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REACHING IN & SPEAKING OUT: PERFORMANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF UNA MARSON AND LOUISE BENNETT

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ABSTRACT

REACHING IN & SPEAKING OUT: PERFORMANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF UNA MARSON AND LOUISE BENNETT

Tejan Green Waszak

Reaching in & Speaking Out examines gender, race, and class in the poetry of Una Marson (1905-1965) and Louise Bennett (1919-2006). This dissertation takes a multidisciplinary approach to these two Jamaican women's groundbreaking poetry, prioritizing the emotional stakes and historical traditions connected to their words through the varied performances within their poetry. This means keeping in mind each poet's individual influences and vulnerabilities, based on their background, education, and social standing, and identifying how those aspects merge with their social climate and become visible through each poet's work.

Bennett's and Marson's poetic style, delivery, and public personas differ greatly: while Marson's poems are primarily written in a standardized (or "Queen's") English, Bennett's poetry is delivered in Jamaican Creole English / Patwa (Patois). This dissertation nonetheless positions Marson's and Bennett's work together, in relation to each other, as two of Jamaica's literary mothers. It engages their poetry to underscore the work they did to push against colonial structures and write themselves into the colonial and postcolonial landscape. They defined themselves in public spaces in a way that made them foundational voices. While centered on Bennett's and Marson's poetry, *Reaching in & Speaking Out* investigates the ways their works have paved the way for Jamaican

women writers who continue to confront European imperialism, white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy.

This project unveils the nuanced ways Bennett and Marson used language and their experiences as black women to expose limiting social constructs directly related to colonialism and patriarchy. I draw upon postcolonial, black performance, and black feminist theories to study Bennett's and Marson's poetry as performances that are born and reborn through interaction with their respective audiences. My project thus contributes to bridging the gap in studies focused on Caribbean poetics and performance. I value the differences in the authors' poetic styles and delivery, recognizing the diversity in black women's expression while investigating their shared histories and cultural practices. This dissertation shows how Bennett's popular creative catalogue and Marson's trailblazing literary work expanded the visibility of black women's humanity at a time when, globally, spaces where black women's voices could be heard were limited.

DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Reaching in & Speaking Out

In her 1925 article, "Women as Leaders," activist and Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) leader, Amy J. Garvey advocates for the urgency for black women's advancement in society. She proclaims, "No line of endeavor remains closed for long to the modern woman...She is not afraid of hard work, and by being independent she gets more out of the present-day husband than her grandmother did in the good old days" (209). Garvey's article, published in the UNIA's *Negro World* newspaper, is ripe with bold, if at times controversial, proclamations and observations.

This rallying call to break the oppressive patriarchal ties relegating women to the home and roles that kept them in the shadows of men is a radical move during this time period. Ula Taylor notes both Amy Jacques Garvey's and Amy Ashwood Garvey's tremendous positive influence on the UNIA in regards to women's advancement. Taylor points out that "a society organized according to the principles of patriarchy was the trademark of most nationalist movements" (44). In regards to the women of the UNIA as a whole, Taylor points out that "The UNIA women must be commended for struggling against the totalizing nature of nationalist discourse. Assertively, they helped to redefine the appropriate roles for women in the association" (45). This need for mobilization against constricting patriarchal control was common in the African diaspora. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting cites Paulette Nardal's summation of the state of gender relations in the black community in Martinique during this period. As one of the founders of the Négritude movement centering black advancement, Nardal's observations reflect the

troubling realities necessitating action in this regard. Sharpley-Whiting states in *Beyond Negritude: Essays From Woman in the City*, "many of Martinique's predominantly black and métisse (mixed-race) middle-class women had 'envelop[ed] themselves,' as Nardal would write, 'in a haughty indifference' to social issues. This indifference Nardal linked initially to their disenfranchisement in the political process because of gender. Hence, they were cloistered from political and public life" (5). Scholar Keisha Blain points out, that by the 1940's there would be "significant transformation in the lives of black men and women across the United States and other parts of the globe." Still, even that "era of hope and possibility," would be "marred by the persistence of racial and gender inequality" (197).

Garvey points out in her article not only the problem of gender dynamics, but the ever present hindrances to black women's advancement through class and race. She writes, "The doll-baby type of woman is a thing of the past, and the wide-awake woman is forging ahead prepared for all emergencies, and ready to answer any call…" (211). Garvey's words here motion towards the myriad constricting forces that had long governed the black woman's existence.

Garvey's words and desire to rally for black women's causes in the 1920s situates the environment and frustrations that black women were facing globally at the time, but also conveys the tradition of strength and the historical legacy of a take-charge spirit that black Jamaican women could be inspired by. Though historically Garvey's many accomplishments remain in the shadow of her famous husband Marcus Garvey, her willingness to call out oppression in its various forms should be given attention. I trace the forthrightness and fortitude of Garvey to that of one of Jamaica's national heroes,

Queen Nanny of the Maroons, both being black women fulfilling the call to take action despite the consequences. It is with a similar spirit and in this tradition that I believe the Jamaican poets Una Marson and Louise Bennett find themselves. The histories these women speak to and the environment they make their voices heard within is what propels this dissertation.

Reaching in & Speaking Out examines gender, race, and class in 20th century Jamaica as evidenced through selected poems by Marson (1905-1965) and Bennett (1919-2006). This dissertation takes a multidisciplinary approach to the study of poetry by these two groundbreaking Jamaican women, prioritizing the emotional stakes and historical traditions connected to their words through the varied performances within their poetry. For me, this means keeping in mind the individual influences and vulnerabilities of each poet based on particular backgrounds, education, and social standing, and identifying how those aspects merge with their social climate and become visible through each poet's work. My study values that even within the small island of Jamaica (relative to global nations), there are stark differences between the communities that each woman comes from and that this informs their work.

The first half of the 20th century saw the rise of Jamaican literature. The poet J.E. Clare McFarlane highlights in his 1957 book, *A Literature in the Making*, some of these early poets including Marson, Walter Adolphe Roberts, Constance Hollar, Roger Mais, Tropica, and Claude McKay. Scholars such as Alison Donnell and Evelyn O' Callaghan have demonstrated the meaningful work of retrieving and engaging the voices of early

Caribbean women poets whose voices and presence were often marginalized.[1] In my dissertation I delve into key parts of the early creative history of the dynamic literature that the country has produced through examining Marson's and Bennett's work. My dissertation centers Marson and Bennett as leaders in the Jamaican literary tradition in myriad ways, including Marson as the earliest Jamaican woman poet to gain notoriety and Bennett as the most well-known woman poet/performer to emerge from the country and whose presence remains prominent posthumously within the country and globally.

I approach this dissertation keeping in mind that part of my goal for this project is to highlight the work of these women as rooted in an affirmative movement: through their bodies of creative work both women craft selves in different and equally important ways. On first look, Bennett and Marson have little in common outside of being Jamaican women, as their poetic style, delivery, and public personas differ greatly; while Marson's poems are often written in a standardized (or "Queen's") English, Bennett's poetry is delivered in Jamaican Creole English / Patwa (Patois). However, upon a closer look what becomes glaringly apparent is the immense work they both did to push against colonial structures and write themselves into the colonial and postcolonial landscape. Put another way, these women were defining themselves in public spaces at a time in the 20th century where they would have to be the foundational voices for women carving paths others could follow. In this respect, Marson takes the chronological lead, born in 1905, only 40 years after the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865, and 57 years before Jamaica would gain independence from the British. According to scholar Lloyd Brown, Marson was "the

[1] O'Callaghan's *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939* and Donnell's *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* both provide meaningful research towards remedying the lack of scholarship on the early periods in Caribbean women's writing.

earliest female poet of significance to emerge in West Indian literature" (34). Many of the barriers that Marson would find herself having to break down would help to make the task a bit less burdensome for black women writers emerging after her in Jamaica and Britain, the locations where she built her career. Bennett, though born in 1919, only 14 years after Marson, would embark on a career beginning in the 1930's and largely spanning the portion of the 20th century after Jamaican independence. This dissertation doesn't value one artist's work above the other, but positions Marson's and Bennett's work in relation to each other as two of Jamaica's literary mothers. In her book, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style,* Denise deCaires Narain considers the possibility of Marson having a "pioneering poetic status". My project extends work like Narain's in offering meaningful considerations of the potential impact of Marson's work. Moreover, by engaging Marson alongside Bennett, I aim to position both of their dynamic works as foundational to Jamaica's literary history.

Even though Marson is a lesser known writer than Bennett, she is celebrated as a trailblazer in that she is one of the earliest published Caribbean women poets, having released *Tropic Reveries* in 1930. But her notoriety in Jamaica today is modest in spite of her numerous published works and in spite of the fact she aided the careers of many writers through her broadcast work in England at the BBC. Some evidence suggests that Marson dealt with bouts of depression in her life, which led to a two year absence from the literary scene and the spread of rumors that perhaps strained the relationship with her audience (Jarrett-Macauley, 179). It is even said that during her career, the BBC refrained from broadcasting some of her poems that were deemed "contentious" (Jarrett-Macauley 159); poems addressing race and discrimination, like Marson often wrote, likely fell into

that category. It is clear to me that her talent and voice were silenced many times when she was alive, but it is a benefit to the literary world that her work exists in print and lives on. The scholarship on Marson's poetry, however, is scant and a goal of my dissertation is to contribute to her legacy by bringing attention to the intricacies of the narratives shared in her poems.

Bennett, on the other hand, is Jamaica's best known and most celebrated woman poet. She may be equally remembered for her poetry as she is remembered for her confident demeanor in her captivating stage and radio performances. As Mervyn Morris shares, "She became an authority on Jamaican culture. She lectured for the University College of the West Indies and, in Jamaica and abroad, was an invaluable resource person for many scholars...She was a mine of information on things Jamaican" (25). Throughout her career, Bennett's name would become aligned with efforts to uplift Jamaica and its culture. Though Bennett would move to Canada later on in her life, her image and work would remain as representational of her home country. I engage with both the overt and nuanced messages in the poetry produced by both of these women at times when tension and excitement were high in the country due to shifts in the social and political climate.

This dissertation extends the work of scholars like Narain, Donnell, Morris, Carolyn Cooper, and Delia Jarrett-Macauley, who have delved into these women's biographical histories and made a case for their relevance in the literary canon. I aim to extend their work by emphasizing performance elements in both Marson's and Bennett's creative works. When it comes to the function of performance in texts, a strict literary analysis has its limitations that can be transcended through engagement with performance concepts. My work engages the field of Postcolonial Literary Studies and the growing

field of Performance Studies to consider how both lenses can work in tandem to convey the complexity and polylithic nature of black Jamaican womanhood. Though I engage the Performance Studies field, I also engage black scholars who have developed their own theories of performance though not necessarily explicitly aligned with nor part of the field of Performance Studies. I aim to extend ideas on how creative texts and theory can work together to inform our understanding of each poet and also that these creative texts and theory are different angles of the same trajectory. Through reading Marson's and Bennett's work, we are called to engage with the transformative experience that each writer shares. Their creative works extend past the confines of their respective careers, changing over time, each decade providing its own unique circumstances that cause us to read and interpret the works through the backdrop of the current state of affairs.

While focusing on Bennett's and Marson's poetic works, my project investigates the ways in which black West Indian women, and Jamaican women, in particular, have responded to European imperialism, white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy. Through the performances evidenced in their texts, both women allow insight into their lives and communities. In her essay "Performance Practice as a Site of Opposition," bell hooks distinguishes two schools of African-American performance that apply in a black Caribbean context as well, concepts that I engage in my dissertation. hooks states,

> ...it is useful to distinguish between performance that is used to manipulate in the interests of survival (the notion of wearing a mask), and performance as ritual play (as art). Collapsing the two categories tends to imply that the performative arts in black expressive culture emerge as a response to circumstances of oppression and exploitation...One may

> engage in strategic performances in the interests of survival employing the same skills one uses to perform in the interest of ritual play, yet the performative standpoint alters both the nature and impact of the performance. In one context performance can easily become an act of complicity, in the other, it can serve as critical intervention, as a rite of resistance. (210)

hooks points to differing modes of performance, the traditional understanding of it as an art form and performance as a social act, focusing on the importance of their respective uses. I examine such performances in Marson's written work and Bennett's written as well as staged work. My primary interest lies in how various forms of performance are exposed in their texts. I employ performance theory as a means to further understand how these women combat social oppressions through their work, but also employ performance as expression and resistance. I suggest that there are performances embedded in their written words and I further examine the importance of their trailblazing texts to their communities in providing powerful representations of women in Jamaican society.

I consider identity formation of women in Jamaican literature through the lens of the narratives shared through Marson's and Bennett's respective works. This includes examining the roles that women were expected to play as well as the spaces where they were not welcomed. These roles include, but are not limited to, being mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. It is important to mention that though their time periods overlap, much of Bennett's life is lived in post-independent Jamaica while Marson lives primarily during pre-independent Jamaica, and so some of the social events reflected in their work are signs of their respective times. Woven through much of their works are calls for

social justice, reaching beyond entertaining the masses to expose hard truths as they see it. It is also important to keep in mind that the works of both authors are produced at a time when little attention was being paid to the advancement of women's issues in Jamaica. I further elucidate the histories their texts convey, including the important work of representing their own experiences. I suggest that the existence of their personal accounts serve to counter historical accounts of the time period that disregard the complexity of the interrelated racial and gender issues for black women in Jamaica. It is essential that we closely read and analyze the creative works produced by women during times when spaces for their voices were limited. Valuing these spaces as knowledge-producing benefits our understanding of them and their communities. One limitation of prioritizing their works as representative of Jamaican women of their respective times is that, ultimately, they are speaking for themselves and from their own perspectives. However, their works don't exist in a vacuum and are reflective of their communities and the social constructs they live with, many of the same social structures that other Jamaican women of their times also live with. To respond to this potential critique, I engage the works of multiple creatives in Chapter 4, "Talking Back: Jamaican Women Poets Building on Tradition and Extending Concepts of the Human," where I show themes in the works of other Jamaican women that run parallel to the themes presented in Bennett's and Marson's work.

The work of this project unveils the nuanced ways Bennett and Marson used language and their experiences as black women to work through and expose limiting social constructs directly related to colonialism and patriarchy. I employ an interdisciplinary approach drawing primarily upon postcolonial theories, black

performance theories, and black feminist theories. I draw upon Richard Schechner's view of performance as a "continuum" of behaviors as his approach allows for inclusivity of varied types of performance including ritual practices, the performing arts, and everyday actions (22). Employing a range of approaches best allows for this study of Bennett's and Marson's poetic texts to further engage as performances that are born and reborn through interaction with the audience. It is my desire that this method furthers scholarship on their work that is invested in strict literary analysis of the text to consider how methods of performance studies can help us to better understand what the text does. A crucial component of this project is documenting the historical narrative that these women construct through their work, providing representation for the oppressed while subverting oppressive forces.

Many of the works that I analyze from Marson and Bennett provide commentary on experiences that specifically concern Jamaicans. I identify areas of their respective works that tackle race, gender, and class. The decades leading up to Jamaica's independence in 1962 are a crucial time as the country was undergoing a transition from British colonial governance to independence. This is significant as the new government was making decisions for the Jamaican plurality during this essential turning point, but were not prioritizing black women's voices and interests. It is essential to pay attention to creative works and elements of performance in women's poetry during these times in part because there are so few places where they had representation. In much of their poetry Bennett and Marson present the complexities of the daily lives of Caribbean women by elucidating common concerns.

Though there is a dramatic difference in the poetic delivery of both women, they both confront issues of oppression, identity, and class distinction by using the art form to disseminate their ideas. For example, Marson's poem "In Jamaica" and Bennett's poem "Dutty Tough" both address the hard economic times in Jamaica; Marson's poem is written in standardized English while Bennett's is written in Patwa (Patois). Marson's poetry is almost exclusively written in standardized English, the common trend with her contemporaries. In her position as one of the first published women writers, it is understandable that she mostly relies on that norm. Donnell shares, "The literary quest for an appropriate voice and form during a time of such linguistic and cultural flux was both testing and insistent for Caribbean poets...Indeed, Marson's poetic writings energetically address the challenge of finding a literary voice for her own time and place from many directions" (27). Marson does, however, turn to incorporating Patwa in her work on occasion, as in the poem "Quashie Comes to London". In these areas of her writing where Marson steps away from the expected in language or content, her bold moves further blaze a trail for women artists to make their voices heard. Bennett, on the other hand, almost exclusively writes in Patwa and through her prioritization of Jamaican language becomes a force representing the country in a manner that becomes known for uplifting its citizens. Morris reminds, "Working in the language of the majority, she had many indications of their approval; and some members of the cultural establishment were supportive. But at every stage in her career she was opposed by persons anxious to defend Standard English against what they considered the virus of Creole" (xii).

Though they take drastically different approaches, through creative form both Marson and Bennett elucidate concerns representing other Jamaicans who may suffer in dire circumstances silently. Ketu Katrak asserts in "Decolonizing Culture" that

> Women writers' stances, particularly with regard to glorifying / denigrating traditions, vary as dictated by their own class backgrounds, levels of education, political awareness and commitment, and their search for alternatives to existing levels of oppression often inscribed within the most revered traditions. Their texts deal with and often challenge, their dual oppression--patriarchy that preceded and continues after colonialism and that inscribes the concepts of womanhood, motherhood...and a worsened predicament within a capitalist economic system introduced by the colonizers (240).

I argue that the risks both women take in their creative work to confront various oppressive societal norms were revolutionary for the literary world. Their dramatically different tactics serve to support the notion that there are multiple effective modes of resistance. The conditions of colonialism are woven throughout Marson's work, as the conditions of postcolonialism are woven throughout much of Bennett's work. All the while a patriarchal society persists, but each writer resists through their poetry and performance. While rooted in a study of Caribbean literature, my dissertation examines how traditional and everyday performance manifests in their poetry as they convey their stories and insight into societal ills in ways that require an understanding of the cultures and traditions they come from. This involves analyzing their words on the page, the issues they address or approach, the way they construct their sentences and how that might impact readers then and now, the cultures and traditions they are a part of, and the

moment in history where they find themselves. The work of this dissertation allows me to reveal the intricacies of how blackness and womanhood are imagined in and through Marson's and Bennett's performances as poets while I interrogate the social constructs they emerge from.

Though a fair amount of research has been done on Louise Bennett the poet, including Morris's essential biographical work, my project highlights how her poetic works elucidate many of the hidden everyday experiences and complexities in the lives of black Jamaican women. This is important, I believe, because though Jamaica shares much in common with other islands, there are great differences between the cultures and people. Bennett is affectionately known by many as Ms. Lou and regarded as Jamaica's "first lady of comedy." She weaves humor throughout her work, connecting to her audience by engaging with the experiences of everyday Jamaicans using Jamaican vernacular, language that Kamau Braithwaite terms, *nation language* (13-14). Bennett's particular insistence on the use of language familiar to Jamaicans in her poetry and traditional performances reflects pride in the ways in which Jamaicans speak and immediately confronts the overbearing nature of a colonial education. Bennett separates herself from other Jamaican writers of her time through not only her commitment to language unique to Jamaica, but through the joyful attitude that often permeates the literature.

Though Marson's work is lesser known than Bennett's in Jamaica and certainly in a global sense, her under-studied work engages with an array of topics that remain important for Jamaicans, such as racism, classism, sexism, and colorism as these issues have affected the country since colonization. In one of her more anthologized poems,

"Nigger," Marson addresses racism head on, dramatizing the pain she feels when the word is "flung" at her. The poem places the reader in the speaker's shoes, as Marson recreates several moments of pain, disgust, and a desire for revenge. Marson takes unapologetic risks in her work and confronts those social norms that aim to demean her and stifle her spirit. As one of the first published Jamaican poets, Marson's work sets an important precedent, paving the way for Caribbean women writers who would follow her. Not only does her work engage with the roles and relationships of Jamaican women in both Jamaica and Britain, but many of the themes explored in her poetry directly correlate with her work as an advocate for gender and race equality in a time when there were few spaces where black women could make their voices heard. Marson's poetry is in line with what we might expect from traditional lyric poetry in terms of providing personal narrative, but my dissertation also makes connections between her experience and the experiences shared by Bennett, identifying patterns of circumstance and experience related to race, gender, and class.

In contrast to Marson, Bennett's poems consistently engage in oral tradition and local language. Her written poetry is very much in tune with her Jamaican audience. At times, her words pointedly question authoritative powers in society as she represents a larger communal body by boldly making society's ills plain. Through multiple platforms including stage, radio, and television, Bennett is granted access into the homes of Jamaicans who welcome her. The trust she gains from Jamaicans is in large part through her reliable speech and mannerisms aligning her with the plight and concerns of the everyday working class. Bennett's poetry isn't overly concerned with being understood by those who do not understand Jamaican vernacular; in her work I see a desire to

examine and interrogate social structures while urging her audience to do so alongside her. We see this in Bennett's poem "Big Wuds" when she uses humor to expose the empty words of politicians. Humor is an important component of Bennett's work, oftentimes having the dual function of facilitating another way of seeing a serious topic while providing the relief of laughter. Her platform and ability to confront authority using humor and dramatic presence to highlight absurdities was unprecedented at the time and it is this dramatic presence that has been the focus for many critics. I believe, however, that the connection she seeks with her audience through subtle references and clear reimaginings of uniquely Jamaican situations in her poetry allows us to see another side of Bennett. Bennett's poetry enacts Trinh Minh-ha's assertion in *When the Moon Waxes Red* that the interaction between the performer and spectator should be reciprocal (93). Bennett is aware of the audience and establishes a relationship with the reader. I argue that her work anticipates potential reactions and responds as she sees fit, though always veering on the side of the disenfranchised. We see an example of this in Bennett's poem, "Bans O' Killing," in which Bennett confronts the character Mass Charlie, representative of powers wishing to maintain colonial ideals in Jamaica, saying "Yuh gwine kill all English dialect / Or jus Jamaica one?" (292). In presenting this question, she immediately gives the audience work to do in considering what Mass Charlie might respond as she goes on to argue against hierarchy in matters of language and dialect. The question of what is proper and improper speech is a question that often plagues formerly colonized countries, and in this poem Bennett defends and protects the language of Jamaicans. In this dissertation, I uncover more of the nuances in the performative delivery of such poems.

