- and gender-based notions of spatiality made paradigmatic by the practice of corseting. My undergraduate career thus provided me with the vocabulary and theoretical foundations necessary for strong feminist literary work. At the University at Buffalo, I continued to make gender my central category of analysis. For instance, I presented a conference paper last spring on the heretofore under-acknowledged presence of specifically Italian fascist discourses of masculinity in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway.

It was at the University at Buffalo that I first became aware of the theoretical dialogue connecting the experiences of women and the natural world under patriarchy and capitalism. Classes on nineteenth-century travel writing and Palestinian and Israeli literature at UB allowed me to delve deeper into ecocritical and postcolonial theories and to produce papers tackling ecofeminist questions. For my travel writing course, I analyzed how George Catlin’s texts on and paintings of Native peoples reveal a racialized politics of mobility and masculinity vis-à-vis the natural world. I am at present writing a thesis on the feminist reclamation of the motherland trope in The Inheritance, a novel by Palestinian feminist Sahar Khalifeh. In my thesis, I argue that the configuration of “woman as land” is not invariably patriarchal. Indeed, Khalifeh’s maternal landscape metaphors represent both a compelling ecofeminist response to the masculinized project of colonization and a challenge to a dominant Western feminist ethos.

Pursuing a doctoral degree will allow me to continue to ask questions that my feminist readings at the undergraduate level and more critically-aware readings at the graduate level have raised. I would like to explore at Cornell how postcolonial authors formulate what Édouard Glissant called an “aesthetics of the earth,” which highlights the gendered foundations of the nation-building project. I am especially interested in how writers like Danticat, Rushdie, Khalifeh, Coetzee, and others engage ecofeminist theory by linking nationalism to sexual and environmental violence—how authors utilize landscape metaphors to make sexual violence historical and “speak-able.” I have also very recently become drawn to ecofeminist theories of beauty work and eating disorders. Ultimately, I believe space remains in postcolonial ecofeminism for further analyses of colonized perceptions of “natural beauty”—of aesthetic practices that both collude with and undermine violent discourses of nationalism that rely on the subjugation, feminization, and “beautification” of a land and its people.

More concretely, I can envision a research project at Cornell on animals, beauty, and sexual violence in Third World and postcolonial literature. For instance, J.M. Coetzee’s dog-
filled novel *Disgrace* elucidates how the rhetoric of “victim-blaming” relies on a Darwinist system of ethics and aesthetics that excuses violence against women and non-human animals vis-à-vis arguments about the uncontrollability—the animalistic nature—of heterosexual male desire. I hope to continue to explore at Cornell how authors reveal an imbricated system of animal and human rights in order to expose the ecological effects of globalized capitalism and the linkages between colonialism, racism, sexism, lookism, and speciesism.

I might find intellectual support from a wide variety of scholars at Cornell, especially those working in the minority, indigenous, and Third World studies program. Professor Carole Boyce Davies’ work in African diaspora studies syncs nicely with my interest in Danticat’s novels and Haitian and Haitian-American writing more generally. Professor Eric Cheyfitz’ work on Palestine and indigenous epistemologies continues to provide important insights to my thesis on Palestinian resistance literature. Professor Elizabeth Anker’s focus on Coetzee, world literature, and human rights discourse seems relevant to my interests as well. Her publications on human rights and her undergraduate course on world literature have proven foundational to my graduate work and to my development as a scholar. I might also find guidance with scholars in the feminist, gender, and sexuality studies department, especially those working, broadly speaking, on violence.

Ultimately, I hope to be involved in a stimulating and diverse intellectual environment, where I can both be influenced by and influence other scholars; accordingly, I believe Cornell is the next step in my academic career.