My project contributes to bridging the gap of studies focused on Caribbean poetics and performance. I value the differences in the authors' poetic styles and delivery in my dissertation, recognizing the diversity in black womanhood and expression while investigating their shared histories and cultural practices. This dissertation shows how Bennett's and Marson's poetic works expanded the visibility of black women's humanity at a time when, globally, spaces where black women's voices could be heard were limited. By exploring Bennett's popular creative catalogue alongside Marson's trailblazing literary work, I acknowledge both women's work as crucial in providing a foundation for the women writers that follow. Thus, my project is invested in both Marson's and Bennett's legacy and envisions that Marson's groundbreaking poetic works are crucial to understanding the Caribbean literary canon, in a similar vein as Bennett.

In Chapter 2, "Insider/ Outsider Gaze: Cultivating Community Through Culture, Tradition and Words," I identify how Marson and Bennett cultivate their own spaces and tell their own stories by drawing on experiences that resonate with other Jamaicans in order to create community. I identify an insider/outsider as one who can be categorized as being a part of a community (insider), or excluded from a community (outsider), based on their proximity to established understandings within the group. In "Resistant Performance," Marvin Carlson states, "Beyond art as process is the idea of art as a means to make community rather than commodity. Imbedded in that is the need to discover and make connections between a culturally and spiritually dissociated past and our present social and political realities" (309). The stories Marson and Bennett share through their poems reflect experiences of two black women who have been raised in a Jamaica that is experiencing the effects of colonialism and each goes about sharing these stories in

different ways. Bennett shares with her audience through unapologetic use of nation language and contexts specific to Jamaica, while Marson does so by connecting to Jamaicans in the country and abroad through content that reflects her experiences in both spaces. Some questions I address in this chapter are: How do these women communicate their fears, hopes, loves and insecurities to us? Who are they speaking to? Who do they represent and whose stories are being made visible? Who are they talking to? Who is listening? Who is the outsider? What aspects of their performances seem to go unnoticed? This chapter analyzes selected poems from Marson and Bennett by engaging with postcolonial theories, black feminist theories and black performance theories to examine answers to these questions. This chapter includes a subsection that analyzes excerpts of Bennett's staged performances, including the audio recording, "Visiting With Ms. Lou". A comparison between written and staged performances helps to show the nuances of behavior that could be missed when reading.

The opening of Chapter 3, "Humor as Resistance in the work of Louise Bennett and Una Marson," includes a brief discussion of humor theory in a Caribbean context. I explore humor as a defense mechanism specifically through Bennett's reflections in interviews and within her poetry. Morris' research on Bennett is of great use here as I re-examine popular perceptions and interpretations of her work. This chapter focuses primarily on Bennett's work, specifically looking at how her sense of humor tackles subjects in a changing Jamaica before and after independence. However, in this chapter, I also focus on the perhaps unexpected humor that appears in Marson's work. Though many are familiar with Bennett's sense of humor, I highlight a more implicit humor we can find in some of Marson's poems. Certainly, the way each author in this study thinks

about and incorporates humor differs, but we can move closer to seeing how each writer transcends life's hardships through their use of humor. In identifying common characteristics of both writers, the payoff for this chapter speaks to the necessity of humor in conveying each author's truth.

Chapter 4, "Talking Back: Jamaican Women Poets & Performers Building on a Tradition," identifies correlations between my analysis of Marson's and Bennett's work with other 20th century Jamaican women poets. Some questions that I consider in this chapter are: How do women make good on what society expects of them? How do they subvert these expectations and at what consequence? Here, I move outward from focus on Marson and Bennett to consider the literary lineage of Jamaican women writers and the building on a foundation laid by Marson. Additional artists whose works I discuss in relation to Marson and Bennett are the poets Michelle Cliff, Jean "Binta" Breeze, Claudia Rankine, Staceyann Chin, and reggae performer, Spice. I focus on how these women harness their power to navigate society's expectations in differing, but effective ways, across various decades. A goal of this chapter is to consider issues of gender and race that persist in the country and what advancements have been made as relayed through the written narratives and testaments of these writers. I thread together elements of their work that relate to themes explored in the work of Marson and Bennett and highlight the value systems they develop that help them to thrive as artists. Of particular interest in this chapter is identifying how several Jamaican women poets use their platforms to expose the resistant ideologies that impose on bodies and human rights.

In the conclusion, I further explore the current Jamaican social climate in relation to Marson's and Bennett's work. Though both women are influential in their respective

historical times, their influence does not end there. I discuss the particular elements of their stories that demand an investment in their legacies moving forward.

Through this project, I desire to convey to my audience that these women are not only a part of Jamaican history, but their presence is relevant in scholarly conversations centered on the advancement of black people all over the world. Through Marson's and Bennett's work, my project inserts itself into the conversation of how we can create agency in black communities when residual effects of centuries of oppression through white imperialism and patriarchy continue to create barriers to advancement. Though there is still so much work to do, retracing our histories can help to strategize the way forward. The powerful and creative self-productions within black women's experiences that these women express through their work demands that we listen and pay attention to our common humanity.

CHAPTER 1

Insider/Outsider Gaze: Cultivating Community Through Culture, Tradition, and Words

Overview

In this chapter, I engage several methods to examine performance in first Una Marson's poetry and then Louise Bennett's poetry to consider the effect in creating insiders and outsiders. I later focus on selected traditional staged performances and consider how creating this insider/outsider dynamic between the audience and poet leads to community building. I argue that though Marson opens doors and provides foundational tools to contribute to an easier path for black women artists who would follow her, Bennett is more effective in her pursuit of building community. In reading the poems of both women, it is undeniable that each poet's style is dramatically different, most obviously through the language in which each chooses to write, Bennett in Jamaican Patwa/Patois and Marson primarily in British English. Through interrogating key tools each poet uses in their work to communicate with their audiences, I assert that their openness to exposing individual hardships helps to provide a representational voice for those experiencing similar effects of colonialism and patriarchal societal structures. In addition, the contrast of their styles allows for multiple communities to form, unified in their desire to resist the aforementioned social structures and write themselves into the landscape of what it means to be postcolonial. To this end, Marson and Bennett create the framework for my analysis through the topics they choose to present in their work, the geographical locations they come from and choose to write about, and the communities they reflect.

When Marson longs for Jamaica after sharing the racial injustices she experiences while in England, she captures common experiences of Jamaicans in Britain in the early to mid 20th century. Alison Donnell notes in her essay, "Una Marson: feminism, anti-colonialism and a forgotten fight for freedom," that "arriving in 1932, she came to Britain twenty years before mass immigration, before the flourishing of West Indian literary voices and before the recognised presence of a difference had 'creolised the metropole'" (116). For context, Marson went to Britain before Louise Bennett's famous poem, "Colonisation in Reverse," would be truly relevant. This meant that if Marson were to succeed in England, she would have to blaze her own trail and create within a space where she was not familiar and far less welcomed as a black woman, even as a subject of the British empire. Marson essentially had to extend her ideas of community in this new environment. Life as a Jamaican in England is a common topic for Marson and her poetry allows us to see the struggles she faced while living there, including racism, colorism, and as a result of these oppressions--homesickness.

Since Bennett's poetry is primarily based on Jamaican experiences within the country, the reader is presented with a different idea of community. We see community cultivated when Bennett conjures images of Aunty Roachy in her book of the same name, tapping into a history of Jamaican storytelling that unites Jamaicans through culture and tradition. Though both women come from a middle class background, they hail from different areas of Jamaica and grow up at different times. Bennett, in particular, presents a body of work that does not necessarily reflect what one might expect given her social standing as she distances herself from normative middle class values.

I argue that through looking at key features in their poetry, we can see communities begin to form through an insider and outsider lens. In both women's cases we can understand their individual experiences as representative of a larger body of Jamaicans with different experiences but all the while connected through the fact of their nationality. Still, within the scope of this connection, their bodies of work show a stark difference in how they viewed and engaged their communities. Whereas Bennett's work conveys a unification of Jamaicans under a nationalist agenda as foundational to her work, Marson's community building in her poetry is less straightforward. As scholar Raj Chetty points out in his essay on Marson's Jamaica-based play *Pocomania* titled "Teach His People the Value of Unity": Black Diaspora, Women, and Una Marson's *Pocomania*," "Beyond confirming or denying Marson's Afrocentric credentials, *Pocomania* uncovers Marson's honesty: her portrayal does not simply avoid relying on Pan-African discourse to gloss over the differences between Jamaicans of African descent, but stresses their lack of racial unity" (38). Chetty brings attention to Marson's elucidation within her play of the complexities within Jamaican communities concerning color and class hierarchies. I argue that similar perspectives also become evident through her poetry once she moves to Britain where the scope of her passion for black advancement and ideas of community become broadened. Specifically important for what I aim to highlight in Marson's construction of community is how many of her poetic works demonstrate aspects of her lived experience and observations in both Jamaica and Britain, sometimes at the expense of the communities she'd established in prior works. While Bennett's work primarily maintains its focus on Jamaica, Jamaicans, and decolonial thinking, over time Marson's work becomes concerned with a more global

sense of community and the various barriers to black advancement within and outside Jamaica.

Some questions I aim to address in this chapter are: How do these women communicate their fears, hopes, loves and insecurities, and to whom are they communicating them? Whom do they represent and whose stories are being made visible? Who is listening? What aspects of their written performances seem to go unnoticed and what are the tensions between the writers and their audiences? These questions help us to get to a more intimate reading of both women's work, work that begs for such readings as each woman shares their personal struggles and joys during a time when black women's voices in the public arena were severely limited. For Bennett, her use of play through changes in voice, use of proverbs, and engagement in ritual, makes clear her layered connection to the audience. Marson's range of poetic styles and themes that vary from life outside of Jamaica to concepts of beauty in multiple contexts reflects a desire to connect with an audience that can understand or wishes to understand her struggle and the complexities of black womanhood. Guided by these questions, I engage with sources that add lenses I believe will contribute to the reading of the work of both poets.

I engage the works of Bennett and Marson with the theoretical insight of scholars Diana Taylor, Richard Schechner, and Carolyn Cooper to unveil further depth in the actions and words of both poets and to provide ways in which to understand how they employ multiple components of performance to create community. This understanding includes the everyday performances reflected in the work of both women. My desire to uncover the mechanics of the cultivation of insiders and outsiders is tied to what the poets

wish to convey through the choices they make, but also what is revealed that is not necessarily a result of deliberate action. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor discusses the role of performance in making political claims and establishing cultural identity. Taylor says "performance functions as a way of knowing not simply as a subject of analysis" (xvi). This notion challenges techniques of analysis to go a bit further. It conveys the power of performance in empowering persons to represent themselves and their communities and to share their knowledge of self in addition to the body of ideas within a culture during a given time. Taylor asks, "How does performance transmit cultural memory and identity?", arguing that "we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices" (19). This idea helps to guide my thinking of each poet's work in this chapter, that there is more knowledge to be gathered and that this definition of performance can help us to get there.

What shows in my analysis of Marson's and Bennett's respective works is how performance registers in each poet's everyday life and in ways we might not expect--an interplay between ritual, gender, and race. The manner in which each of these components manifests in the daily lives of these women can be subtle or overt. This becomes evident through close attention to the interactions within their work, showing us how they are viewed, but also how they view and value themselves. Through exploring these varied performances, we see how each poet builds a community of both insiders and outsiders.

Marson's Jamaica, 1930

> All hail to thee! Fair island of the West,
> Where thy dear people are forever blest
> With beauteous gifts from nature's blessed hand,
> Lavished in rich profusion o'er the land,

Welcome be all who journey many a mile
To share the joys of this our lovely isle:
Fond nature still invites, -- 'Come, be my guest
And I will give thee gladness, peace and rest!' (56)

The poems in *Tropic Reveries*, Una Marson's 1930 book debut, find her sharing with an imagined public about life in Jamaica. Providing what a foreign gaze might expect of the tropics, "Jamaica," the poem featured above, paints a picturesque scene as the speaker walks us through elements of island life that are beautiful and pleasant. The four stanzas of the poem are deeply invested in emphasizing the natural beauty of the island and even pose an invitation to visitors in the last two lines: "-- 'Come, be my guest / And I will give thee gladness, peace and rest'" (56). Given Jamaica's tortured history at the hands of colonizers, it might be difficult to understand the carefree nature of the poem in the context of the early 20th century. Yet, Marson's choice to open the poem with "All hail to thee! / Fair island of the West," prompts readers to consider Jamaica in a privileged position, worthy of respect from the "All" she identifies. There seems to be a stark contrast between the reality of pre-independent Jamaica and the invitation to enjoy the lush flora and fauna of the country, especially since the poem was written by a black Jamaican woman. As Marson's "Jamaica" was published prior to her move to Britain, we can also gather that distance from the country does not likely inspire the poem's sentimentality.

A less skeptical reading might insist that the speaker in the poem is only singing the praises of a beautiful country. Donnell identifies Marson's representation of Jamaica in this poem as a "troubled allusion to an Edenic vision," and points us to other poems in *Tropic Reveries* that offer more depth and complexities than "a vision of natural opulence which balances on the very edge of stereotype" (29). Donnell identifies these seemingly

contradictory elements in Marson's work. Still, there seems to be something else happening in Marson's "Jamaica"; the irony is certainly worth investigating in addition to the sentimentality of the speaker's personal connection to homeland. In extending the reading of this poem I wish to consider the speaker in relation to the historical time and place; considering the audience Marson seems to be speaking to becomes essential.

Though many of Marson's early poems focus on romantic love and the dynamics of such relationships, another focus emerges that we can see clearly in this poem: the love and adoration for her home country, a love that is arguably also romantic. But given the colonial status of the country pre-independence, how might we reconcile Marson's romanticized version of Jamaica in this poem? We might gather that Marson may have aimed to write what the poetry reading public would want to read. As Donnell states in her introduction to Marson's *Selected Poems*, "poetry in Jamaica in the 1930s appears to have been favoured by those striving to achieve the communication of so-called 'universal values'" (21). Additionally, C.L.R. James notes that much of the best writing from the West Indies up until the late 1960's was "seen through a European-educated literary sieve" (165). James' statement encourages us to consider the effect of deprioritizing one's own cultural lens in favor of the colonizing country. This begs the question: who was the imagined public for Marson in this poem written early in her career and was she indeed only mimicking the popular style of the time seen through this sieve and thus excluding those outside of that distinction?

Marson's "Jamaica" is doing more than jotting down observations of the beautiful land she lives in. We can argue that the paradise personified in the poem also exposes the fact that Marson belonged to the Jamaican middle-class and lived a more economically

stable life than most Jamaicans. In his memoir *Familiar Stranger,* Stuart Hall explains his life as a member of the Jamaican middle-class in the mid-1900's as "constrained by those multiple grids of class, status, colour, subordination and dependency which were the lifeblood of the subaltern middle-class imaginary" (58). Hall's use of the word imaginary insists on the interrogation of the very systems that operate based on the falsehoods of security that constructs such as class and color reproduce. To engage this notion with the Jamaica that Marson constructs in her poem, the scene enacted reflects a privileged social status. Hall's framing of the Jamaican middle-class makes the ease and carefree nature of Marson's "Jamaica" easier to understand as it reflects elements of an idealized Jamaican. However, the world Marson creates in the poem isn't as confined to a subjective 'middle-class imaginary' as it first appears. Through her words, Marson is also drawing a line between what I refer to henceforth as insiders and outsiders. In this particular poem, insiders are those who call the land home and outsiders those classified as visitors or onlookers. Marson's use of the word 'guest' presents a distancing of self from visitors. The very politeness of the word might signal for outsiders to be on their best behaviour, but the word also implies accommodation for those guests from insiders. There is a community being created here. The poem reveals the insiders through the author's seeming connection to those belonging to the community in which the poet identifies, in this case Marson's fellow country people. Outsiders become those that do not belong to that community and will only access the country through a lens of belonging elsewhere. However, readers may be left to wonder: who is tasked to provide "guests" with "gladness, peace and rest"? In raising the question of audience and the question of who

belongs to Marson's Jamaica, participating individuals are positioned as players in a scene where each member is called to behave accordingly.

As a motivating force, I desire for the creative work excerpted from Bennett and Marson in this chapter to engage the overarching idea of "the little theatre" that Stuart Hall references in *Familiar Stranger*. Regarding the family dynamic of his household during his young years (58), Hall shares the ways in which each family member operates having a role corresponding to social structures outside of the home. The relationship I draw here is that each poem reflects particular social structures and tensions and in each poet's relaying of this, members of the audience can see the role they are cast in--within each poem is a *little theatre*, a performance. Through actions, voice, scene and the backdrop of time the performance within the poem reveals itself.

Marson as Insider and Outsider

Marson's career trajectory shows that she was determined to pursue her goals as a creative in spite of the reality that many of the roles she embarked on were ones that black women had previously been shut out from. In a similar vein as Phillis Wheatley who created space as the first published African American woman poet, Marson was a trailblazer helping to lay the vital foundation for the Jamaican woman creative, though in her lifetime large scale recognition for her wide-ranging creative works eluded her. As one of the first published West Indian women poets who at various times in her life also held the roles of playwright, radio host, and speaker, Marson reimagined the role of the Jamaican woman and lived it. This by no means came easy, and Marson left Jamaica in order to heighten her chances at achieving many of her goals. This migration from a colonized yet familiar homeland to the land of the colonizer inevitably meant that Marson

would be faced with new challenges. Marson, I argue, built community through her work and connection to audience in these vastly different spaces, though her ability to do this effectively and consistently was at times tested.

The wide range of Marson's influence is conveyed through the poetic forms she engages, though some criticism frames this as a negative in understanding her work. Donnell points out that some scholars have categorized Marson's poetry "according to oppositional poetic and political modes: either sentimental or polemical, feminine or feminist, resistant or complicit" (12). This seemingly difficult to categorize style is telling in that the diverse subject matters and focus in her poetry indicate that Marson desired to communicate with many different communities. Marson's roles sometimes differed based on her location and to this end she catered to multiple audiences. Her poetry, it seems, sought to connect with particular communities that, like her, struggled with belonging after leaving the familiarity of their homeland. As it was the case for many writers of color in the late 1800's and early 1900's coming from the US and the Caribbean, Britain often provided more opportunities than in their home countries (Douglas, 232). In leaving her familiar homeland of Jamaica, Marson would find herself as an outsider in Britain. However, as a Jamaican in Britain, Marson maneuvered her way through multiple contexts and talked to various publics as a public intellectual, cross-genre writer, and radio host.

Marson Developing Self In Diaspora

Longing for Jamaica is a common theme in Marson's poetry. The author clearly struggled with being outside of Jamaica, writing many poems about missing the island. She also wrote about the struggles in England that pushed her to miss her home country.

Poems like “In Jamaica,” “Home Thoughts,” and the aptly titled “Nostalgia" find the poet reminiscent and it is clear that the country, in spite of its political, economical, and social issues, held some of her sweetest memories. Donnell notes that Marson was not trying to escape her homeland, as many of her male peers at the time. Instead, “For [Marson], the journeys to Britain were prompted more by an awareness of the need to see Jamaica as part of the larger colonial, Caribbean, and later African, picture” (116). Marson therefore saw a possibility for her small home island to be a part of larger conversations within the world, seeing Britain as a gateway to actualizing this. Nonetheless, though Jamaicans were members of the British empire, they were far removed from Britain itself and the image white British people wanted to associate themselves with. Marson would find that the hardships of living as a stranger in a new land were compounded by the fact that her skin color meant that she immediately would be identified as an outsider. In considering community building, the role of the body in helping to construct that community requires us to also think about society's influence in shaping the individual’s view of self. We see in Marson’s poetry several identity shifts as she considers the roles she fulfills at any given moment in her life. Many such shifts find Marson considering the fact of her brown body in the context of a very white and unwelcoming Britain where she has to endure anti-black racism.

In a radical move, Marson boldly confronts the subject of anti-black racism and its damaging emotional effects in her poem “Nigger,” published in *The Keys* magazine in 1933. The publication was edited by Marson for The League of Coloured Peoples, an organization formed by physician Dr. Harold Moody “which began to campaign for full civil rights for black people in Britain, and which came increasingly to condemn white

racial superiority in the empire overseas" (Schwarz, 52). In line with the magazine's focus on black advancement, Marson's poem takes on a factor obstructing advancement, the cruel treatment of black people by whites in Britain.

Marson confronts the oppressive history of the word, 'nigger,' and the ill intentions behind its usage through the speaker in the poem attempting to come to terms with an experience which aims to diminish their sense of self. The poem finds the speaker in deep reflection when the slur is used against them as the poem begins, "They called me 'Nigger'" (85). The poem moves to share with the audience who the offenders were, people who are identified as "little white urchins". The insult, "little white urchins," is used to counter those who have attempted to dehumanize the speaker. Marson walks us through the speaker's experience of being othered saying, "They laughed and shouted / As I passed along the street, / They flung it at me: / 'Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!'" As Margo Jefferson states in her *New York Times* article "Revisions; Labels Change, Carrying Different Emotional Baggage", "if names didn't matter, the groups with power wouldn't have so many insulting names for the groups without it" (867). Marson conveys the disgust in the voices of the taunting children and the anger of the speaker who looks inward to question the resistance to retaliate violently, asking in the second stanza, "What made me keep my fingers / From choking the words in their throats?" (85). In posing this question to the audience, Marson calls out to a community of supporters, people who can sympathize or empathize. The next few lines find the speaker still in question as to why the word triggered so many conflicting emotions. The speaker asks two additional questions,

What made my face grow hot,
The blood boil in my veins
And tears spring to my eyes?
What made me go to my room
And sob my heart away
Because white urchins
Called me “Nigger”? (85)

Marson conveys the flux of emotions: this time the pain the speaker is left feeling prompts them to resort again to their own name calling.

The speaker does not appear to be the subservient and scared recipient of the verbal blows that these taunters might desire, however. The speaker’s anger rises just below the point of action. The poem does not reference the potential recourse of actions that a black person in the society would have to endure if they were to act on their feelings of anger in such a situation. Instead, it dwells in the very emotions the words conjure for black people and the insistence of British white people to continue using and weaponizing the word. Marson conveys to the reader that it was the speaker’s willpower that saved the verbal attackers from a physical altercation when she shares that tears sprang to her eyes. Instead of allowing the taunters to see the effect of their words, the speaker waits to return to their room to cry. There is a sense here that the speaker doesn’t want to give the offenders the satisfaction of seeing the pain they caused.

Marson moves in the third stanza to share that the speaker does have a choice in how they respond. Marson writes, “What makes the dark West Indian / Fight at being called a Nigger?” (85). Even in this experience meant to reduce the speaker based on race, they find their agency in articulating this choice to not allow the taunters to see physical manifestations of the anger by fighting or crying. The strength of the speaker in this moment is a facade, but a necessary one for them to maintain control in the situation

they have been forced into. Though the speaker does not act on their anger, their true desires are shown through the poem. We are made to see their strength even though the "little white urchins" could not. It is as Zora Neale Hurston says in her 1928 essay "How it Feels to be Colored Me": "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (215). The words *flung* at the speaker can be seen as an enactment of what Hurston refers to as "a sharp white background"-- here, it is that word that disrupts the speaker's life and dehumanizes them.

The speaker, however, allows the third stanza of the poem to focus outward to consider a community under perpetual attack, knowing that what they've experienced is a common part of the black experience in Britain. The initial line of questioning continues, "What makes the dark West Indian / Fight at being called Nigger? / What is there in that word / That should strike like a dagger / To the heart of Coloured men / And make them wince"? (85). The stressed syllables within the words "What makes the dark West Indian" followed by the word "Fight…" in the next line, creates a powerful sonic force within the poem. Additionally, the break between the two lines causes an enjambment that first speaks to the humanity of the 'dark West Indian' and then questions, "Fight at being called Nigger?" It is as if the speaker wonders if the word should have as much power as it does, while still recognizing that its painful effects are inevitable. Still, through this move to consider the pain of other black people who have a history of oppression triggered through hearing the word, Marson shares the collective pain of the community. The speaker is shown as a representative of a larger body having to experience the hurtful nature of the word. Marson starts the fourth stanza, shifting the address by turning outward writing, "You of the white skinned Race / You who profess

such innocence". Whereas earlier in the poem Marson primarily conveys the painful experience within the black community regarding the word and its implications, she moves in the fourth stanza to point fingers, blatantly calling out this cruel action from white people. Marson also calls out the audacity of guilty parties to "profess such innocence". We see through these instances that Marson has made clear the division she feels between the insiders and outsiders so that when we encounter the opening line of the sixth stanza that says, "We will not be called "Niggers," it is clear who Marson has pulled into this circle to take a stand. The turn to include the word "we" and the forceful nature of the line tell outsiders that this proclamation is on behalf of a group with which the speaker feels solidarity. Marson also infers that black solidarity is bolstered through the religious alliance she includes in the poem:

> God keep my soul from hating such mean souls,
> God keep my soul from hating
> Those who preach the Christ
> And say with churlish smile
> "This place is not for Niggers." (86)

Here, the speaker and God are made to be on the same side as the speaker wills for help in not being moved to hate the "mean souls" though they've provided good reason throughout the poem as to why such a feeling would be warranted.

In a similar manner, the poem "Another Mould" from Marson's 1931 collection, *Heights and Depths*, pointedly addresses white society, confronting the societal norm of white supremacy. Marson writes, "You can talk about your babies / With blue eyes and hair of gold, / But I'll tell you bout an angel / That's cast in another mould" (77). Marson negates white beauty ideals as she writes, "She is brown just like a biscuit / And she has the blackest eyes / That don't for once remind you / Of the blue of tropic skies". Through

this poem, Marson shows the audience that the "brown skin cherub" is the speaker's preference and sweet in their own right; however, the reference to "the blue of tropic skies" reminds us that in spite of the stated intention, the comparison to white beauty standards still exists. The speaker still counterpoints black beauty aesthetics to Eurocentric ones, conveying the far reaching control of white supremacy. In this poem there is a clear desire to hold the beauty of the brown child as enough; hold her to the light, though the societal constraints remain in spite of the intention.

It seems that the confidence Marson tries to instill in the "brown skin cherub" is rather difficult to come by. Though Marson speaks words of affirmation in "Another Mould", she exposes the struggle tied to that confidence in "Kinky Hair Blues" from her 1937 collection, *The Moth and the Star*. It is important to note that in including the reference to the American musical form of the blues within the title of the poem, Marson draws connection to a wider audience connected by the social struggle placed upon those with the common factor of kinky hair. In her book *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style*, Denise deCaires Narain notes several additional occasions of Marson's reference to the blues in her poems that "experiment with the African American speech rhythms and musical influences characteristic of the work of Langston Hughes and others involved in the Harlem Renaissance" (24). This move is in line with her desire to reach a wider audience, engaging various groups of black people. In "Kinky Hair Blues," Marson repeats several lines like a mantra that exposes the speaker's feelings of being stuck between loving herself for who she is and wishing to have physical features that she feels would be more likely to get her romantic attention from men. The poem starts,

Gwine find a beauty shop
Cause I ain't a belle.
Gwine find a beauty shop
Cause I ain't a lovely belle.
The boys pass me by,
They say I's not so swell (144)

In these lines the speaker centers the male gaze as setting the standard for who is deemed beautiful. The implication here is that the beauty shop can provide what the speaker needs in order to receive the attention desired. In the third stanza Marson writes, "I hate dat ironed hair / And dat bleaching skin," then repeats the two lines encouraging the reader to take notice of this sentiment. The speaker then shares, "But I'll be all alone / If I don't fall in". Here, Marson points to women who've changed their features to remove the kinks from their hair and lighten their skin to find companionship. The skin and hair are treated here as costume as we are privy to the knowledge that the speaker would rather not alter their appearance, but is a victim to the societal pressure of white supremacy. In his description of the broad spectrum of performance to include everyday life, Schechner states, "Usually a person knows when she is playing a role and when she is 'being herself'. To 'be myself' is to behave in a relaxed and unguarded manner. To 'perform myself' means to take on the appearance [of another]" (146). In this sense, a performance of self for Marson would be straightened hair and lightened skin, features that might garner romantic attention though they are undesirable to her. The kinky haired black woman of this poem must alter her appearance to better fit European standards of beauty which are standards that the men she wishes to attract are looking for in their partners. As Marson's *The Moth and the Star* was published after leaving Jamaica, the male gaze of the poem likely belongs to multiple contexts, united in their preference for a

light skinned, straight haired woman, and resistance to see beauty in Afro-centric features.

We might read the fifth stanza as a major shift in the poem when Marson says "I like me black face / And me kinky hair" (91). This can be seen as the speaker performing an act of self love. By repeating these words there is an attempt by the speaker to give herself the love that society tells her she should not have. Still, the ending to the poem is one of despair as Marson writes, "Now I's gwine press me hair / And bleach me skin," and after repeating those lines again like a mantra, the poem ends with "What won't a gal do / Some kind a man to win". If companionship is what the speaker in the poem wants, it is evident that society has shown that she is not desirable in her current state. The speaker clearly wants to remain as she is, but feels pressured to perform another self. While recognizing one's self worth is encouraged in "Another Mould," the speaker makes apparent their feelings of unworthiness in "Kinky Hair Blues" and together they reflect the constant struggle to subvert white supremacist norms.

Marson shows us through "Kinky Hair Blues" a more controversial positioning of herself as both insider and outsider. Marson tows a fine line here in highlighting a divide within black communities in her effort to devalue the combination of light skin and straightened hair as aspiring to European standards of beauty. The practices that Marson exposes are generally done in the privacy of one's home or within a small group and those who take part may not want this made public or to be confronted by it. Though her larger project aspires to highlight black beauty and connect to the black community as only an insider could, she threatens to alienate some members of her audience that may

disregard or reject Marson's assertion that they have chosen to change their features to please a skewed male gaze influenced by white social standards.

"Little Brown Girl," a poem also included in *The Moth and the Star*, is a reflective poem that, like "Another Mould," conjures images of a brown child. We are disabused of this childlike image as we consider that the interactions Marson shares throughout the poem are not typical of childish behaviours and so we can infer that the subject of the poem is likely an adult belittled through their negative interactions with white people in England. In this poem Marson exposes white curiosity of black bodies, asking the "little brown girl" questions,

> Why do you start and wince
> When white folks stare at you?
> Don't you think they wonder
> Why a little brown girl
> Should roam about their city
> Their white, white city? (92)

The speaker in this poem is implicit and appears to mock the Londoner through repetition for emphasis when questioning "their city / Their white, white city?" Later on in the poem Marson writes, "And the folks are all white-- / White, white, white," making it clear how out of place the speaker feels. As the speaker appears to be treated as a spectacle, she begins to question her own brown body's presence in England through the questions placed upon her, such as "What are you seeking, / What would you have?" Throughout the poem, the speaker is scrutinized. Further into the poem, the speaker mocks the ignorance of Londoners who might ask,

> And from whence are you
> Little brown girl?
> I guess Africa or India
> Ah no, from some island
> In the West Indies,
> But isn't that India all the same? (94)

It is clear from the sarcasm Marson uses throughout the poem when the speaker imitates the Londoners that she looks upon them with disdain not only for their lack of knowledge of migrants, but their seeming disregard for the nuances of difference between brown people and the geographies they represent. When the Londoner assumes the speaker is "from some island", they are also showing their indifference to who she actually is and exposing the superiority that they feel over her. What the mimicked speaker does care to know, however, is "How is it you speak English as though it belonged to you" and "Would you like to be white little brown girl?" (94). Marson exposes the ignorance and smugness of the interrogators, but through her rhetorical move of sarcasm conveys that she can access a perspective on the situation that they wouldn't comprehend. Marson connects to members of her audience who, like her, have been subjected to such reductive lines of questioning that pretend to be polite, but are racist.

In her 1925 essay, "The Double Task: The Struggle of Women for Sex and Race Emancipation," Elise Johnson McDougald considers a different set of questions forced on black people. Though she focuses on her experience as a black woman in Harlem, there are similarities to the issues raised through Marson's poem in spite of the geographical and historical differences of their respective locations. She states,

> What then is to be said of the Negro woman today? Here the questions naturally arise: 'What are her problems?' and 'How is she solving them?' To answer these

> questions, one must have in mind not any one Negro woman, but rather a colorful pageant of individuals, each differently endowed...With a discerning mind, one catches the multiform charm, beauty, and character of Negro women; and grasps the fact that their problem cannot be thought of in mass. (689)

What prevails for both Marson and McDougald is the need to confront the ignorance of the idea of black women as monolithic. This parallel shows that the lack of understanding and will to understand the complexities of black women happens in many contexts. "Little Brown Girl" enacts the dilemma of her diasporic experience wherein the speaker is faced with ignorance from outside sources compounded by the fact that they clearly also question how they are seen in England. As scholar Kobena Mercer asserts, "the mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridised identities point to ways of surviving and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition" (5). Mercer elucidates that new identities are formed as a survival mechanism out of necessity, hard times that demand adaptation. Through her poem, Marson gives shape to the complex existence of being a black woman in England during the 1930s, and the questions and sentiments that emerge in this poem speak to a larger community of black migrants in Britain in the early to mid 20th century. We can look at what Marson does through this poem in sharing her diasporic experience as written out of necessity in trying to show the racist behaviours of white British people towards black people in Britain. Marson exposes her condition as a marginal figure while seeking to connect with those who share in her struggle.

In much of Marson's poetry, it is clear that she tows a line between her Jamaican foundation and diasporic existence in England. The shifts in how Marson sees herself and how she maneuvers her way through different societal expectations in the contexts of two

countries have the potential to trouble readers for its inconsistency, but those who can relate to Marson remain insiders. Though relationships to community can be fluid, it can be used as a power move for the oppressed to create a community where insiders are valued and outsiders are called out and kept outside. This essentially becomes a necessary and revolutionary act---to not only combat white imperialist behaviours, but to also find those with whom one can build community.

Bennett and Jamaican Pride

Historically, the imperative of those invested in perpetuating white systemic power have made it so that oppressed groups must build community in spaces designed to keep them out and treat them as subordinates. While the community building reflected in the focus of much of Marson's poetry is borne of the systemic injustices that she experienced moving between Jamaica and Britain, Bennett's poetic work is undeniably Jamaica centered. Bennett's artistic work is a crucial component in reviving the nation and developing its identity in the years right before and after independence in 1962. In his biographical work *Miss Lou: Louise Bennett and Jamaican Culture*, Mervyn Morris contextualizes the period when Bennett's work took flight:

> Jamaica needed Louise Bennett when her talents emerged. She came into public view at a time when, across the Caribbean region, there had been widespread unrest and when, increasingly, colonial assumptions were being questioned...In January 1939 Norman Manley, one of the leaders of Jamaica's national movement, said: 'We can take everything that English education has to offer us, but ultimately we must reject the domination of her influence, because we are not English...nor should we ever want to be. Instead we must dig deep into our own

consciousness and accept and reject only those things of which we from our superior knowledge of our own cultural needs must be the best judges. (12)

Slightly more than two decades before Jamaica would gain independence from the British, Manley proposed that his country's people "reject the domination of her influence". Though it was a progressive sign for one of the nation's leaders to take this stance, productively combatting centuries of colonial influence is a tall order especially since colonialism inserts itself in so many aspects of the everyday life of the colonized. The push towards the development of an individualized national identity, separate from Britain's, would remain prevalent in the decades leading up to independence. It is in this socio-political climate where Bennett carves her place as an artist, starting out in the 1930's and growing in popularity as time progressed. While writers such as Marson and Claude McKay were already building a reputation through their creative works at this time, Bennett's work and presence in the literary world would come to represent Jamaica on a grand scale and in a way many felt was consistently and unapologetically Jamaican.

In a 1984 interview with Rose-Anee Pierre, Bennett recounts an early experience observing and interacting with people on a tram car that made her realize her passion for stories. She states, "I realize...this is what I want to do because this is what the people saying" (The Writer and Her Work). Bennett reflects on being intrigued with the people who surrounded her and her statement captures the essence of who she was as an artist, committed to faithfully documenting the realities of Jamaican people in the present. It is this desire to capture the reality of "what the people saying" that continues to resonate with Jamaicans, helping to make Bennett the most popular woman poet/performer in Jamaica's history.

However, it was not always a smooth road of acceptance for Bennett's creative endeavors. Early on in her career, some criticized the poet's use of Patwa. As Morris points out, "She was resisted by some who claimed to regret a departure from 'proper English'" (14). This nod to 'proper English' attempted to undercut the value of Jamaican Patwa and frame Bennett as outside of the respectable Jamaican. These critiques, rooted in white patriarchal and colonial ideals, frame her as outside of Jamaica's best interests in terms of advancement for the country, an advancement in line with England's colonial influence. Through her poetic works, Bennett set herself apart from the nation's other popular poets through her strict adherence to Jamaican vernacular.

In *History of the Voice*, Bennett's contemporary, Barbadian poet and intellectual Edward Brathwaite, asserts that Bennett has been writing "*nation* all of her life" (26). He goes on to say,

> Anancy, Auntie Roachie and *boonoonoonoos* and *parangles* an ting, when she could have opted for 'And how are you today': the teeth and lips tight and closed around the mailed fist of a smile. But her instincts were that she should use the language of her people. (15)

Brathwaite brings our attention to the stark differences in the language, the subversion towards controlled and polite standardized English, and the importance of the fact that Bennett doesn't just happen to do these things, she chooses to. When Brathwaite juxtaposes "And how are you today" with the imagery of "teeth and lips tight and closed around the mailed fist of a smile," we are compelled to see the performance enacted in speech. The liberation that Bennett writing *nation* facilitates becomes even more apparent. This act of prioritizing the language of Jamaicans over the language of Britain

when one has access to both is a form of resistance, but also an affirming move for Bennett and the community she represents. The Martinican psychiatrist and militant anti-colonial intellectual Frantz Fanon states in *Black Skin, White Masks* that “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (38). In essence, this statement conveys the power language has in helping to construct an identity. By speaking, performing, and writing in the way most Jamaicans do, Bennett not only creates a community of insiders, but she also shows other listeners that she values the unique culture and stories of her country’s people. Using Patwa, Bennett speaks in a way that is familiar to all Jamaicans regardless of class. She does this despite pushback from those who disapproved, preferring instead to strictly adhere to British English, a residual effect of a colonized history. In his book *Jamaica Talk: Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica*, linguist Frederic Cassidy puts another spin on the description of the ways Jamaicans speak,

> Jamaica Talk is not by any means of the same kind on all Jamaicans' lips. It exists in two main forms, which may be imagined as lying at opposite ends of a scale, with every sort of variation between, but each variant inclining in some degree toward the right or the left. At one end is the type of Jamaica Talk that aims toward the London 'standard' or educated model, and, in many Jamaicans' usage, reaches it extremely well — certainly as well as the speech of many a Britisher living outside the 'home counties' around London. At the other end of the scale is the inherited talk of peasant and labourer, largely unaffected by education and its standards. This is what the linguist calls 'creolised' English, that is, an English

learned incompletely in slave days, with a strong infusion of African influences, and continued traditionally in much the same form down to the present. (3)

Though the notion of what is deemed as 'educated' here adheres specifically to a typical high valuation of the British system of schooling, Cassidy's description is useful in understanding the unifying power of Bennett's decision to uplift Patwa in her work. Cassidy's use of the word 'inherited' here is also worth noting. In this framing an inherited vernacular is a birthright, a gift to be valued and which Bennett treats as such, encouraging others to feel a similar connection to this aspect of culture.

Bennett may have desired to reflect the language and experiences of the people, but it was not always the image that others wanted to present of Jamaica. In his essay "A History of Poetry," Edward Baugh states, "In those late colonial days, the struggle to erase the stigma attached to dialect had hardly begun. To the extent that educated ears might have professed to entertain dialect, it was only as low entertainment" (246). Criticisms of Bennett's choice in language use were in response to perceptions of her speech as associated with an uneducated lower class which was not reflective of her class status and level of education. Critics noted that her speech was not the way Jamaicans were taught to speak in school. Bennett's decision to write and perform *nation* rejects the devaluation of Jamaican vernacular. Bennett essentially encourages that others reject a performance of self investment in whitewashing their culture. As Bennett notes, "We were taught and encouraged to sing the songs of foreign countries...to learn foreign folk dances and stories as these foreign things were considered infinitely better than things West Indian" (iii). For Bennett, to strictly adhere to the ways of speaking taught through the influence of a British system becomes a way of being that is unlike a self comfortable

in its own national identity. As scholars Dohra Ahmad and Shondel Nero state in their article “Productive Paradoxes”, “the difference between a language and a dialect is more political than linguistic, as it reflects the relative power and social status of the respective speakers, as well as who is doing the labeling, rather than anything inherent in the language or dialect” (70). Thus, Bennett’s choice to write in Patwa represents an important shift in thinking of language ownership, anti-colonialist thought, and their relationship to the country. Ownership of language can provide empowerment and signals to others that an alternative form of communication from an external entity is not necessary; essentially this move positions Patwa as being enough and not lacking. Bennett’s move then is revolutionary, building community through actions that can be employed for decades to come.

Criticism of Bennett’s building of national identity elucidates how perceptions of individual identity are based on how one performs socially. Early in her career Bennett is seen as depicting a behaviour that rejects the socially acceptable, but her follow through leads to an endearing audience that she herself creates. In matters concerning whether to accept or reject English domination, Bennett’s position was undoubtedly to reject it. The result of this rejection of colonial influence manifests itself throughout Bennett’s work as many scholars have noted, but I focus in this chapter on how Bennett creates space to tell the stories of many Jamaicans and ultimately builds community through her poetry.

Within Bennett’s body of work are poems and monologues designed to empower and unite Jamaican people. In “Resistant Performance,” Marvin Carlson states that, “Beyond art as process is the idea of art as a means to make community rather than commodity. Imbedded in that is the need to discover and make connections between a

culturally and spiritually dissociated past and our present social and political realities" (309). A common feature of Bennett's work is its devotion to valuing the knowledge that can be gleaned from the past to inform present action. Through the subjects Bennett chooses and the familiar voices woven through her poetic works, we can see familiar components of families and diverse publics in Jamaican life. Bennett's poems employ several methods to convey the great value she places on bridging the past and present as a means to make community, even while at times criticizing members of said community.

Miss Lou's Views

In line with Bennett's efforts to bridge past and present, her monologue "Hero Nanny" focuses on the 18th century Maroon leader, Queen Nanny, and was delivered on her radio show *Miss Lou's Views*. "Hero Nanny" was inspired by the government's move to give the title of National Hero to Nanny and the mixed reactions in response. The title of National Hero, a high honor ordered by the Jamaican government and in place since 1969, was seen by some as too high a distinction to bestow on Nanny. Supporters of Nanny were adamant that her importance in Jamaica's history had been secured through her accomplishments as a guerilla strategist. According to scholar Karla Gottlieb in her essay "Queen Nanny of the Jamaican Maroons,"

> During that time, she successfully led her troops in a series of battles against the British forces, defeating them time and time again and eventually causing her enemies to sue for peace in 1739. At that time, the Maroons were granted quasi-independence and given a grant of 500 acres of land in Nanny's name in the Blue Mountains of eastern Jamaica which at the time was called Nanny Town. In many ways, Queen Nanny is a contradiction in terms: a female leader who engaged in

> often brutal warfare against an enemy who considered Africans less than human, she is also depicted in myth and memory as a nurturer, a caregiver, a force of life. (3)

In 1975 Bennett reimagines Nanny's legacy in response to the tense discussions around the National Hero distinction for Nanny. In the spirit of Taylor's characterization of the power of performance to "enact embodied memory" (208), Bennett conveys a multitude of feelings that reflect the masses regarding the decision. "Hero Nanny" is delivered as a tale highlighting Nanny's bravery and persistence as a Maroon leader. Bennett conveys the admiration and reverence that she has for Nanny through the words and attitude of the main speaker, and we also see a pride that the speaker has based on the connection they feel to the subject's history. As Bennett shares the story, the primary speaker is positioned as an appreciative Jamaican in awe of Nanny's achievements and disgusted by those who may feel ashamed of Nanny as a part of their history. It is evident through Bennett's words that the author sees the potential power in the spirit of pride in Nanny's story, not only for herself, but for all Jamaicans. Bennett begins,

> We have one Jamaican proverb what say 'If breeze no blow, yuh no know say dot fowl got skin.' An lawks, missis, from authority go announce Nanny as National Hero, a dont get fi fine out ou much Jamaica smaddy still shame a dem slavery heritage! Mmmm. (13)

In *Noises in the Blood* Carolyn Cooper highlights the importance of Bennett's inclusion of the metaphorical proverb. She states,

> The metaphorical proverb recurs in the poetry and dramatised narratives of Louise Bennett to fulfil two vital functions...Thematically, the proverb provides

> conclusive evidence of the socially recognised truth of the argument that a particular Bennett persona articulates; structurally, the metaphorical proverb employs graphic imagery derived from everyday Jamaican life as the vehicle for social commentary. (37)

This understanding of the function of metaphorical proverb in Bennett's work advises the audience to not take for granted that she chose to begin by referencing the somewhat comical image delivered through the proverb. By starting the monologue with a common Jamaican proverb, Bennett already begins to establish community with those who have heard or used the saying in their everyday life. Bennett's inclusion of the proverb is not random, but communicates in a familiar manner and anticipates an understanding for her core audience based on their shared cultural experience. In essence Bennett's act of sharing the proverb through the primary speaker is in itself a performance, communicating with her potential audience through language that inherently makes it so that some are insiders and some outsiders based on their connection to the proverb. By beginning the poem, "We have one Jamaican proverb what seh", Bennett asserts the ownership of the proverb, one that belongs to Jamaicans. When the speaker then states, "An lawks, missis, from authority go announce Nanny as National Hero, a dont get fi fine out ou much Jamaica smaddy still shame a dem slavery heritage," they call out those who might express embarrassment of the Maroon leader and slave ancestors, linking their reactions to the common Jamaican proverb shared. The proverb that follows conveys that in order to hear the true feelings of the people, something had to happen to rouse them. Though the monologue criticizes those Jamaicans ashamed of Nanny, they understand this reference, that proverbs are a familiar part of Jamaican culture, and so are

immediately insiders. If we identify this behaviour as a move that Bennett makes, then proverbs themselves start to become their own performance for community within Bennett's work, bringing us to more knowledge of the speaker. By enacting the everyday through proverb, Bennett signals that she is initiating a conversation with certain members of the audience and a scene then comes into view. The proverb sets the tone for a real world application of the lesson in the proverb. When Bennett says, "If breeze no blow, yuh no know say dot fowl got skin," she alerts the reader that some members of the community will expose their true feelings because they have been stirred.

In "Hero Nanny," Bennett quickly moves from laying a foundation through proverb to detailing through the main speaker, their dissatisfaction with those who would criticize the national recognition of Nanny due to what is identified as "shame [of] slavery heritage". What happens here is a positioning of the main speaker as the unashamed Jamaican, comfortable enough to embrace an ancestor others might wish to reject. As Jenny Sharpe notes in *Ghosts of Slavery*, some critics "objected to the recognition of maroons as freedom fighters" while another popular reason for opposition to Nanny as national hero was due to rumors that she was "simply a folkloric character". These rumours even triggered the government to commission Kamau Brathwaite "to prove her historic existence" (20). Bennett's "Hero Nanny" confronts the controversy head on. Bennett moves from sharing the proverb to positioning the main speaker as an observer while the character Aunty Roachy is positioned as oral historian. In response to criticism of Nanny by the character Muches who states, "Cho! Wha meck dem haffi go dig out dat-deh ole slave duppy fi tun National Hero?" (13), Bennett dramatises Aunty Roachy's response, stating, "Aunty Roachy eye-dem glisten wid bexation, an she wheel

roun pon Muches an holler, 'Not duppy Hero, a Warrior Oman! Siddung, Muches, meck me tell you bout her'". Through the character of Aunty Roachy, Bennett tells an empowering story of Nanny, countering the label of her as "duppy Hero" with "Warrior Oman". We see the positive response to Aunty Roachy's re-telling of Nanny's story when mid-way through the monologue after Aunty Roachy says, "History book say 'The soldiers were baffled and retreat in alarm.' Lawks, what a joke!", Muches responds, "Nanny pop dem. Gwaan talk, Miss Roachy. Gwaan talk". Here Bennett alludes to the attempt at watering down the event by history books. Muches becomes fully immersed in the uplifting narrative. Bennett reframes any claims attempting to diminish Nanny's legacy as freedom fighter, thus encouraging naysayers to shift their view of her as well. Aunty Roachy concludes her story with a powerful statement, "But black people never got nobody fi write dung fi-dem hero deservin deeds eena book, so from generation to generation dem write it dung eena dem rememberance. An my granmodder tell me seh fi-her granmodder tell her seh dat a fi-her grandmodder did tell her seh a so!" (16). Here, the main speaker reminds the listener of the importance of upholding the tradition of oral history. What Bennett does in "Hero Nanny" is essential as she attempts to preserve Nanny's story and position from obscurity. Prioritizing the preservation of Nanny's legacy not only subverts white colonial influence, but patriarchal forces as well. Bennett helps to retrieve Nanny from the invisibility scholar Hortense Spillers reminds us historically often becomes the case for black women around the world. In her essay "Expostulations and Replies," Spillers states,

> You can't talk about the era of slavery in the Americas without talking about black women, or black men without black women and how that changes the

> community— there is not a subject that you can speak about in the modern world where you will not have to talk about African women and new world African women. But no one wants to address them… (19)

Without a high valuation on oral history, the early stories of heroism rest solely at the discretion of those holding empirical and archival power. This makes the need to preserve the histories of one's own culture and people essential. As Edward Said states in *Culture and Imperialism*, "One of the first tasks of the culture of resistance was to reclaim, rename, and reinhabit the land" (226). Said reminds us that within colonial spaces, the move to write oneself into its history is a necessary one. In placing high value on Nanny of the Maroons, her revolutionary story, and the importance of oral history, the narrative becomes shifted and reclaimed.

An important move that Bennett makes in this monologue is keeping the narrative as a discourse between Jamaicans. This move is in line with the decolonial push to not be in service of white colonial history and instead to prioritize the oral history of the oppressed. Bennett creates community through pushing towards embracing a history that has been and will continue to be transmitted intergenerationally. Bennett encourages this embrace of Nanny and also reminds insiders of the value of their oral history, a history that belongs to Jamaicans as descendants of the enslaved. Bennett essentially helps to legitimize an oral history against the people who wish to mobilize against it. By doing this, she gives any potential non-Jamaican reader the role of the outsider and does not necessarily invite them into the conversation. Jamaicans can take part in the tradition of oral storytelling, assuming the role of either Aunty Roachy or her immediate audience and both points of view are equally part of the community Bennett reflects in her poem.

Here, Bennett is committed, like in so many other poems she crafts, to uplifting Jamaicans. However, in this poem Bennett takes on the task of combatting any ill spirited mainstream conception of Nanny. Bennett's poem is not simply one of praise for a hero, it also calls for self-reflection. "Hero Nanny" not only offers us powerful storytelling rooted in the experience of oral tradition, but also urges Jamaicans to embrace the legacy of Nanny--learn from it and find power in it. For Bennett, Nanny is "Woman! A strong fearless Jamaican warrior oman dat wouldn buckle under slavery" (15).

Conflicting Views

In line with her mission to promote Jamaican empowerment, Bennett makes a controversial move in the poem "Back to Africa" from her 1966 collection, *Jamaica Labrish*, where she questions the goal of the Marcus Garvey supported Back to Africa movement. So powerful a figure had Garvey been during his lifetime that though he'd left Jamaica and generated a large and international following for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and himself as leader, he maintained a large presence within the country and was named posthumously in 1969 as one of Jamaica's first three national heroes. Bennett, however, criticized the general notion of the Back to Africa movement through her poem of the same name. Bennett starts the poem, "Back to Africa Miss Matty? / Yuh noh know wha yuh dah-sey? / Yuh haffe come from some weh fus, / Before yuh go back deh?" (286). Here the speaker in the poem questions the logic of a call for a return to a place one has never been. Bennett goes on to detail the varied ancestral lineage of the second person "you" in the poem we might infer speaks to Jamaicans more broadly. The fourth stanza makes clear the speaker's view on the topic of

a mass migration to Africa when the speaker states, “But de balance o’ yuh family / Yuh whole generation / Oonoo all bawn dung a Bun grung / Oonoo all is Jamaican!” The speaker conveys that despite their ancestral lineage, their most recent histories have been constructed within Jamaica. With this move, Bennett reminds Jamaicans of the history that has been created within the country that unites them as a broader community. Bennett proves to be an ideal representative to rebut Garvey’s insistence that black people of the African diaspora would better thrive in Africa as her body of work promotes Jamaican nationalism. Bennett’s oeuvre supports the identity formation of Jamaica informed by both an insistence on resisting colonial influence and a desire to acknowledge Africa’s presence in Jamaica through ancestry, language, and customs (as stated by Bennett in staged performance). In his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall provides insight on the complex formation of Caribbean identities, the “ruptures and discontinuities” that make up “Caribbean uniqueness” and the creation of culture in a colonial space that might further illuminate Bennett’s move to critique the movement. He states,

> [L]ike everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (112)

Hall brings our attention to the complex nature of the retrieval of histories for people of the Caribbean, the problematic nature of attempting to draw clear lines to a foundational past for the colonized. Further, he states that "The original 'Africa' is not there...It too has been transformed...Africa must at last be reckoned with for Caribbean people, but it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered" (112). Hall's sentiment here speaks to the importance of Africa's undebatable influence and presence within the Caribbean, but emphasizes a reckoning with this past, not a recovery. This 'reckoning' appears to be an idea that Bennett supports through the sentiment in her poem. For Bennett, it was not a matter of negating Jamaica's connection to Africa, it was a desire to acknowledge that newness had occurred; this newness manifested in Jamaican identity through culture and tradition. Bennett pushes to build community by encouraging that Jamaicans acknowledge the island as their homeland since, by logic of birth, it is home. While Garvey's mission envisions a unified group of black people all over the world joined by their ancestral ties to Africa, Bennett's project, as evidenced in this poem, urges Jamaicans to be satisfied in their Jamaican identity. The speaker emphatically states, "Oonoo all is Jamaican!" going on to say "Go a foreign, seek yuh fortune / But noh tell nobody seh / Yuh dah-go fe seek yuh homelan / For a right deh so yuh deh!" (287). Here, the speaker refers to spaces outside of Jamaica as "foreign," conveying that though nationals might go elsewhere, they must not forget Jamaica as their home. Through this poem Bennett conveys the importance for community building in valuing the new customs and culture borne out of necessity for colonized people.

Bennett and the Great Pretender

Bennett is well known for her commitment to empower Jamaicans to be proud, but she also tasked herself to call out those who showed dissatisfaction in their identity as Jamaicans. We see this in Bennett's poem "Dry Foot Bwoy" included in *Jamaica Labrish*. Regarding the collection, Narain highlights the social consciousness reflected in Bennett's writing,

> In the breadth and range of issues tackled, Bennett's poems provide a fascinating catalogue of current events over an extended period (roughly the 1940s to the early 1970s); read alongside more conventional, historical accounts of the period, her poems offer distinctive and insightful comments from the "marginal" perspectives of ordinary Jamaicans. (60)

Published in the post-Windrush climate, Bennett's poem "Dry Foot Bwoy," mocks the Jamaican who returns from Britain appearing as a pretender. Bennett's move to name the poem with an insult of "dry foot bwoy," already lets the audience in on the fact that the poem will not speak favorably of him. This person Bennett writes of desires to convey to those around him that he has left the island and returned anew. This is manifested in his repeating of key phrases that a British person might speak. "Actually" is one such word that Bennett inserts in the poem and it is repeated often by the "dry foot bwoy" to convey his new foreignness. The poem asks "Wha wrong wit Mary dry foot bwoy?" who returns speaking phrases like "Oh, jolley, jolley". The subject of the poem seems to be a performer putting on airs and tapping into British speech in such a way that the act is obvious due to his dependence on key British phrases. There is shock and dismay as the

community witnesses the shift in the sixth stanza, “Me gi a joker de gal dem laugh / But hear de bwoy, ‘Haw-haw! / I’m sure you got that bally-dash / Out of the cinema!’” In this instance, the “dry foot bwoy” responds to a joke in an aloof manner while those around him are thrilled by it. The line is drawn between the insiders of the community and the “dry foot bwoy” who essentially distances himself from the community through his disingenuous behaviour. He clearly no longer wishes to engage with the community in the same way, essentially wishing to make himself the outsider due to an affinity he now has with British speech. Bennett emphasizes through “Dry Foot Bwoy” the importance for Jamaicans to remain true to their own culture by dramatising for the audience the disruption of community when Jamaicans return from a foreign country and have seemingly forgotten their culture in the pressure to assimilate within another.

Closing Notes

In considering the relationship between performance, poetry, the postcolonial, and formation of community, it appears that poetry for both Bennett and Marson becomes inseparable from the performance of time and location. That is to say the environment each woman finds herself in plays a role contributing to the community that is engaged by their words. Bennett and Marson each have different reactions to their environment and respective hardships that result in cultivating a separate kind of community. Bennett’s becomes defined by its connection to national pride through words and actions, while Marson’s is characterized by its embrace of two countries and adjustment to a foreign culture.

Marson may have helped to lay the groundwork for women poets in Jamaica and the Caribbean, but Bennett’s style of writing and performing deviated drastically from

Marson's formula. We see this deviation primarily in terms of language, Bennett writing almost exclusively in Jamaican Patwa, Marson primarily in standardized British English. However, there are instances where we can draw clear lines between the two poets and their thematic focus. This is the case with Marson's poem "Quashie Comes to London," published in 1937, as its focus on black migration to Britain and employment of the Jamaican vernacular is a precursor for Bennett's later poem, "Colonisation in Reverse". "Quashie Comes to London" is one of the few instances where Marson employs the Jamaican vernacular, and we see through the varied poetic styles and shifting of community focus in her poems that there was a struggle for Marson in building her community.

This choice as it relates to language and thematic focus, appears to have had an effect on the communities both women drew to them. Though Bennett experiences some resistance early on in her career within Jamaica, based on her strict adherence to Jamaican vernacular, she sees her following grow as Jamaicans become more endeared to her. Although Bennett and Marson come from different areas of the island and have different methods to speak to their audiences, they cultivate the communities they themselves need. Ultimately, both manage to highlight different aspects of Jamaican and black life. In this way, the insider/outsider dynamic develops into a protective barrier from the outside world, keeping in culture and vision and attempting to keep out colonial ideals to various degrees of success for each poet.

CHAPTER 2

Resistance, Affirmation, and Culture through Humor in the Performances of Una Marson and Louise Bennett

Overview: Humor Theory in a Caribbean Context

In thinking of the power of language use in black American contexts, Ralph Ellison states in his 1963 lecture "What These Children are Like," that: "The great body of Negro slang–that unorthodox language–exists precisely because Negroes need words which will communicate, which will designate the objects, processes, manners and subtleties of their urban experience with the least amount of distortion from the outside. So the problem is, once again, what do we choose and what do we reject of that which the greater society makes available?" (555) Ellison's consideration of black vernaculars specifically calls the audience to consider the politics of language and the negotiation of identities within black communities. That there is a choice and that language can be manipulated to suit one's interests signals an agency that can come into being or that can be accessed even in oppressive conditions. In his book, *The Signifying Monkey*, published in 1988, Henry Louis Gates Jr. explores aspects of African American performance as ways of "signifying," a term employed as "a strategy for black figurative language use" and which includes several rhetorical strategies geared, in large part, towards persuasion (92). Gates' discussion of the term helps to reveal the kinds of communications that become necessitated, fully integrated, strengthened and passed down generationally within black communities. As Gates asserts, "Anyone who analyzes black literature must do so as a comparativist, by definition, because our canonical texts have complex double formal antecedents, the Western and the black…" (xxiv). This brings our attention to shared histories within the unique elements of cultural production

from individual black communities. It is within this long tradition where I situate my work in this chapter.

Much scholarship on humor in black communities has elucidated its utility and effectiveness as a strategy to subvert oppressive forces, including combatting colonial presence. Of great relevance to my research in this chapter is the employment of humor in language as a strategy within black communities, how several rhetorical moves are employed in anticipation of particular audiences, and the effects. In elucidating the strategy of humor with particular focus on minimizing racial tensions, Ralph Ellison stated in a 1970 speech,

> If you can laugh at me, you don't have to kill me. If I can laugh at you, I don't have to kill you. You might not like, and I might not like, the context of the laughter as projected in stereotypes and distortions and freductions. But this kind of humor, for all its crudeness, in some instances has allowed the American people to come together on some sort of workable basis. (148)

Ellison elucidates the redeeming potential of humor, even at the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. In their introduction to the anthology *Cheeky Fictions*, Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein elucidate the tension of humor in postcolonial texts. They write, "Why is humour such an uneasy bedfellow, why laughter - apparently- an abomination to postcolonial studies? The problem seems to lie with a basic misconceptualisation of the nature of laughter, which is often seen as either slighting a serious subject matter or simply indicating lighthearted entertainment" (2). Reichl and Stein point to the multifaceted nature of humor. In a similar vein, Glenda Carpio takes on the topic of

humor in her study *Laughing Fit To Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery*, focusing on the work of several black humorists across genres. Carpio considers the consequences of humor in exaggerated stereotypes. She poses a central question of her book: "...can stereotypes be used to critique racism without solely fueling the racist imagination?" (15) Through this consideration, Carpio brings our attention not only to the potential risk of perpetuating what needs to be dismantled, but her work also uncovers the powerful effects of humor as well. Her question brings our attention to the risks artists must negotiate taking when presenting their work to the world.

It is also important to keep in mind that the far reaching impact of humor that can be interpreted as subversive towards the mainstream can also be nuanced. While humor is powerful for its subversive effects, we risk an understanding of black resistance to systematic and social oppression through humor as only anger, a trickle down effect of slavery, when there is more at stake. Sam Vasquez brings us to this point in her book, *Humor in the Caribbean Literary Canon*, where she examines several key elements in Caribbean focused texts: Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain,* Aime Cesaire's *A Tempest*, and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*. Vasquez also dedicates a substantial section of her book to considering the humor of Louise Bennett's "trickster poetics" and use of double entendre in her poetry. Vasquez' project centers "pivotal moments and the accompanying emblematic innovations in authors' uses of humor" (23). In analyzing humor as a tool in Caribbean literature, she writes: "individuals were not merely surviving and subverting in a Western context, but using humor as a form of self production that opens up a space for bodies, discourses, and realities that had previously gone unrecognized or were maligned in the Western literary canon" (2). Considering that

humor can be an act of fruitful self production encourages an understanding of comedic dialogue from members of historically oppressed groups in a more complex way; this includes being independent from mainstream understanding or acceptance. Humor seen in this way also opens the door for us to consider its importance as a part of a healing process from centuries of oppression and the possibilities of humor's life affirming effects.

When it comes to the subject of language use in a historical Jamaican context, Sylvia Wynter notes in "One Love - Rhetoric or Reality? Aspects of Afro-Jamaicanism" that "...language became the area of the plantation where he negated his Being. His response was to assimilate this language to his own structure of thought; of imagination. Recreating its essence through the trauma of his new existence" (78). Here, we see language framed as a remixing out of necessity. This concept in tandem with Vasquez's framing of humor as self-production is vital when thinking of both Marson's and Bennett's work, and the multiple uses and effects of the humor in their language to serve themselves and their communities. Self-production is a precondition for representation and though both Bennett and Marson represented their country's people, the manners in which they did so were drastically different as Marson's work focused on experiences in Jamaica and Britain while Bennett's work was Jamaica centered. Both authors also had varying levels of reach in that Bennett's popularity far surpassed Marson's over the span of their respective careers. Though their methods of self-production differed, an area in their art where they draw a connection is in the choice to use humor as a tool in their work. Bennett's humor, of course, figures more prominently in her work, while Marson's appears far less frequently and is often subtle. Much of the work of this chapter examines

how subversion and self production through humor exist in tandem in their works for what I assert to be bodies consistently and necessarily in performance.

The definition of performance that drives my assertions is in line with Diana Taylor's articulation that performance is "a doing, a done, and a redoing. It makes visible, and invisible; it clarifies and obscures; it's ephemeral and lasting; put-on, yet truer than life itself...performance is radically un-stable, dependent totally on its framing, on the by whom and for whom, on the why where when it comes into being" (41). Taylor makes clear the seeming contradictions of performance, conveying it as a process for the doer with the potential of evolution in its meaning for the audience. Through considering how Marson and Bennett deploy humor, I assert that humor for both is an act of self and community preservation and in this process they demonstrate self-love through sharing their experiences. Bennett and Marson also develop community to varying extents, Bennett's work resonating particularly with a Jamaican audience, while Marson's speaks to experiences in both Jamaica and Britain. Vasquez helps us to think about humor in a specifically Caribbean context while Taylor helps us to think through the connection of meaning and value in their performances, linking past, present, and future. These added critical perspectives contribute to our understanding of how identities are cultivated within the author's creative works. On the complexity of cultural identities, Stuart Hall frames it in part as "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (225) In this vein of expanding notions of identity formation, in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and*

the Postmodern Perspective Antonio Benitez-Rojo examines Caribbean identities within Caribbean literature. Though Benitez-Rojo focuses specifically on the Caribbean novel in his chapter "Viaje a la semille, or the text as spectacle," his words are useful for my approach in this chapter on the performance of humor in Marson's and Bennett's respective poetics:

> [I]ts discourse is doubly spectacular, and not simply because it assumes its own spectacularity but also, above all, it is a discourse that, as well as being scenographic, is double in itself...It is this scenographic (public) cross-dressing ability that leads me to think that the Caribbean text is, like the Caribbean reader, a consummate performer. (221)

Though Benitez-Rojo's primary focus in the chapter is on the multiplicity of the Caribbean novel, I apply this thinking to shorter forms of Caribbean texts that are tasked to convey the complexity Benitez-Rojo identifies, typically in quicker and more succinct manner in adhering to the word economy of poetry and/in performance. Benitez-Rojo also calls us to think of the audience in their active roles as part of the performance as well as how the text and the audience are intertwined, each informing the other. It is within these spaces that community building can thrive based on the audience's level of connection to the author's words. Humor becomes a useful component at the center of performance in order for audience members to best engage with and help move their communities forward.

Marson's Use of Humor to Subvert Social Norms

I begin this section with Marson's use of humor as a subversive device. In Marson's body of work, a few key poems demonstrate her rarely examined sense of humor, poems that undermine various social structures in their forthrightness, wit, and sarcasm. Through these subversive devices, Marson not only adds her voice to examine the social construct of marriage, but also to confront the absurdities of such societal pressures that find her questioning her own position and value in the society. Marson's accounts insert their voice as commentary on ongoing processes that persist as social pressures adversely affecting women. In "To Wed or Not to Wed" from her 1930 collection *Tropic Reveries*, Marson's cynical humor about the absurdities of marriage confronts the binary that exists in society dictating that women must find a "match" and get married. Marson starts, "To wed, or not to wed: that is the question," clearly parodying the well-known soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that finds the main character in deep wonder of life and death. Marson neatly places her speaker in the place of Prince Hamlet. If we are to derive similar meaning from Hamlet's words as many scholars have gathered, then the decision Marson makes to compare considerations between life and death to being married or unmarried is both telling and playful. The words "To wed" are heavy in that they convey the act of marriage and union with another and draw a parallel with Hamlet's "To be". Being wed is in line, in this case, to the very notion of existing. Marson continues,

> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The fret and loneliness of spinsterhood
> Or to take arms against the single state
> And by marrying end it? (80)

Marson dramatically juxtaposes two conditions in these lines, the wed and unwed, yet both are in support of marriage if one does not want “the fret and loneliness of spinsterhood." Marson's choice of punctuation also undermines marriage as a remedy for the “single state”. Marson ends the thought with a question mark, letting us in on the uncertainty of the very marriage that the previous lines were in support of. Alison Donnell points out, “given the historical context of Jamaica and the moral pressure exerted on women to marry and thus gain respectability, it may not be extravagant to compare ‘The fret and loneliness of spinsterhood’ to Hamlet’s ‘sea of troubles’” (32). Marson’s choice to draw clear references to the popular play while revealing more personal concerns of her speaker encourage the reader to reach for Shakespeare’s text to consider the parallels in the language, further intensifying the meaning.

Further into the poem Marson asks an important question that conveys within it assumptions one might have of what it means to be ‘wed’,

> For who’d forego the joys of wife and mother,
> The pleasures of devotion, of sacrifice and love,
> The blessings of a home and all home means,
> The restful sympathy of soul to soul,
> The loved ones circling round at eventide
> When she herself might gain all these
> With a marriage vow? (80)

All the aspects of being ‘wed’ are framed in the positive here, including sacrifice which lends itself to selflessness. The notions of giving of oneself are tied to pleasure as Marson links this feeling to “devotion” then “sacrifice and love”. Of course, a large part of the humor is in the exaggeration; the joys of a wedded life are presented neatly wrapped. Marson’s skepticism, though, is implicit and subtle. Humor is evident in the notion that with just a marriage vow one could acquire so many of life’s ideals because readers know

that this would take far more work than just a marriage vow. The social pressure and supposed promises of marriage are highlighted here.

This is heightened when we consider Marson's many love poems that expose the speakers longing for a partner as we see in the poems "Longing" and "Renunciation." At other times we are privy to a speaker's feelings of inadequacy as they prepare for a partner who keeps them waiting, as seen in the poems "In Vain," and "Incomplete". If we are to read these poems in relation to one another, we might gather that the potential romantic partners who ascribe to the rules outlined in "If" may be an influence in some of Marson's other love centered poems. However, similar to the tone Marson takes in "To Wed or Not to Wed," we see an exhaustive list of expectations placed on women and favoring men in her poem "If." In it, Marson writes,

> If you can keep him true when all about you
> The girls are making eyes and being kind,
> If you can make him spend the evenings with you
> When fifty Jims and Jacks are on his mind;
> If you can wait and not be tired of waiting,
> Or when he comes at one, be calm and sleep,
> And do not oversleep, but early waking,
> Smile o'er the tea cups and ne'er think to weep. (64)

Marson's implicit humor shines in this poem. As readers we may not recognize initially what the conditions being presented to us by the speaker are for. When it becomes clear that the layout of the poem operates as an instructional manual for a woman to maintain her romantic relationship with a man, the absurdity of the list becomes clear. In the scenario Marson details, the woman is made to be at fault if the man is disloyal and she is made responsible for keeping the man happy. When the speaker says "If you can keep him true when all about you / The girls are making eyes and being kind," it is implied that it is the responsibility of the woman to "keep him true" despite other women's

perceived persuasive methods to take him away. In each situation, the onus is on the woman to keep the peace at the expense of her own feelings. Marson continues these tips at the end of the fourth stanza with the potential payoff of these efforts being "you'll be a wife worthwhile". In this poem, Marson humorously exposes the performances that women often have to enact in a relationship due to society's expectations. Her tongue in cheek approach exposes the ridiculous circumstances that women might be expected to endure just to be able to call themselves "a wife worthwhile".

Lisa Tomlinson points out in *The African-Jamaican Aesthetic* that some scholars of Marson's early work critiqued her love poetry as "too sentimental," (48) but in both of these poems from *Tropic Reveries*, she is confronting those structures that insist on pressuring women to marry and fall into the roles of wife and mother. Feelings of desperation in matters of love are common throughout her love poems and so the tone of frustration with the pressure to marry that she exposes in "To Wed or Not to Wed" and "If" can be considered alongside her feelings of inadequacy and confusion in matters of love in other poems. This gives us a better understanding of Marson's lyric poetry on a whole as exposing her vulnerabilities and desire to not just exist within limiting social structures, but to interrogate them as well. Marson alerts us to how these social pressures are in opposition to the level of effort and emotional support she receives in her romantic partnerships. She also implies how others might perceive her if she does not fall in line, as a "spinster". As a result of Marson's interrogation of these norms, the reader may be prompted to question adherence to oppressive standards set by society, standards that encourage women to seek out a partnership even if it is dreadful if it means they will not

live a life of “spinsterhood”. Marson also exposes the bias that often favors men in heterosexual partnerships.

Marson ends “To Wed or Not to Wed” by stating, “my apologies to Shakespeare”. Regarding this apology, Donnell writes, “Although such intertextuality may suggest that the meanings in operation here can only come into ‘play’ because of their textual antecedents, the counter textuality of these poems illustrates that Marson’s relationship to tradition is not passive or derivative” (33). Donnell alerts us to the point that this was a purposeful and useful move by Marson, not a poem arbitrarily imitating Shakespeare. It is important not to risk allowing this overt critique of mimicry to convince us of some lack in her ability. Marson does employ some mimicry, but at her own discretion and serving her own purposes. She mimics European poets in style, but there is a sense of humor at play. If returning to the soliloquy she draws upon, we are led to believe that these are the thoughts Marson is ruminating. She lays herself bare and encourages readers to question their own adherence to social norms even when they don’t best serve the individual. This is a far more radical move during the period this poem emerges. At the time Marson’s poem was published during the 1930’s, the subversive moves she displays are far less common, but perhaps even more important as she is helping to initiate important conversations regarding women and their contributions to Jamaican and broader society. Although Marson’s humor is subtle, it is impactful, providing an alternative narrative to women succumbing to social norms in order to adhere to customs.

Marson’s subtle humor exposes another characteristic of the poet’s personality, her wittiness, but also pushes the boundaries for Jamaican women’s voices in the arts of the early 20th century. Through her platform she provides a representational voice where

Jamaican women poets express their grievances regarding domestic partnerships, exposing absurdities in this specific social norm in favor of the patriarchy.

As a woman at the forefront of the literary tradition within Jamaica, Marson lays important groundwork with her humor. Marson's poems "If" and "To Wed or Not to Wed" point out in an implicit manner that alternate considerations of romantic partnerships are possible, opening the door for wider discussions of that subject. Marson's subtlety conveys what Vasquez articulates as "humor as a form of self production that opens up a space for bodies, discourses, and realities" (2). This conception of the expansive potential of humor makes room for a wide array of artists displaying both implied and overt strategies of humor.

Bennett's Preparation for Performance

If Marson lays a foundation for Jamaican women's use of humor through subtlety and implicit wit, Bennett deploys a much more overt humor in her work. In *Humor in the Caribbean Literary Canon*, Vasquez revises Roger Abrahams distinctions between Caribbean men's and women's uses of humor (in his book *The Man of Words in the West Indies*) where he aligns women with a respectable and orderly humor and men with freer and more adventurous behaviours (60). Vasquez points out that Bennett aligns with what Abrahams would categorize as a "male deployment of laughter". She asserts, "[Bennett] serves as a metaphor for entering male dominated discursive spaces, both in her poetics and in her contributions to the Caribbean arts" (60). It is with this spirit of boldness to go beyond the limitations established by society where Bennett makes her mark.

Teck kin-teet kibba heart bun.
(Use a smile to disguise your sorrow.)
- Miss Lou

Colonials, we began with this malarial enervation: that nothing could ever be built among these rotting shacks, barefooted backyards and moulting shingles; that being poor, we already had the theatre of our lives. So the self-inflicted role of martyr came naturally, the melo-dramatic belief that one was message-bearer for the millenium, that the enflamed ego was enacting their will...one could live two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect.

-Derek Walcott

As Bennett's oeuvre is extensive, in what follows, I focus on a few key works from various genres, including stage performances, writing, and interviews that all hold in common humor that demands attention. Bennett's language and style were far from the expected for Jamaican women's literature and a departure from the more imitative style of Western literary traditions that had come to be the norm from Caribbean writers in the late 19th to 20th centuries (Brathwaite, 116). As Derek Walcott writes, "We knew the literature of Empires, Greek, Roman, through their essential classics; and both the patois of the street and the language of the classroom hid the elation of discovery" (4). This is important to keep in mind as Bennett essentially created her own lane by making the radical move to be different from her predecessors. This difference came to be seen as essentially most reflective of Jamaican language and culture. We must also keep in mind that at the time of Bennett's early success in the 1940s, she was only one of a few Jamaican women writers in the public eye. Though Marson had broken barriers for women in the fields Bennett pursued, Marson did not gain a reputation for engaging the public through Jamaican language and customs nor was her poetry thought of then as especially comedic. Marson's humor was more implicit than obvious, so her humor could

be categorized as more reserved, situational, and at times sarcastic. By contrast, Bennett was received as outright funny. Quite simply, Bennett wanted the audience to laugh. In Bennett's poetry, radio broadcasts, and even most interviews, her humor takes center stage. In stage performances Bennett delivered her material confidently and laughed loudly at her own jokes. The ease and comfort that Bennett had with her audience in her audio and stage performances are clear and come through in her words, tone of voice, and laughter.

In interviews and stage performances Bennett often breaks into song to further bring to life a moment she wishes to recreate or a lesson she wishes to teach. It is even more common for her to show amusement when sharing a joke she finds especially funny. In considering how her humor manifests, I would like to consider a question: How did the artist's comedic voice evolve to be so conscious and critical of societal ills while maintaining a distance from the anger they might conjure? How did this approach aid her success? Bennett mastered her craft so well that she left an indelible mark on the Jamaican community, becoming arguably the country's most popular cultural icon, and came to represent the country on a grand scale internationally. Underneath the brilliance of Bennett's humor that the public gets to enjoy is a history of what had to be done for her to be able to get audiences to laugh along with her, the preparation for performance.

For many countries in the Caribbean during and after colonial rule, various art forms became the dominant mode of expression and the oral tradition became a valuable source for preserving histories and customs. Kamau Brathwaite asserts in *History of the Voice*,

> The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would *think* of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning. (17)

Jamaica is one such country where historically the oral tradition has been a dominant part of everyday life. In *Noises in the Blood* Carolyn Cooper describes the importance of the tradition in a Jamaican context stating,

> The oral tradition in Jamaica is conceived as a broad repertoire of themes and cultural practices, as well as a more narrow taxonomy of verbal techniques. The thematic repertoire includes diverse cultural beliefs/practices such as religion - obeah, myal, ettu, revival, kumina, spirit-possession; entertainment/socialisation practices...The verbal techniques include the compressed allusiveness of proverb, the enigmatic indirection of riddle and the antiphonal repetitions of oral narration which recur as set linguistic formulations in folk-tale, legend, song-text and performance poetry. (2)

This component of the culture serves as a pathway to human connection, one that thrived in spite of the country's history of colonial rule. Bennett identified connections between her own work and ritual traditions passed down from times of slavery that enhanced her creativity. Paul Gilroy provides general historical context, asserting in his essay "... To Be Real: The Dissident Forms of Black Expressive Culture" that "Survival in slave regimes or in other extreme conditions intrinsic to colonial order promoted the acquisition of what we might now understand to be performance skills" (14). Gilroy

makes plain that oppressed people having to live a life of "servitude and inferiority while guarding their autonomy" become performers (14). Essentially, individuals had to find ways to take care of themselves and their communities in spite of the injustices they were forced to contend with during and after slavery. On the multi functionality of such performances, bell hooks sheds light, "One may engage in strategic performances in the interests of survival employing the same skills one uses to perform in the interest of ritual play, yet the performative standpoint alters both the nature and impact of the performance" (211). This emphasizes the importance of context in performance. Of great importance is the recipient of the performance. As Taylor notes, it is "dependent totally on its framing, on the by whom and for whom, on the why where when it comes into being" (41). During slavery, people were essentially forced into bringing multiple selves to life, each self serving a role in survival and living.

With this reality in mind of trying to survive while attempting to create autonomy, we gain a heightened perspective in which to engage the performance elements of oral history in Jamaica and to consider how the incorporation of humor could add to such performance. Bennett's informal training is embedded in the culture and everyday activities within it and this training heavily involves the oral tradition. In thinking of performance more broadly, Richard Schechner helps readers to expand notions on what we consider performance. He writes, "everyday life also involves years of training, of learning appropriate bits of behaviour, of finding out how to adjust and perform one's life in relation to social and personal circumstances" (22). Schechner and other Performance Studies scholars call on us to pay close attention to the various ways people become involved in performance even without artistic intentions. In engaging Schechner's

considerations of the possibility of what we might consider performance, cultures with a prominent oral tradition have, in a sense, built performance into their lifestyles. Continuous engagement in one's culture not only provides foundation within a community, for artists like Bennett it becomes material from which to learn and through which to develop.

Bennett is keenly aware of the actions and mannerisms of community members in their everyday life and works these to her advantage through humor. This awareness sets Bennett apart from a more passive individual. Mervyn Morris notes, "Her mother, an accomplished dressmaker, would often, while hard at work, call on Louise to make her laugh. Louise also amused the customers, who came from a wide social range. She was taught to respect them all" (4). The average person tending to their everyday life may not be aware of the various roles they play at a given time or of the various ways they are gradually learning how to exist in their community; however, through Bennett we can draw clear connections of how her observations of community members' responses are a part of the development of her performance of humor. Bennett provides a bit of insight into one of the ways her humor was transmitted culturally through storytelling. She states:

> All the stories that were in the pretty foreign books with the pretty coloured pictures didn't sweet me like the Anancy stories which my grandmother and my great-uncle and my friends at school told me. We used to swap Anancy stories with each other during recess time and lunch time and those of us who knew plenty Anancy stories and could tell Bredda Nancy stories "sweet" were very popular with our schoolmates. We were always certain of a big audience during

> the storytelling sessions an all the listeners became part of the storytelling too, because we all knew the little spider-man so well. (15)

Anancy, the familiar trickster spider, played an important role for Bennett. As Cooper points out,

> The proverbial cunning of the Jamaican woman is one manifestation of the morally ambiguous craftiness of Anansi, the Akan folk hero, transmuted in Jamaican folklore into Brer Nansi, the archetypal trickster. Folktales of the mighty outwitted by the clever proliferate throughout the African diaspora. The shared history of plantation slavery in the Americas consolidates within the psyche of African peoples in the hemisphere, cultural continuities, ancestral memories of sabotage and marronage, systemic resistance to servitude. It is within this broader tradition of neo-African folk consciousness - the Anansi syndrome - that Bennett's elaboration of Jamaican female sensibility can be best understood. (48)

Cooper draws connection between characteristics of Anansi with Bennett's depictions that show "the fortitude of the Jamaican female" (48), providing a framework that encourages readers to consider how social conditions necessitate certain identity formations.

Through Bennett's reflection, she conveys a commitment to the art of storytelling and building community from an early age. Additionally, by identifying that there were appealing components of the "foreign stories," but that they were not as desirable for her as stories from her own culture, Bennett makes an important move. She doesn't outright

insult the “foreign” books, she simply shares that she placed a higher value on stories from her own culture. Bennett’s recollection is striking in that it conveys the seemingly subtle ways colonial influences within the Caribbean threaten to subvert one’s own customs through its prioritization of the ‘foreign’ as standard in a British colonial education system. However, Bennett also demonstrates her own move to disrupt this norm through championing other forms of knowledge transmission by sharing stories orally with those around her instead of only accepting what was taught in schools. We see through this note on her childhood experience that an important part of Bennett’s preparation involved not only the learning and remembering of these stories heard from friends and family, but also required the ability to tell the stories “sweet”, in a way that would be pleasing to an audience because of her keen comedic voice. As Mikhail Bakhtin highlights in *The Dialogic Imagination*,

> The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions. (293-294)

Bakhtin’s detailed attention to nuances of language ownership are summed up neatly for a Jamaican audience in Bennett’s elucidation of the advantage a story teller has in being able to tell a story “sweet”. As the telling of Anancy stories has a long history within black cultures, readers can gather that one’s ability to make the language and story one's

own would be valuable in both extending the audience and building the tradition. As folklorist Roger Abrahams points out in "The Shaping of Folklore Traditions in the West Indies: Aesthetic Principles and Tropisms," "This high value on words enhances the status of those in the community who can best use them as a means of performing and arguing" (2). Richard Bauman also notes that "storytelling involves a display of *competence*" (13). Bennett learned early on that the pay-off for being able to tell the stories sweet was a large and engaged audience. The jokes that others would come to connect with and the manner in which Bennett would deliver those jokes was a long time in the making.

In "The Oral Artist", Isidore Okpewho writes, "To be an accomplished oral artist, some form of apprenticeship or training is necessary" (21). Okpewho goes on to describe two types of training, formal and informal, the latter of which I have focused on for its function in helping to cultivate Bennett's oral art. Okpewho states,

> Informal training entails a kind of loose attachment whereby the future artist happens to live or move in an environment in which a particular kind of oral art is practiced and simply absorbs the skill in it as time goes on. It is possible, of course, for a person to live forever in such an environment and not develop the skill; one's mind or nature has to be predisposed toward art before the skill can successfully take root. (21)

We see how Bennett was "predisposed toward art" when she recalls the time she took to pay attention to her schoolmates' reactions to her storytelling and her interest in telling the stories well enough to grow her audience from an early age. In an interview with

Mary Jane Hewitt, Bennett reflects on her more formal training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London: “I just let them know that I didn’t come to lose an accent or to lose anything, really, but to get some technical knowledge of the theatre and whatnot...I didn’t come to lose any of the cultural things that I had acquired” (9). Through this statement Bennett conveys an awareness that in the context of empire, losing parts of one’s culture is possible but preventable if steps are taken to preserve it. Bennett wished to add to her technical knowledge, not to forget cultural components of her artistic abilities. Bennett rejects the notion of adopting British customs and culture, a rejection that becomes a staple of her work. For Bennett, a purposeful will to hold on to her culture was necessary in order to resist the power of British colonial thinking and practices especially since in England she was out of the context where her culture had been acquired. As we can see through the recollection of her time telling and retelling Anancy stories in her youth, the foundation of her craft was firmly rooted in the community and informal training; it was of great importance to her that she maintained those connections to her roots.

Bennett proves to be a master at connecting with her audience and her wide ranging artistic works are a good case study for considering humor that is developed out of an apparent necessity. In order for her humor to get to a point of resistance, Bennett had to prepare through years of participating and identifying the everyday performances in social interactions and circumstances of disenfranchisement within her community that needed to be exposed and addressed. Through that self training in community, she could most accurately convey the stories she wished to tell and interrogate the norms that others took for granted. The end result of years of preparation is what the audience would then

get to witness and continues to participate in today, through her oeuvre. As Denise deCaires Narain writes, “Bennett’s appeal lies both in the way she makes ‘ordinary Jamaicans’ the subject of her poetry and in her assertion of a poetic voice which claims its authority in the indigenous language and its associated values” (65). By grouping these two attributes of Bennett’s work, deCaires Narain brings our attention to the importance of their interconnectedness that affirms ‘ordinary Jamaicans,’ of the importance of their language and values. Anancy stories, though playful, helped to lay a powerful foundation for Bennett in learning how to engage her community through performance. She would eventually publish some of those Anancy stories she’d long performed, in *Anancy and Ms. Lou*, for a wider audience.

To Pretend to be Laughing

In “On the Comic and Laughter”, Vladimir Propp asserts that “laughter is caused by the sudden revelation of some hidden flaw. When there is no flaw or when we fail to see it, we will not laugh” (36). Though differing greatly from Propp’s Russian social context, Bennett might agree with this understanding of laughter’s triggers through her characterization of her own use of humor to tackle issues of colonialism, racism, and sexism, among other issues, within a Jamaican context. As we see in “Dutty Tough”, a poem whose title already alerts Jamaicans through its meaning, ‘the ground is hard,’. Bennett is hyper attuned to the real problems beneath the surface. We see this dramatised when she writes “Sun a-shine but tings noh bright, / Doah pot-a-bwile, bickle noh nuff” (159). Bennett makes clear that though things may appear well (“Sun a -shine”), there are issues to be dealt with (“but tings noh bright”). In the second line, Bennett alerts the reader that resources are scarce although it may not immediately appear as such. In an

interview with Dennis Scott, Bennett once said of her work, “I have found a medium through which I can pretend to be laughing” (Bennett on Bennett). In the interview, Bennett also makes reference to the well-known saying, *laugh to keep from crying*. She is clearly aware of the magical powers of humor to conceal, but her words “pretend to be laughing” can be interpreted in different ways that I will discuss further into the chapter. In interviews Bennett exposes humor as a defense mechanism, but this is also clear in her poetry. This quote from Bennett begs the question of why one would have to pretend to laugh--after all, isn’t laughter a state of joy? We associate the act of pretending as just that, an act. If there is another emotion that dominates, why hide it? Her statement conveys a complexity worth unpacking because it acknowledges that her laughter is doing the job of concealing and is also a necessary coping mechanism.

Mervyn Morris provides a look into Bennett’s use of humor as technique in his biography of the poet-performer:

> [S]he generated laughter of many kinds and for various purposes: corrective laughter, laughter as tolerant recognition, laughter as a coping mechanism—survival laughter. Her work is usually assessing values and attitudes, and it is often ironic. When [Dennis Scott] asked her, ‘Is your work “angry”?’ she replied, ‘Not obviously. Not obviously angry.’ (10)

We see Bennett’s acknowledgement that her anger operates far beneath the surface of her work. Any objection to her on the basis of anger by potential detractors would not be seen as credible due to the cheerful nature in which she delivers her material. Bennett conveys that she must hide aspects of her deeper feelings within her performance.

Though humor and laughter appear dominantly in her work, that does not mean that anger is not a part of her true feelings. Bennett has made it so her words perform in this complex manner. Still, there is more at stake here than her admitted suppression of emotions. Bennett's act does not only serve herself. Her act is multi-layered having the important benefit of making her presence known and felt, a powerful woman's voice that may otherwise have never been taken seriously had she not been funny. In Bennett's presentation of the realities of multiple facets of Jamaican life, members of her audience whose voices may otherwise go unheard can also feel seen. The humor incorporated in her work can then both reveal dire circumstances and connect on a human level through language that is uniquely Jamaican. Take for example the second stanza of "Dutty Tough". Bennett writes,

> Tings so bad, dat now-a-days wen
> Yuh ask smaddy how dem do,
> Dem fraid yuh teck i tell dem back
> So dem noh answer yuh! (159)

In the scenario Bennett outlines, people are going through such a tough time that social niceties can be overbearing, "Dem fraid yuh teck i tell dem back". The laughter that results from Bennett's observation is not because the circumstance in itself is funny, but the laughter would likely come from one's personal experience or proximity to the experience of the tough times she details in the first stanza.

Looking at Bennett's vast content and the subject matters she takes on in her work, we can see that she is indeed addressing a great deal of serious matters, sometimes initiating and sometimes furthering conversations through her work. As previously noted, this gathering of information and knowledge of her culture and people was a long time in

the making. By the time Bennett was granted the opportunities to share with the public, she'd had years of preparation through observation of the various components of the lives of the Jamaican people. Bennett recognizes and exposes societal flaws, then in turn gets her audience to consider and interrogate them. She conveys through her comment, "I can pretend to be laughing", that she has an understanding of how her audiences will receive her comedy and even shares with them the control she has over her art. Bennett implies that the humor does the job of unveiling truth, though for her, the content of the joke is not diminished by laughter. Bennett is attuned to having found a tool to engage audiences in topics of politics, gender bias, and the resulting effects of colonisation, things we might consider to be no laughing matter, by uncovering societal flaws and getting the audience to see how oppressive forces explicitly and implicitly permeate their communities. The audience is able to laugh wholeheartedly when they can see the flaws she uncovers. It isn't that these flaws are new, they are simply exposed and in this way, Bennett's performance of humor acts as society's consciousness.

In sharing additional insight on her view of humor, Bennett demonstrates some of the difficulty that occurs when attempting to pin down the complexities in its use and reception. She states,

> The quality I think, is stronger among the negro people in that we have a certain quality of forgiveness. I don't care whether people agree with me or not; I find that the negro people have the greatest capacity for forgiving of any people I can find anywhere. I can't think of any other race that has suffered as much as the negro has all over the world that could behave as the negro does...To behave as

> we do, to laugh at things as we do--well really! To make fun of ourselves and other people as we do in the midst of unhappiness! (Bennett on Bennett)

Bennett anticipates that there will be some disagreement with her statement, but what she identifies in this instance as "forgiving" comes through in the remainder of her interview as a more complex understanding of humor's motivations than is captured through that particular word. It would seem here that Bennett identifies the quality of being able to laugh at serious matters, even at tragedy, as a sign of forgiveness, but the varied ways she describes her work in this very interview convey a more nuanced understanding of humor. If for Bennett there is a mask or act when it comes to humor and she also equates laughter with forgiving, then perhaps that forgiveness is also a mask or act. Perhaps a joke and hearty laugh can be deployed in a way that one might mistake it as forgiveness of some offense, while another who understands the depth of the joke can laugh to keep from crying. Parts of the text will connect to audience members in a different way depending on the communities they come from and their connections to the history within the text. In a similar way, Bennett's jokes are received differently depending on the audience's level of connection to what is being joked about. When Bennett states that "negro people have the greatest capacity for forgiving," it speaks more to the appearance of forgiveness than actual forgiveness. We've considered the various ways the performance of laughter when used strategically can elevate conversation while subverting oppressive entities, but Bennett implicitly conveys through this statement that there is also power in conceiving of laughter as a way towards the appearance of forgiveness.

Acquiring Agency Through Humor

A close attention to the nuances of speech and tone in conversations is evident in Bennett's live performance, a crucial mode of her self expression. Bennett brought the drama of the stage to her radio show, *Ms. Lou's Views*. In a video recording of the show, Bennett delivers a monologue featuring her well known character Aunty Roachy speaking to the audience in a manner as if she could see them. deCaires Narain makes an observation about Bennett's poetry collection, *Jamaican Labrish*, that holds true for her radio monologues: "Bennett self consciously signals her role as a 'gossip', and, in performances, uses body language and intonation of voice to create an atmosphere of intimacy with the audience, inviting the audience to 'collude'" (72). In the recording of her monologue, Bennett begins with the signature phrase for her Aunty Roachy stories, "Listen no!" After this calling for the audience's attention, Bennett quickly moves into storytelling mode, detailing the events of a nursing strike and impersonating the characters involved as her free hand seemingly begins to feel the words, moving with the narrative. It is evident that even though she is sitting in a recording studio and without a live audience, Bennett knows how to summon their presence and anticipate their reactions ("Ms. Lou and the Early Jamaican Theatre," 42:42-44:30).

When Bennett speaks to the audience through the radio monologues transcribed in *Aunty Roachy Seh*, there is often the familiarity of a friend sharing a story or relaying the latest gossip, but also an authority that we might associate with an elder. In the monologue "Free Schoolin", Bennett speaks to her audience in response to Prime Minister Michael Manley's 1973 announcement of free education for Jamaican children. She asks her audience, "Oonoo did read de big headline eena newspaper yessideh weh

seh ‘Education to be Free?’” (22) This line reflects the excitement of a person who is ready to talk and is open to conversation that could garner a myriad of reactions. Bennett goes into a retelling of the conversation that ensued between an excited Aunty Roachy and a “croomoojin gal” with nothing positive to say about the news. When the “croomoojin gal” adamantly questions, “How we gwine get the money?”, Aunty Roachy replies, “Same way yuh did able fi lengthen yuh midi skirt an meck maxi fi go a Mona foreign bredda welcome-home party because yuh did like him off!” Aunty Roachy conveys through a casual yet potentially embarrassing observation that money gets spent on much less important things. In this case, Aunty Roachy highlights that money was spent frivolously on clothes by stating, “fi lengthen yuh midi skirt an meck maxi”. These words are a calling out of the “croomoojin gal,” questioning her priorities through a comment that likely would be received with laughter at her expense. The message comes through clearly from Aunty Roachy: education is of higher value than material goods. When the “croomojin gal” insists, “But we cyaan afford it,” Aunty Roachy maintains her optimism and makes a salient point, “We cyaan afford not to afford it! For if we less-count pickney, den we maltreatin the future of we country, mmmm” (22). With a knowing “mmmm” Bennett’s Aunty Roachy punctuates her message that children are the future and thus should have free education so that the country can prosper. Aunty Roachy is firm in her position: invest in the country’s children.

In "Culture and Nationalism on the World Stage: Louise Bennett's *Aunty Roachy Seh* Stories," Opal Palmer Adisa provides observations on the Aunty Roachy character. Adisa reveals Aunty Roachy as an amalgamation of several key figures:

> Aunty Roachy represents the average Jamaican who speaks the Jamaican language, popularly and erroneously called patois but renamed nation language by Edward Kamau Brathwaite. She is both a composite and a reworking of the legendary national female heroine Maroon Granny Nanny, who ruthlessly fought the British and was a strategist par excellence. Aunty Roachy also reveals the feisty independent spirit of many market women, who are known to say what they please and can wield a knife deftly if someone tries to abscond with their goods. But Aunty Roachy also represents common sense and "bigness." What is clear from both the tone and tempo of these stories is that Aunty Roachy has a ready mouth, a common denominator of all the three types of women after whom she is modeled. (127)

Of great importance in Adisa's description of the characteristics that make up Aunty Roachy is that none of them display weakness. The market women that Adisa connects Aunty Roachy to have a similar independent spirit as conveyed in Marson's poem "My Philosophy" from *The Moth and the Star*, where Marson details an interaction between two market women. In describing one of the women, Marson writes, "She carries a huge basket on her head. She swings both hands violently as she addresses the friend close behind her without turning" (71). Similar to Mason's depiction of their strength and no-nonsense personalities, Adisa draws upon the feisty nature of the market woman that relates to Aunty Roachy. When Adisa points out that Aunty Roachy has a "ready mouth," this signals a person who is prepared with the right response in any given situation. Bennett weaves a narrative to include aspects of colorful characters reminiscent of figures common in Jamaican communities. The personality that comes across is of a strong and

confident woman no matter where you place her in the community. Adisa details the varied contexts where we might find elements of the character of Aunty Roachy in Jamaican society. In each of the described contexts, Aunty Roachy is defender at times for herself, but most often on behalf of her community.

Bennett could easily make it so that she is the one delivering the message, but she gives the task to Aunty Roachy. As a strategy, Bennett appears to use the character of Aunty Roachy to make or co-sign bold assertions. In order to bring this across to the audience, the voices of the characters are of paramount importance. What comes through clearly in the interaction in "Free Schoolin" is Bennett's attention to the nuances of speech and voice. We are able to distinguish each person's personality and point of view while Bennett maintains her role as messenger and interested party. Bennett provides us with enough material to imagine the dialogue as if it were being played out on stage for us. From the interaction in "Free Schoolin", the "croomojin girl" comes across as pessimistic and focused on things that cannot elevate the most vulnerable members of society, while Aunty Roachy is the voice of reason and progress. Manley's implementation of free education for Jamaican children was one of his many initiatives to empower Jamaicans. As he states in his first book, *The Politics of Change: A Jamaican Testament*, (1974), "if the individual is to be equal in society, we must understand everything equality implies. It implies access to a home, it implies access to a job. It implies access to the educational process and to remedy under law" (31). A large part of Manley's efforts while in power was centered on providing Jamaicans with more access for development, not least of all educational access. In presenting this proposed government policy in her monologue, Bennett engages her audience in a serious topic

that could greatly impact their lives. Bennett participates in this important conversation and makes her position visible through Aunty Roachy's convincing argument presented through Jamaican nation language. Each character has humorous moments and each says their piece all while readers get two sides of a very important and then current debate on free schooling. The audience acquires the information in a most natural way, through humorous conversation and in a manner that highlights communal ties. Humor in this way is functioning towards community building.

Bennett brings the audience's attention to the necessity of discussing and fighting for women's rights in Jamaican society, elevating the often hidden concerns that women face on a daily basis. Historically, gender is often disregarded as an issue of concern in Caribbean countries and not coincidentally, those in power are predominantly men. It is well known that Jamaica's history leading up to independence did not take into account to any large degree the voices and opinions of women. The glaring injustice of a colonial past can make it so that issues of gender adversely affecting women are pushed aside under the guise of advancement for all. But the plight of women in Jamaica is one that called for special attention. If the issues affecting the plurality of Jamaican women were to be heard, alternate paths to power had to be paved than the traditional ones in place which were almost exclusively occupied by men. The lack of space afforded women in sections of society that made decisions affecting their lives, such as government posts, meant that women had to make their voices heard in other ways. Historically for the Caribbean, the presence of policies and systems put in place through white imperialism sought to serve only those in power, but once this imperialist representation exited, nations were left to pick up the pieces and create new systems and policies in an attempt

to start anew. In *Citizenship Under Pressure*, Rachel Mordecai contextualizes the social climate of the decade following independence:

> Jamaica was a country plagued by its postcolonial condition, evident in race and class stratification, the dispossession and alienation of the majority population of poor black people, the conspicuous consumption of a relatively small group of brown and white people whose lifestyles and economic security were predicated on a ready supply of cheap manual labour, and the widespread privileging of the (near-) white and European over the black and African. (1)

It is worth noting that though Jamaica became independent in 1962, the first prime minister was a mixed race Jamaican man who appeared white. Though he promoted a redefinition of Jamaica after British colonialism, visually the representation at the time of independence was similar as before, white and male. Black leadership and representation in government eventually would come to be the norm, but male leadership would remain dominant. For black women in Jamaica there were several layers of oppression to rectify and during the mid 20th century, though the country was on the verge of independence, the gender inequality in the government was apparent. In *Cultural Conundrums* Natasha Barnes points out that "no Caribbean nationalist movement ever made gender a central conceptual category in its discourse of anticolonial revolution" (135). Barnes makes it plain: "The spoils of independence, it seemed, were the province of Jamaican men" (19). This disregard of women's issues reminds us how a patriarchal society can perpetuate itself even in a climate of anticolonial struggle unless there is a major and systematic intervention.

Bennett was a vital member of this kind of intervention, as she promoted discourse representing the varied voices and concerns of Jamaican women before and leading into independence. The multi functional approach and effect of her work using humor as a tool was a necessary and effective way into the larger conversations of gender that needed to happen, but simply were not taking place. In "Oman Equality," a monologue delivered on *Ms. Lou's Views*, Bennett discusses unfair treatment of women. She states,

> Yes, bwoy! Nuff oman deh pon a seh dat dem a seek liberation from man-dominance, counta how some man got a way fi chat bout seh 'Woman's place is in the home', an a demands dat oman tan a yard so wash an cook an clean all day long, an teck any lickle money pittance what de husband waan fling pon dem a week time, an meck it stretch fi provide food an clothes an shelter, meanwhile de husban-dem a drink an gamble as dem like, Mmmm. (66)

Bennett speaks pointedly to the multi layered oppression many women face in society, causing them to "seek liberation from man-dominance". Bennett does the work of elucidating the circumstances many women in the home are made to endure, including cooking and cleaning while also having to provide all the needs for the home with the small amounts of money given to them at the discretion of their male partners ("what de husband waan fling pon dem a week time"). Bennett also brings the audience's attention to the fact that the men in these relationships are able to frivolously use the money they make. Bennett makes clear how little agency women often have due to being prevented from entering the workforce or from controlling household income. Further into the monologue, she goes on to include Aunty Roachy to unpack key points on the need for

the women's liberation movement: "Dem got some man what hole seh dat oman no got no right fi run lef dem yard go work fi money, for all dem a do is box bread outa man mout. Lawks, wat a joke! From ah bawn! What a unfairity" (Bennett, 66) The joke here lies in the ridiculous reasoning offered to women and Bennett's reaction to such a point of view. The speaker demonstrates through this line that a root problem in the fight for equality is that men who would venture to say that women "box bread outa man mout" have the perspective that they are entitled to the opportunities and monetary rewards while women appear as nuisances to take from men what is due them[2]. There is a clear need identified here for men to check the ways in which they operate from a privileged position in society as women are relegated to a position determined by the male centered society. Bennett condemns the misogynistic view that a woman's place is in the home while it is a man's role to make the money. To "box bread outa man mout," essentially conveys that women would be stealing from men. She points out that the struggle for women's equality is a worldwide concern and brings attention to the need for Jamaica to get on board as this is a shared concern. Bennett calls out this unjust point of view that diminishes women's value, regarding it as absurd and a joke. Through this move, Bennett also further asserts the woman's presence in society, weaponizing humor to attack men's supposed dominance.

Bennett goes on to reveal further absurdities she finds embedded in the very meaning of 'equality' as it relates to gender. When Bennett states, "All like de rights fi get equal pay fi equal work like man," she asks the audience to meet her on the basis that if a person does the same work, they should get the same pay, regardless of gender.

[2] In her book, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, scholar Rhoda Reddock examines several later instances of the problem that Bennett humorously covers in "Oman Equality".

Globally, pay disparity due to gender and adversely impacting women is an age-old concern. As Karen Finley bluntly writes, “if you’re not a mother and you’re not a whore in this society you’re considered unproductive. Woman’s value is still based on her biology. If a woman becomes a bank president she still conforms to a male image of what that is” (256). Bennett dramatizes Finley’s point, highlighting women's equal pay as a ‘right’. Bringing in Aunty Roachy, she continues, “Aunty Roachy seh dat she gree wid dat, for if a oman a do de same work like man she suppose fi lif up de same pay envelope.” Bennett focuses here on what is fair, providing a stance that doesn't depend on biology but abilities and common sense. Her humor functions here to bring Jamaican citizens’ attention to a crucial matter impacting the lives of the whole society through privileging men by keeping women’s positions in society as subservient to them.

The monologue isn’t without complications as the dialogue moves through several viewpoints. Aunty Roachy cautions against the use of the word ‘equality’ categorizing it as a “croomojin wud”. Essentially the word “equality” is isolated as problematic as the monologue expresses that there are differences between the sexes that can’t be denied, while adding the word “rights” brings the focus to what is fair on a human level. Bennett’s speaker warns against using the word ‘equality’ to convey that women should be equal to men, implying a constant comparison to men. To reiterate Finley’s point, “If a woman becomes a bank president she still conforms to a male image of what that is”. Bennett troubles the connotations of the word ‘equality’ while bringing the audience to a place where they can interrogate many nuanced aspects of the issue.

Bennett’s monologue enacts here a key element of what she states in the above interview on the desire for her work to “capture what the people saying.” Bennett raises

an important point that is in the general interest of women's advancement in society, bringing Aunty Roachy in to agree with that point and using the character to move the conversation to a place of potential divergence for women. The dialogue at times seems conflicting in its goal, sometimes reducing the issue at hand to jokes about jobs women don't want to do. The multiple viewpoints are all presented as legitimate in their own right and readers aren't necessarily clear by the end of the monologue which perspective dominates. Bennett does, however, bring the issue of gender bias and pay disparity to the forefront of her readers' minds. Shining the spotlight on this topic urges the audience to also interrogate for themselves these prevalent societal norms, thereby making the possibilities for intervention more likely. She identifies the conversations happening in Jamaica surrounding women's issues, allowing the audience to consider potential solutions. Whether or not we agree with the entirety of Bennett's message, it is conveyed in a manner that engages her audience and probes at the tough questions. Bennett exposes the talk of the people and using Aunty Roachy, she is able to convey her viewpoints while revealing the powerful social interactions within everyday conversations between Jamaicans.

Transcending Performance: "We nuh haffi shame atall"

> ...black is the manifestation of Africanist aesthetics. The willingness to back-phrase, to move with a percussive attack, to sing against the grain of the other instruments, and to include the voices of those gathered in the fabric of the event—these are the elements of black that endure and confirm. Yes, it can be the grain of the voice or the sway of the hip; a stutter call that sounds like an engine starting or an unanticipated reference to political circumstances: these elements

> mark the emergence of black in time and space. This black is action: action engaged to enlarge capacity, confirm presence, to dare. (DeFrantz and Gonzalez, 5)

Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez's insight on black cultural aesthetics provides a thoughtful consideration of various nuanced elements of black performance through which we might engage Bennett's staged performances. This conceptualization of blackness relays an understanding that I believe allows for unification of black cultural aesthetics while still embracing the uniqueness of expression in different black cultures. DeFrantz considers movement and action as a part of the black experience---the performance embedded in the experience. Bennett uses her performance to do just what DeFrantz details. Once exposed to Bennett's powerful stage performances it becomes difficult to separate the writer from her performances due to her commanding presence. While her written work is powerful on its own, her staged performances offer us the opportunity to not only hear her voice, but also to see and/or listen to improvised aspects of her performances impacted by audience interaction that further bring her work to life. The addition of Bennett's charismatic voice, laugh, and improvisation immerses the listener in the immediate Jamaican cultural atmosphere and allows us to see more of Bennett's personality. The changes in emphasis that come through in Bennett's voice are effects that words on the page cannot give as completely.

In the audio recording, *Miss Lou in Concert*, laughter and joy are dominant components of Bennett's performance. Her performance includes several songs that introduce topics such as language and diaspora. In the opening selection, Bennett can be heard singing the Jamaican tune, "Come Mek Me Hol Yu Han". She then shifts into the role of teacher as she shares the purpose of the song, to welcome the audience. She continues, "It's a long time girl me never see you, come mek me hol yu han...". The joy in her voice comes through clearly. Bennett sings for a short time and encourages the audience to do so as well, which they do. She then interrupts the harmonious sing-along, shifting to a more stern tone, and states, "But I don't want to hear anybody sey 'Come let me hold your hand,'" carefully enunciating each word she quotes in a clearly mocking manner of an Anglophone colonial character. Bennett's move to summon characters by imitating them is common in her work, but most effective when it can be heard. The mimicked voice is one purposely stripped of the Jamaican accent and one of the effects of the live presentation is allowing the audience to envision the words being said by the character summoned. In hearing her imitation, the audience erupts in laughter. It is clear that they too are familiar with the person on the receiving end of this mockery. The mimicked person could either be an actual Anglophone colonial outsider of the culture or an individual such as a migrant Jamaican who has decided to censor themselves out of a desire to align with the Anglophone speech of a forein country. This is a similar scenario

as the one in Bennett's poem "Dry Foot Bwoy". Bennett goes on to state the reason that the words should not be pronounced in that manner, "...because yuh gwaan to poil up de culture". This comment is in the same vein as Bennett's previously mentioned resolve not to lose any part of her culture during her training at RADA in London. This awareness of such vulnerability for a country still in transition as it moves from colony to independent nation-state is an essential component of cultivating the nation's own cultural identity. Bennett's mixing of Jamaican vernacular with British vernacular shows us the importances in nuances of meaning and experiences of language and culture. By providing the original version of her statement in Patwa then offering the "poil up" version in British English, she makes clear that Jamaican vernacular is a language in its own right and the full meaning of the original statement cannot be received with a British English translation and pronunciation. Inevitably, some things will be adopted and adapted from the colonizing country; however, Bennett reminds the audience that they have their own customs and language and she is consistent in her encouragement to value these above that of others. This playful insistence is a necessary reminder that their culture is something of value. Bennett wishes to prevent what Ralph Ellison might term the "phony self" for Jamaicans when she admonishes "yuh gwaan to poil up de culture"[3].

[3] In his essay "What these Children are Like," Ralph Ellison cautions Black Americans "there is a bit of the phony built into every American...We change our environment, our speech, our styles of living, our dress and often our values. So in effect, we become somebody else--or so we are tempted to believe--and often we act as though we have no

This move by Bennett prioritizes the language and culture of Jamaicans and subverts desires to make the language fit a British English standard.

Bennett enacts this in her stage performance. In *Misss Lou in Concert*, she engages the topic of language hierarchy through the character of Aunty Roachy. Bennett includes the audience as if in conversation with them by saying, "And my Aunty Roachy, she nuh like fi nobody sey a no language at all at all, she vex yuh know?" Here Bennett refers to those who would find fault with Jamaican vernacular and even goes as far as to say it is not a language. Bennett shares how upsetting such claims are to Aunty Roachy. By bringing into the conversation this familiar character, Bennett's story gains an additional layer of importance and legitimacy through Aunty Roachy's respected point of view. As Lloyd Brown says of Bennett's use of persona, "Her poetic voice fascinates and challenges her audience precisely because her characters seem to be so irrefutably independent of a controlling artistic vision of authorial judgement...the woman's experience remains unobtrusive rather than explicitly reiterated" (116). Brown highlights Bennett's ability to bring her characters to life. This is an essential move within her work: by allowing her characters to simply be themselves, she highlights multiple women's voices in society, bringing them from the shadows to the mainstream. In *Miss Lou in Concert*, Bennett conveys high regard for Aunty Roachy and we become privy to her

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connection to our past." (qtd. in Callahan, 21) The "phony selves" that Ellison details in an American context are a result of combined false productions.

valued opinion. Later in the performance, Bennett describes the rhythm of Jamaican vernacular and gives a brief synopsis of the many influences of the language. She states in *Miss Lou in Concert*, "This culture that we have come from all the different people that have lived in the country, yuh know? And we just use it and now we have a real West Indian...a real Jamaican culture". Bennett's vocal tone conveys joy and satisfaction in the resulting fact of a uniquely Jamaican culture being created in spite of the country's history of slavery and colonial rule. Bennett acknowledges here that many different people have contributed to the making of Jamaican culture and later in the recording asserts that though there are many influences, "the basic ting dat we derived from is African". This is an important moment where Bennett frames Africa's influence on Jamaica in a positive light, thus combatting the dominant narrative colonised countries are faced with, one that prioritizes European influences.

Bennett also makes a few connections between her poems for us in *Miss Lou Live*, allowing some insight into her train of thought when curating her work. Bennett introduces her most well-known poem, "Colonisation in Reverse," by saying, "Jamaican people like travel...one time, yuh know, in the late 40s and early 50s dem did seh dat we colonisin England in reverse. Me and my Aunty Roachy did say so". In this move, Bennett makes the distinction between herself as the poet, and Aunty Roachy, the poetic speaker. It is a humorous moment where Bennett aligns explicitly with her close collaborator. Bennett then shares the poem and follows up with a few examples of what those in the Jamaican diaspora might miss about their homeland. We are able to hear the

words in the way that the author intends and the humorous moments are heightened through her tone of voice and laughter. In her mannerisms, phrasings, cadence, stresses in voice, and ad libs, we get elements of speech that are common to Jamaican culture and a further understanding of the complexities of language in the culture.

As a person skilled in her ability to write and deliver comedic stories on stage, Bennett employs humor in a similar way as Taylor describes performance in general. Her humor is always in an active mode--- telling and retelling by drawing connections between herself and the larger community, as well as to history and the present through bringing to the forefront issues of politics, inequality and cultural prejudice. By bringing attention to these issues, Bennett motions towards a more fair society. As she joyfully shares with the audience the nuances of speech, language, and ways of being Jamaican, she encourages the audience to find the joy for themselves even in the absurdities of social situations and realities that she describes. Bennett celebrates the nation and its people, conveying a deep connection and investment in the values that they have.

Closing Thoughts

In the works I've chosen to focus on in this chapter from both Marson and Bennett, the humor of both authors subverts colonial influences and patriarchal forces through function as defense mechanisms, transcending such forces to acquire agency. Though Bennett's incorporation of humor is a dominating component of her work, Marson's more subdued humor proves effective as a subversive method and is a radical move considering her early 20th century context. The works I've chosen from Marson

demonstrate an incorporation of humor as an additional method to convey her personal struggle with the realities of her social conditions, but as readers, we are also called to consider their persistence today. Marson's works don't depend heavily on humor, but further reveal the complexity of her relationship with social norms and her compulsion to undermine the status quo manifested in a myriad ways.

Using her gift of humor and ability to endear audiences to her, Bennett was not only an entertaining figure, but an agent of political mobilization. Knowing what we know now, that it wasn't until 2006 that Jamaica appointed its first woman prime minister, it seems obvious that the need to prioritize the advancement of women through access in all aspects of Jamaican society was always there, but ignored by those in power. Through the avenue of humor, Bennett was a dramatic presence dominating in areas of society where women's opinions were overlooked or ignored. Even in instances where Bennett might have to pretend to be laughing, she uplifts through her adherence to Jamaican culture and refusal to prioritize British customs and language. Through her humor she provides a relief from societal ills while investigating them and getting her audience to do this identifying and critiquing themselves. Humor used in this way pushes the conversation forward, so that in addition to being a tool for healing and to subvert oppressive forces--both of which are important effects of her humor--it also positively positions her as a political voice.

Mahadev Apte asserts that "Humor is an ingredient in almost all aspects of human existence and the sociocultural universe, hence it should rightfully be taken seriously (152-153). Apte conveys that there is a complexity to humor's role that demands we see past the joke to its necessity as a part of human life. There are divergent ways of

accessing and contextualizing activism. Jamaica is no exception. Bennett's ability to carry on the oral tradition was heightened through her talents of stage performance and humor. She ushered in activism by drawing from a rich tradition of storytelling and humor in a way that extended to a broader Jamaican public deeply familiar with that rich tradition. Bennett opened up space for what an artist can do with their voice to impact the community and demonstrated a different way to stand up for what one believes in, with a smile.

CHAPTER 3

Talking Back: Jamaican Women Poets Building on Tradition and Extending Concepts of the Human

Good poetry is like effective prayer, it feeds the human spirit, it nourishes, it puts us in touch with forces far greater than ourselves.
- Lorna Goodison

Marson Foregrounding a Thriving Literary Landscape

In a 1949 article titled "We Want Books But Do We Encourage Our Writers," Una Marson made an astute observation on the state of authorial representation in Jamaica. She stated, "in our island home the writers who have reached professional status can be counted on the fingers of one hand...Now, I am told and I know that in Jamaica the young writer is regarded as a little queer" (185). Marson captures the skepticism of Jamaicans about the professional writer and their potential, correlating the low number of Jamaican writers with the general lack of support for the profession on the island. Marson calls out their inability to accept individuals that are outside parameters they know and can understand. Plainly, being a writer was not seen as a practical endeavor by any means.

In her speech, Marson provides an example of a segment of society where her observations can be seen in action, "If he is a civil servant his superiors think he would be a better civil servant if he was not interested in literature and had no literary ambitions. In fact everything is done by his superiors to discourage him to attain…In the home he hides his poems or essays for fear of being laughed at" (186). Marson is hyper attuned to the writer's essential place in society and makes plain the larger issue of the public regarding the work of the writer as optional, a hobby that takes away from some more meaningful work. She encourages the public to redefine their conceptions of writers. As James

Baldwin puts it in his 1962 essay "The Creative Process," "The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through vast forests, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place" (315). Baldwin frames the potential of the artist in a way Marson would appreciate and in a manner that sees creatives as integral figures in society as they see what others might not. Marson, more than a decade before Baldwin's essay would come into public conversation, enacts what Baldwin calls "illuminating the darkness" with her words. Marson's sentiments are also in line with Audre Lorde's bold statement on the importance of poetic expression for oppressed groups, specifically women: "poetry is not a luxury". Lorde's 1977 essay published in "Chrysalis: A Magazine of Female Culture" would come almost three decades after Marson's speech and reminds us that the problem of disregard that artists often face in society has a long history. Though Marson exposes these truths in the mid 20th century, prior to both Lorde and Baldwin, she conveys a similar passion and urgency. Through her speech, Marson recognizes the essential role of the writer to society and it is clear through her contributions as an activist and creative that she worked hard so that Jamaica would not neglect its writers and the future of the Jamaican literary landscape. The observations she makes in this article are in line with her commitment to the craft of writing as well as the advancement of Jamaica's literary culture and the establishment of writing as a viable profession.

This desire for public support in a changing Jamaica is heightened by the fact that Marson's speech comes when the country was only a bit more than a decade from achieving independence in 1962. Though she does not make the connection here to the country's colonial past, it is probable that this aversion by the public is also rooted in the

country's white imperialist history. As Charles Fuller states in a 1988 interview centering racism in the U.S., "Racism says that most black people don't know how to do that. Racism says, 'I have a place for black people in my mind and that place does not include literature. It does not include literacy, literature, or creative art in any way, shape, or form'" (qtd. in Harrison, 314). Fuller's statement reminds us how important the arts are to expressing identity within a culture and makes Marson's move to encourage Jamaicans to stretch their thinking beyond the limits placed on them, even more urgent during the 1940's. After all, self imposing limitations on the potential of the country's people serves to continue the damage of the very white imperialist thinking that is to be dismantled.

Marson not only lent her voice in support of the arts, but also led by example as a woman working and publishing in multiple creative genres. One of Marson's many endeavors, *The Cosmopolitan*, was a monthly magazine she started that ran from 1928 to 1931. The magazine provided a much needed creative space with a black woman at its helm, no small accomplishment during the 1920's. Marson was working towards building up Jamaica's very own arts culture. Alison Donnell highlights a quote from Marson in the magazine which states, "This is the age of woman: What man has done, women may do" (quoted in Donnell, ix). Marson's use of the word 'may' here signifies possibility and a knowing that women had always been capable, but restricted. In a Jamaican context this oppression on black women, specifically, was multi-layered, having to fight against a white imperialist rule and a generally male centered society consistently placing them last in line.

Marson was a trailblazer for young women writers to follow and we can see how her statements are bold, brave, and crucial in helping to set the tone for a country that

would go on to produce a cadre of successful women writers of creative and scholarly texts. Judging from Marson's multiple references to the work of international writers in her own work, she was well versed in various forms of literature that had been widely received in the rest of the world. I believe that it is a similar potential for Jamaica that Marson is courageous enough to believe in despite knowing the many limitations imposed on black lives historically. The success that many Jamaican women writers would go on to have on a national and international scale, however, would largely come into being during the 1970s, after Marson's passing in 1965. Under the governmental leadership of Michael Manley and the People's National Party, the 1970's would leave a legacy, in part, that promoted Jamaican culture and nationalism. As Stuart Hall shares,

> It was only in the 1970s that this Afro-Caribbean identity became historically available to the great majority of Jamaican people, at home and abroad. In this historic moment, Jamaicans discovered themselves to be 'black'- just as, in the same moment, they discovered themselves to be the sons and daughters of 'slavery'.
>
> This profound cultural discovery, however, was not, and could not be, made directly without 'mediation'. It could only be made through the impact on popular life of the post-colonial revolution, the civil rights struggles, the culture of Rastafarianism and the music of reggae…" (231)

Hall points to the multiple sources of influence leading to the cultural shifts in how the majority of Jamaicans would start to redefine their connections to Africa, and Jamaica finding empowerment in these new framings of their historical ties. Marson's work would have likely seen its fuller potential in such a climate embracing Jamaica's artistic

cultural development. In thinking of the lengthy list of Jamaican women writers from the country and its diaspora that emerge after Marson, such as Louise Bennett, Olive Senior, Jean Binta Breeze, Erna Brodber, Carolyn Cooper, Sylvia Wynter, Lorna Goodison, Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy, and many others, we can see the foresight that Marson had of how important the arts and literature specifically could be to the progress of the country.

I do not aim to present Marson's oeuvre as a flawless representation of Jamaican women's literature; scholars such as Denise deCaires Narain, Delia Jarrett-Macauley, and Alison Donnell have conveyed the complexity of Marson's work in its diversity and even at times, its inconsistencies. As Donnell states in her introduction to Marson's *Selected Poems,* Marson was a complex figure and, just as it would be disingenuous to mention only her triumphs and achievements as a writer and social and political campaigner when it is well known that she suffered from clinical depression and was often unfulfilled and lonely, so too it would be misleading to suggest that Marson wrote only strident, progressive poetry" (20). I do, however, posit that Marson's existence opens up so much as a possibility that she sets the standard high enough for excellence to appear clearly on the horizon. In this vein of thinking, I embrace what might be seen by some as imperfections in her body of work that resist clear placement of her as feminist or decolonial thinker. Her complexity is rather celebrated as Marson demonstrates that one does not have to embody a certain kind of easily pieced together story, lifestyle or work because that is what is expected of them in society. Marson engaged multiple genres and promoted social justice and historical legacies while battling her own inner struggles all while clearly wearing her heart on her sleeve.

Much of Marson's writing has not been critically engaged as deeply as it should be and though recently there has been a slight improvement in scholarly focus on her work, she is not yet a household name in Jamaica more broadly. However, Marson's work is foundational for Jamaican women writers, and I wish to extend the discourse on black expressive culture by centering Marson and following themes she highlights in order to see the history and development of key subject matters affecting Jamaican women. Knowing Marson's history of activism makes it difficult to separate her mission from her poetry. As poetry economizes language, we are left to infer meaning based on the context the poet chooses to provide and/or what we know of her. It is the culmination of her efforts that causes me to pose the following statement: Despite some limitations in the scope of her project as a poet, Marson essentially helps to lay the groundwork for the project of decolonization in Jamaica, though not naming it as such.

In this chapter, I engage scholars who've focused on the push towards decolonization and consider key moments in select works of Marson and select Jamaican women writers who move beyond the confines of what society has deemed acceptable. In what follows, I examine areas in Marson's writing in relation to other Jamaican women writers. I focus on where Marson's writing makes evident her position as being in two worlds, the one in which we live and where we could go. I keep this framing in mind as a crucial component of the project of decolonization. I turn to Sylvia Wynter, whose work helps to deconstruct how notions of the human and humanism are constructed in the first instance. Though Wynter's work emerges in the second half of the 20th century, as a Jamaican writer whose creative and scholarly endeavors have been groundbreaking to date, she helps me to build from what I perceive as Marson's earlier frustrations with the

limitations of the colonized public imagination to step outside of the boundaries white imperialism had forced unto their lives. In her *Small Axe* interview with David Scott, Wynter shares a crucial point on society's limitations on notions of the human. She shares,

> It is the story in which the idea of humanism, of its de-godding of our modes of self- inscription first erupts, where Man and its human Others—that is, Indians, Negros, Natives (and I would add, Jews and Muslims)—are first invented. And this history is the history of the expansion of the West from the fifteenth century onwards, and an expansion that is carried out within the terms of its own cultural conception of its own origins. And you see, it is this ethno culturally coded narrated history that is taught both in a now global academia as well as in all our schools, while it is this history in whose now purely secular terms we are all led to imagine ourselves as Man, as purely biological and economic beings. The history for Man, therefore, narrated and existentially lived as if it were the history- for the human itself. (198)

Wynter calls on readers to interrogate what we classify as *Man*[4]--that it is based in a European ideal, an invention. She calls for a reconsidering of our ideas of the human and its inventions, its origins, who it serves and the disservice that the resulting understanding does to those who fall outside of its limited parameters. In this vein of thought, I engage themes that are signature in Marson's work with this imperative presented by Wynter prompting reinvention of concepts of humanity that I posit become more fully realized in the work of Jamaican women writers that follow.

[4]In Unsettling the Coloniality of Being, Sylvia Wynter interrogates concepts of Man 1 & Man 2 in advancing considerations of the posthuman.

Additionally, in order to dismantle them we must consider why common themes of racism, colorism, and sexism persist in Jamaican women's writing. The various ways writers address such themes allows us to see beyond the current social structures in the way that they imagine and enables a furthering of their work through our engagement. John Fiske elucidates the potentiality of this move in his statement on feminism and cultural politics when he writes,"These movements are so valuable because they do more than explain and validate the experiences of women and people of color within a white patriarchy; they also refuse to admit that their ways of knowing and experiencing the world are in any way subordinate or inferior" (165). Multiple societal oppressions on black women reveal themselves through the work of Marson and other poets in this chapter. This is precisely the work Marson engages in poems like "Another Mould," an existence where value isn't determined based on comparison to another, but one's worth and history is enough in and of itself in all its complexities. So much of Marson's project addresses oppressive social standards, but conveys a vulnerability through which she asks to be seen and accepted for who she is. Marson's ventures into various forms of writing reflect a person committed to understanding human desires, motivations, and pain. Marson offers us many opportunities to see the questions she grapples with and to also turn these questions on ourselves to consider where we stand as humans in the world she shows us. As Wynter states, "Human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities. . . And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms" (35). Wynter turns our attention to our humanity and what makes people unique beings, reminding us that our understandings of ourselves and one

another should not be stationary and instead be open to reinterpretation and reconsiderations as we progress on the planet. Marson's project, too, in many ways is invested in this work of interrogating social norms and the mechanics of human behaviour for greater understanding. Though her work reflects her time, it is also apparent that she was a forward thinker and a key player in Jamaica's push towards advancement.

In this chapter I frame Marson's legacy as a poet in connection to other Jamaican women writers to show what these women's work can teach us about our collective potential. This chapter engages an interdisciplinary approach to thinking of the role cultural politics play in Marson's writing and that of other key Jamaican women writers. John Fiske says of Cultural Studies, "[It] has always been concerned to examine critically and to restructure the relationship between dominant and subordinated cultures; it has always been concerned to interrogate the academy and the rest of the social order…" (164). This statement is true of Marson's body of work in her tireless efforts to break barriers and present the complexities of black womanhood in varying circumstances--not to be perfect, but real. Marson may not have been Jamaica's most famous writer, but she most certainly broke the gender barrier in Jamaica's literary scene and paved the way for a rich literary culture more free to engage a variety of subject matters and reaching far beyond the nation's borders.

Although Jamaica is a small country, dynamic literature has emerged from it since Marson's early statements on the writer's importance in her 1949 speech. Through identifying themes and considering how the women writers included in this chapter document and engage key cultural and socio-political concerns that impact their lives, we

see what issues pervade and how they extend ideas of and sensitivity towards black women's humanity.

The Culture of Inclusivity

Marson's earliest collection of poems, *Tropic Reveries* (1930), opens with a preface written by the author that seeks a deeper human connection with her potential audience. Regarding her poems, Marson appeals to the audience,

> To those who read them for the first time, I trust their sincerity will appeal in such a way as to compensate for any of those faults which are so readily to be detected in the works of a new and humble aspirant to a place among the Singers "whose songs gushed from their hearts". (vi)

In her last line Marson cites 19th century American poet Henry Longfellow's poem "The Day is Done," a move re-purposing a popular line while arguably asserting herself in a tradition of poetic discourse. In this preface, Marson shows that she is aware of the critical eye of the public and her vulnerability to them in sharing her lyric poetry. She makes apparent the desire for human understanding and compassion, which I would argue she reciprocates in her own approach to the material she shares. What is evident in her prologue is a desire to be heard.

One of the governing forces that seems to drive Marson's project is the subject of barriers to inclusivity resulting from imperialist rule. This manifests in her work through poems that focus on discriminatory practices involving race, migration, belonging, and even romantic love. "The Poet's Heart," from *Tropic Reveries*, finds Marson taking up the project detailed in her aforementioned article of getting the larger audience to see the

necessary place of the poet in society. Her words in this poem are grounded in feeling and articulation of that which makes us human. She says,

> They differ not, but in degree: -
> More deeply feel all that they see
>
> ...His poet's heart goes out to these,
> Their sorrows and their woes he sees (66)

Here we see the responsibility that the speaker in the poem places on the artist to not only take notice, but to also speak up. She identifies not only the artist's place in society, a role often disregarded by the larger public, but the work that the poet is tasked with, seeing the human more completely. This observant role of the poet identified here in a Jamaican context speaks to the call of the poet's heart to see into what plagues the nation during colonial rule. As we see in other works from Marson, including her popular 1938 play *Pocomania*, grappling with society's issues pertaining to race, gender, and class are an essential part of her larger project. As Donnell reminds, "[Marson] was critical of those Jamaicans blind to the lives of the majority population with whom they had daily contact but whom they did not properly recognize as co-citizens" (22). Marson's history of speaking on behalf of those excluded can be seen in works centered on both Britain and Jamaica, but her particular focus on the power of the poet's observations connects to her 1949 speech.

Marson gestures towards expanding understandings of the poet, but also an appreciation for what their work reflects about society, specifically in the context of a colonized country. Aimé Césaire's opening canto in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* conveys a similar sentiment to that of Marson's, highlighting a commonality in the sustained difficulties for many attempting to fight present effects of colonial rule. Among

their respective talents, Césaire and Marson share what Marson might call “a poet’s heart”. Hailing from Martinique, Césaire’s work also shares a deep investment in grappling with the experience of being from a colonized Caribbean country. He writes,

> To go away. My heart was pounding, with emphatic generosities. To go away...I would arrive sleek and young in this land of mine and I would say to this land whose loam is part of my flesh: ‘I have wandered for a long time and I am coming back to the deserted hideousness of your sores.’
>
> I would go to this land of mine and I would say to it: ‘Embrace me without fear...And if all I can do is speak, it is for you I shall speak.’
>
> And again I would say ‘My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice the freedom of those who founder in dungeons of despair.’ And on the way I would say to myself: and above all my body as well as my soul, beware of assuming the sterile attitude of a spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of miseries is not a proscenium, a man screaming is not a dancing bear. (45)

Césaire incites action here, relaying tensions between past and present as he motions towards a shared space and the responsibility he feels to others and to homeland. As scholar Keith Walker states, “For Césaire, it is also a diasporic ceremony of shared passions, solidarity, and globally shared fate” (183). In this opening canto, Césaire reminds us of our responsibility to each other, not just to ourselves, through his call to “speak”: “My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth”. There is an insistence to do more than observe, but to move and on behalf of those who may not be able to have their voices heard.

In the above excerpt from *Notebook*, there is a call similar to Marson's for an inclusive humanity, a project that Marson takes on in many of her poems. In a similar vein of thinking, Marson takes on the project of inclusivity and accountability in her poem, "There Will Come a Time" from her 1931 collection, *Heights and Depths*. In the opening stanza, she writes, "False pride and petty prejudice prevail / Where love and brotherhood should have full sway" (80). Marson shares with the reader what can be considered barriers to progress, "false pride and petty prejudice". Marson writes,

> Each race that breathes the air of God's fair world
> Is so bound up within its little self,
> So jealous for material wealth and power
> That it forgets to look outside itself
> Save when there is some prospect of rich gain; (80)

Here, Marson presents criticism on the destructiveness of capitalism zeroing in on human feelings of jealousy in the desire for wealth and power. She positions this destructive mindset against what can be inferred as a unifying notion, sharing "the air of God's fair world". The poem does not necessarily take on the burden of a colonial history or specific injustices hindering inequality, but chooses instead to root itself in the observation of the human tendency of self interest for capital. A deeply emotional poem, "There Will Come a Time" centers itself in the future, insisting the audience think not only of themselves, but those that will inherit the earth. She writes,

> What matter that we be as caged birds
> Who beat their breasts against the iron bars
> Till blood-drops fall, and in heartbreaking songs
> Our souls pass out to God? These very words,
> In anguish sung, will mightily prevail.
> We will not be among the happy heirs
> Of this grand heritage - but unto us
> Will come their gratitude and praise,
> And children yet unborn will reap in joy
> What we have sown in tears. (80)

Marson conjures images of the caged bird readers might connect to Paul Laurence Dunbar's powerful poem, "Sympathy," from his 1899 collection *Lyrics of the Hearthside*, and later, Maya Angelou's popular 1969 autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. I mean to situate Marson in this deep tradition of creative voice, producing work aware of its place in a global conversation. Marson's vivid imagery in the above stanza conjures a history of painful experience not limited to Jamaica and that by all indications she anticipates will not soon be ameliorated.

The poet writes as if accessing a future that has been promised in spite of current circumstances and through her references to God throughout the poem, we can infer that it is the poet's faith in a higher power that lends confidence to her words. Marson proclaims in the last stanza of the poem,

> For there will come
> A time when all the races of the earth
> Grown weary of the inner urge for gain,
> Grown sick of all the fatness of themselves
> And all their boasted prejudice and pride
> Will see this vision that now comes to me
> Aye, there will come a time when every man
> Will feel that other men are brethren unto him -
> When men will look into each other's hearts
> And souls, and not upon their skin and brain,
> And differences in the customs of the race. (80)

This excerpt offers a hopeful envisioning of the future and is similar in tone and content to the famous line shared by Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech where King states "I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." This parallel is an important one as Marson's commitment to the public as an activist was often taken up in her more creative works in addition to her scholarly works and speeches. Whether or not we are moved to cling to

Marson's perhaps utopian vision, the voice of the poem is exuberant and oftentimes prophetic. Marson's poem is not as much rooted in hope as it is in certainty, conveyed through the forcefulness of the word "will", that what she envisions is reflective of society's potentiality even if she will not herself experience it. Marson ends the poem writing,

> Though I should live a hundred years or more
> I should not see this time, but while I live,
> 'Tis mine to share in this gigantic task
> Of oneness for the world's humanity. (80)

Though the poem looks towards the ideal of a society free of hate and greed, the speaker appears to hold all people to one standard, seemingly detaching themselves from discourse holding any one group more accountable than the other. Still, we can infer her meaning since it is white imperialism that has made such a poem like the one she writes necessary. As Donnell reminds us, "[Marson] was not a poet or a person removed from history" (21). Marson showed through several other poems the specific social barriers preventing progression, often using retellings of personal experiences to confront those at the hands of her oppression. Though "There Will Come a Time" lacks much specificity of particular offenses, it expands to consider an alternate, inclusive world and finds Marson willing to do her share in order to help towards that goal. Readers searching for clearly anticolonial language from Marson here may be disappointed that the author does not use the opportunity to boldly call out offenders and name white imperialism for what it is; however, losing sight of the powerful moves the poem makes would be a disservice. The poem is indeed anti-colonial and anti-racist though its language is not forcefully so. Marson appeals to human sensibilities in conveying her vision to the audience, an appeal

that has the powerful effect of inspiring faith for the reader that the efforts made towards the goal of a compassionate society will be to the benefit of generations to come.

A primary issue that Marson mentions in “There Will Come a Time,” but does not choose to deeply engage as a primary barrier to inclusivity, is discrimination based on skin color. Marson boldly identifies and interrogates the subject of racism and colorism, however, in “Kinky Hair Blues”, where the speaker in the poem examines her own features and holds them against society's standards. The speaker implies that these standards are dictated by male preferences stating,

> Gwine find a beauty shop
> Cause I ain’t a belle
> Gwine find a beauty shop
> Cause I ain’t a belle
> The boys pass me by,
> They say I’s not so swell (144)

The repetition in the opening lines of the poem are haunting and create a somber impression for the reader. As deCaires Narain points out, the poem reflects the influence of poets of the Harlem Renaissance. She writes, “Marson uses the melancholy tenor of ‘the blues’ to document aspects of black experiences” (24). Marson goes on to dramatise the complexities of emotions that the speaker feels when “boys” view her as lacking in comparison to someone with lighter skin and straighter hair. The dynamic here finds the speaker tying her self-worth to male approval. The point of view in the poem reflects the gendered forms of colorism that most often adversely affect the poorer persons within the community. The poem displays how physical attributes become representational of histories and especially damaging for the historically oppressed, what Fanon identifies in *Peau noir, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*) in part as the “l’éxperience vécu du noir,” or in its literal English translation, “the lived experience of the black”. It is

important to point out that Marson's poem is especially bold in the context of her colonial middle class upbringing and peers with more economical access to prescribe to the social rituals that Marson calls out in this poem. Marson makes a point to expose this conversation, a topic that remains a part of an ongoing conversation in the global black community today. Marson takes this subject on well in advance of when members from her social standing would start to publicly confront such anti-black attacks. Though "Kinky Hair Blues" was published in Marson's 1937 collection of poems, it is evident the issue persists as it is a topic that reappears in Jamaican literature, music, and other spaces of creative expression in Jamaican culture. Though the subject is less often engaged publicly, the pervasiveness of racism and colorism is such that individuals feel its effects both explicitly and implicitly.

In a similar vein as "Kinky Hair Blues," Marson's various poems centering on romantic love and loss situate themselves in the male gaze. Marson often turns to consider her subjective place in romantic situations. "Renunciation", "In Vain", "Incomplete", "I Cannot Tell", "Love's Lament," and "Love's Farewell" are only a few of her poems that convey feelings of loneliness. In addition to participating in this common topic of lyric poetry privileging coupledom, it is evident that the personal often becomes heavily political in Marson's poems when it comes to the subject of love. In "Kinky Hair Blues", the speaker laments that her distance from features closer to those of white women make it harder for her to find a romantic partner. Though she affirms that her features are to her liking, she ends the poem considering, "What won't a gal do / Some kind a man to win" (144). Here, a man is seen as a prize to be won by a woman. The audience is left to consider for themselves the politics romantic love is participating

in. Judith Butler's essential work in gender theory is helpful here to consider the normalized social behaviours often misrepresented as natural. She brings our attention to gender norms that are accepted in society, though should not necessarily be taken for granted. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler articulates the performative nature of gender stating that it is "an identity tenuously constituted in time" (519). These acts make reality through their performance. While Marson's common position in her poems on love as longing for a partner to no avail convey loneliness and perhaps even a neediness often problematically ascribed to women more generally, the phrasing "Some kind of man to win" is not an arbitrary one. When Marson writes "What won't a gal do," we are left considering the myriad ways the women Marson refers to are made to contort their identities for men. Marson questions the problematic nature of social standards that make it hard for black women to be accepted for who they are. Marson poses this question in rhetorical fashion at the end of the poem, exposing the absurdity of efforts prioritizing favor from men. Marson shares through this poem the complexities of working through societal and gender norms, but does convey ultimately that she is not content to politely accept what society hands her. By the poem's end, readers are left questioning the emotional effects of valuing beauty rituals designed to minimize physical features of black women.

It is clear to me that for Marson, the personal and the political are interconnected; there is little that separates the topics that Marson covers in her project. This ties into the decolonizing project in its effort towards expansive thought and practice by interrogating problematic social norms. In this vein of thinking, I posit that the intimacy of societal truth baring we find in Marson's poetry rooted in her Jamaican and British experiences

leaves a legacy that finds points of connection with later Jamaican women poets.

Paving the Way

The path that Marson helps to pave for Jamaican women finds its foundation in her unwillingness to simply remain in confining social structures, choosing instead to interrogate and challenge them. In this way, Marson is a shining example for those who come after her. In the section that follows, I shift to focus in on select contemporary Jamaican women writers whose work emerges after Marson, in the second half of the 20th century, work that also addresses matters of racism, colorism, class, and gender. I link Marson's work through subject matter with the work of select contemporary Jamaican women writers who take up similar topics as she does, thus extending conversations with their additional insight and individual circumstances. I discuss how these writers unravel oppressive social pressures in ways that push Marson's project forward, extending our ideas and considerations of humanity.

My engagement with each contemporary poet's work is in tandem with Marson's work as I draw connections between themes and elucidate how later poets extend her vision through their insistence on exposing societal ills. I link these poets to Marson as building on a path she forged. I have chosen Jamaican women poets born between 1946 and 1972 who trace common social themes that persist from Marson's earlier considerations of them onward. I do this to examine how conversations surrounding these themes persist but are further developed through the work of these contemporary writers. Another connection that I find important to consider is that all the poets I've included in this section have notable relationships with a country outside of Jamaica. Like Marson, these women are Jamaican by birth, but have substantial relationships with the USA or

Britain. Where relevant, I consider their themes in the context of the diasporic experience they share.

The poems included in this section are: “Colonisation in Reverse” by Louise Bennett (1919-2006) from her collection *Jamaica Labrish*, “Within the Veil” by Michelle Cliff (1946-2016) from her 1985 collection *The Land of Look Behind*, “Garden Path” by Jean Binta Breeze (1957-) from her collection *The Arrival of Brighteye*, “Fragment of a Border” by Claudia Rankine (1962-) from her 1992 collection *Nothing in Nature is Private*, and “My Jamaica” by Staceyann Chin (1972-) from her 2019 collection of poems, *Crossfire: A Litany for Survival*.

In addition, I include a song as text component in this chapter. As Jahan Ramazani asserts, “song has long been conceived as poetry’s closest generic kin” (184). My intention is not to argue the genre’s relevance in the chapter, but to focus on the link in the subject matter of the chosen song. I include lyrics from dancehall performer Grace Hamilton (1982-). Known professionally as Spice, her song “Black Hypocrisy” relates to themes explored in this chapter pertaining to colorism. As my focus is strictly on the verbal components of the song, I value Carolyn Cooper’s statement on the relevance of this approach. She writes, “...the value of the analysis of disembodied lyrics is that the ‘noise’ of the reggae musician and the DJ is heard as intelligible and worthy of serious critical attention” (5).

Though I’ve listed the various poet/performers whose works appear in the remainder of the chapter (in addition to Marson) in order of their birth, the work that follows is ordered by theme and draws connections between Marson’s and each poet’s/performer’s work as relevant. All work from the poets/performers I’ve chosen is

published after Jamaican independence, offering audiences deep considerations of the effects of colonial history and narratives on their experiences of societal oppressions. These women represent voices of Jamaica and, for all but Bennett, its diaspora. Though Bennett spent time studying in Britain and her last years in Canada, her body of creative work is most exclusively representational of Jamaica. “Colonisation in Reverse” appears in this chapter as an astute commentary on the complexities of colonisation and diaspora. I pose a theoretical poetic inheritance I trace back to Marson as a foremother who elucidated concerns of the Jamaican population across racial, color, and class lines, as well as diasporic existence.

Women Poets’ Interrogation of Systems of Oppression After Marson

Michelle Cliff’s diverse body of work is known to often draw clear connections to her own experiences. Raised between Jamaican and the U.S.A., Cliff’s work often pushes boundaries for readers to question the problematic systems they live in whether or not they may be benefitting from those very systems at the cost of others. Speaking of her body of work, Sally O’Driscoll writes,

> The reception of her work indicates that Cliff herself- her embodiment as an author- has been an important factor in the evaluation and classification of her writing. As author, Cliff stands at the point of connection- or rupture - between two major non-congruent constructions of identity: third-world postcolonial-ist and first-world postmodern. Also relevant are debates about "race" as social construction (and its different operations in an American or a Jamaican context) (56).

O' Driscoll points out various intersections at play in Cliff's work. As with Marson's important move to use her platform to expose issues facing Jamaican women, including racism and colorism, Cliff's work considers these topics though approached from a different perspective. Cliff's writing often centers on the complexities of mixed race identity, reflecting elements of her life as a light skinned, mixed race Jamaican woman. Her poem "Within the Veil" from *The Land of Look Behind* extends the topic to explicitly consider this type of intersectional identity. Cliff's fast paced poem considers multiple forms of social discrimination, managing to weave together a narrative that conveys an authoritative yet vulnerable speaker insisting on subversion of colonial influence in thought and practice. Cliff opens the poem taking on a common topic she tackles in her work: passing. Cliff writes,

> Color ain't no faucet
> You can't turn it off and on
> Tell the world who you are
> Or you might as well be gone.
>
> Now, the Whiteman makes the rules
> But we got to learn to turn them down (87-88)

The position that the speaker in the poem takes on race insists that one does themselves and their community a disservice by misrepresenting who they are as a result of social pressures resulting from white imperialist thinking. For Cliff, if one doesn't claim their true identity then they "might as well be gone". When Cliff writes, "Now the Whiteman makes the rules," she acknowledges the history of oppressive systems imposed. But she points to the human ability to employ choice when she writes, "we got to learn to turn them down". Throughout the poem, the speaker addresses a person who evidently phenotypically passes for white having the peculiar power to choose their race through

their verbal presentation of self to the rest of the world. Cliff presents passing as a way of silencing one's true self, shifting alliances and contributing to the false narrative of features common to white people as the ideal. This is an act that suppresses the individual's true identity through their denial and that serves to further oppress all black people.

Honor Ford-Smith of Sistren Theatre Collective, a Jamaican theatre group founded in 1977, adds an important perspective on the damaging effects of silencing in another sector of society, specifically from middle class women. Since its inception, the collective's work has centered on decolonizing efforts relating to women's experiences of societal oppressions. Although the group primarily consisted of poor and working-class black women, Ford-Smith was one of the few members from the middle-class. In *Lionheart Gal*, their gathering of oral testimonies, Ford-Smith writes,

> By not problematizing our own situation, we middle class women were being "good girls" inadvertently playing into the old colonial image of middle class femininity. By "facilitating" working class women's expression of their own oppression and not our own, we were engineering only a partial picture concerning Jamaican women. (248)

Ford-Smith elucidates silence as complacency--how the middle class woman's silence on their own lived experiences further perpetuated the myths of the good vs bad binary separating women in society. In middle class women not breaking their silence, the interrelated struggles between Jamaican women were obscured. Ford-Smith continues,

> We avoided naming our own experience, which might have created a real basis for transforming old class-based dynamics. By keeping our mouths shut, we

> allowed the construction of the "good woman" to remain intact. We missed an opportunity to envision and formulate new images of women's identity and interclass relations. (248)

In showing only selected struggles for black women in Jamaica, those who silenced themselves only served to uphold oppressive systems within which they were themselves limited despite living more economically comfortable lives than lower class women. In a similar vein of thinking, Cliff's exposure of the black woman passing in "Within the Veil" exposes an important part of the conversation pertaining to the diverse black experiences for women in Jamaica. To return to the driving force in Marson's poem, "There Will Come a Time," beneficiaries of such systems are called to think outside of themselves and beyond material gain towards how their actions affect other members of society with less access.

In "Within the Veil," Cliff calls the reader to action through the words, "we got to learn to turn them down" reminding the reader of their power. Cliff inserts a warning in the third stanza, "Unless you quit your passing, honey / You only gonna come to woe" (87-88). Cliff goes on to call for unity of black people regardless of individual ethnic makeup, physical context or sexual orientation. As Freida Tesfagiorgis reminds, "Black women artists globally are diachronically and synchronically linked through colonialism, slavery, racism, and capitalism" (147). These multiple features of black women's lived histories make it so that the navigation of society's burdens are explicitly exposed within their experience. W.E.B Du Bois' concept of "double-consciousness" is helpful here to elucidate the reality Cliff exposes in her poem for black women in postcolonial spaces. As Du Bois writes in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "It is a peculiar

sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amazed contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness…" (69) When Cliff writes, "Now the Whiteman makes the rules / But we got to learn to turn them down," she calls for a resistance to the imperialist ideals that designate black as inferior and perpetually in comparison to white.

Cliff is specific in her identification of concerns that need to be addressed in this poem. She pushes the audience to move beyond what we've come to expect and accept as the norm, in this case adhering to warped views of white and lighter skin as desirable due to their perceived proximity to access, and towards the long overdue need for acceptance within the society. Du Bois exposes the multi-functioning ability of the veil that, due to a legacy of oppression by white people, prevents black people from seeing themselves as they are. Cliff's veil bears reference to the mask referenced in Paul Dunbar's 1896 poem "We Wear the Mask" that sheds insight into the painful realities of black lives in predominantly white societies as a result of imperialism. Dunbar writes,

> We wear the mask that grins and lies
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
> This debt we pay to human guile;
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.
> Why should the world be otherwise,
> In counting all our tears and sighs?
> Nay, let them only see us, while
> We wear the mask. (355)

This mask (or veil) hides the truth out of necessity and Dunbar's poem exposes this norm. Moving beyond positions that are comfortable is not easy, but it is necessary for progress and this comes with time and interrogating norms and their strongholds in society.

"Within the Veil" highlights for readers that the black experience is legitimate for all shades of black people and should be embraced as such, but by all indications of the speaker, passing is specifically anti-black.

In considering the boldness of presence through women's words in Jamaica's literary history, the dub-poetry of Jean Binta Breeze makes a memorable impression. As dub-poetry brings together elements of music and spoken word, and often engages and interrogates political matters, Breeze's work is often mentioned as being in a similar vein as Bennett's. Here, however, I consider her poem "Garden Path" to frame it as extending ideas in Marson's project specifically as presented in "There Will Come a Time". As Breeze is regarded as the first woman to write and perform dub-poetry, she helps to blaze a trail by breaking barriers and entering spaces where women had not been welcomed, thus encouraging others in the process. Breeze's poem "Garden Path" weaves together powerful imagery and personification as she details desires and life's roadblocks that have been encountered by the poem's speaker. The title of the poem might find the reader expecting a different experience than they receive since a 'garden path' typically invites pleasant imagery, but the poem resists our expectations. Breeze writes,

> I am tired now
> of doors opening onto streets
> or grills
> or walls
> opening onto some public business
> where I must make sense of noise
> neurosis
> numbness
> intruding arguments
> and judgements
> systems of punishment
> and reward
> often interchangeable (24)

When Breeze writes, “I am tired now,” she situates readers within a mood of despair and even frustration. Though the speaker in the poem moves to provide a list detailing specific oppressions in their community, the words “I am tired now” remain present as a reminder that the issues detailed have led to feelings of exhaustion. Readers become aware that the speaker is at a point of action or retreat. We see elements of the faulty system Marson reasoned in “There Will Come a Time”, detailed and interrogated here by Breeze. Throughout the poem Breeze shares moments of self realization and a general feeling of being fed-up, similar to Cliff’s admission in “Within the Veil” when she writes, “Can’t abide this shit no longer / We got to swing the thing around” (87). Both women convey an unwillingness to sit idly by and accept things as they are. Breeze offers up a version of self-care, showing us a strategy for avoiding what does not serve oneself and only aims to diminish. She writes,

> I find I am avoiding
> The pointed conversation
> Where words have missions
> Similar to knives (24)

By detailing how she handles oppressive conditions, Breeze essentially offers up a roadmap in transcending negativity. Breeze conveys to readers the speaker’s determination to value themselves through choosing not to enter those spaces that do not serve them. In the final lines of the poem, Breeze brings readers to a place where she shows the speaker’s acceptance of self and unwillingness to fit into any category or confines people have built. Breeze uses this moment to bring together various sectors of society rising above any limitations associated with each:

> I am more than colour
> More than class
> More than gender

More than church
I am more than virgin
More than whore
More than childhood traumas (24)

Breeze brings us to a place of full acceptance through her words of affirmation and self-love that read like a mantra. The words “I am” and “more” used in the closing lines of the poem convey a confidence, self-determination, and power that the author has found in herself. Refusing to fall into the social traps of oppression and judgement based on skin, gender, religion, or engagement in sexual activity, she affirms that she is more than the labels associated with these categories. As Walter Mignolo states, “The decolonial option does not simply protest the contents of imperial coloniality; it demands a delinking of oneself from the knowledge systems we take for granted (and can profit from) and practicing epistemic disobedience” (106). This very disobedience is what Cliff demands through “Within the Veil” and Breeze realizes in “Garden Path”.

Though my focus up to this point has centered on Marson and the various ways women poets extend the topic of inclusivity, a more recent pop culture moment presents an opportunity to highlight another dimension to the conversation specifically surrounding discrimination based on skin color. In 2018, the subject of colorism in Jamaica was taken up by prominent dancehall artist, Spice, in her song “Black Hypocrisy”. As Spice is a dancehall artist, we may not initially think to consider parallels between her lyrics and poetry, but poetry in the popular sphere is music's relation. I include music because it is not disqualifying as a category to engage poetry since the public's engagement with words in music can be extended as a kind of poetry for my purposes in this chapter to show correlations of theme within form that economizes the use of words. As Carolyn Cooper points out in *Noises in the Blood*,

> Relatively little attention is paid to the institutions of music production or to assess the degree to which modes of production and performance reinforce or undermine the power relations identified at play in the lyrics. But the value of the analysis of disembodied lyrics is that the 'noise' of the reggae musician and the DJ is heard as intelligible and worthy of serious critical attention. (5)

Cooper's profound work in *Noises in the Blood* speaks to the importance of examining both oral and scribal texts, including song as text, better reflecting the diverse voices and representations of Jamaican culture. In addition, Angela Davis reminds, "...music in general reflects social consciousness...For Black women in particular, music has simultaneously expressed and shaped our collective consciousness" (215). Bringing our attention to a relevant and controversial topic, Spice highlights in "Black Hypocrisy" some of the very issues that Marson brings up in "Kinky Hair Blues" where Marson laments that in order to find a suitable mate, societal pressures claim that she should change her features to appear more European. While both women address the social conditioning of colorism, Spice does not use the conversation surrounding European beauty ideals in the black community to focus on romantic love as Marson does. Spice sings, "Cause I was told I would reach further if the colour of mi skin was lighter and I was made to feel inferior cah society seh brown girls prettier." It is worth noting here that though Spice does have a brown complexion, it is the norm in Jamaica to use the term "brown" to describe a person whose complexion falls within the lighter shades of brown. As colorism is not a topic often confronted in dancehall, Spice makes a bold move here to expose a problem that many would rather not discuss.

In addition to the personal and moving lyrics conveying complexion as a barrier to forward movement in her career, Spice actively uses her body as part of the project of the song. In order to further tackle colorism as a problem that persists in Jamaican and black culture more generally, Spice made the move to present to the public pictures of herself with a complexion change from her natural dark brown skin to a near-white complexion. This caused much controversy and for many days her fans and media outlets alike were unsure of whether this performance of the body was permanent (skin bleaching) or temporary (make-up). Additionally, Spice wore a flowing blonde wig and gray contacts to further present to her audience features typically associated with Europeans. This new visual image of the artist was to be experienced in tandem with lyrics like, "Well, since yuh seh that I'm too black for you, I'll please yuh, do I look how you want me to?" The dramatic visual of this change encouraged the audience to inspect their own biases.

Ultimately, Spice revealed that her physical transformations were temporary changes, but her decision exposed a glaring issue and forced the uncomfortable conversation regarding complexion hierarchy in Jamaica. It is important to note that attention on Spice during this time was not limited to Jamaica and this was in large part due to her inclusion in the popular reality show, *Love and Hip Hop: Atlanta*. This meant that though Spice's song and racial performance were grounded within happenings in her home country, her international popularity meant that this conversation extended outside Jamaica. Spice using her platform to shine a spotlight on the trend prompted more people to pay attention. Through the combination of her lyrics and the bold move to use her body as a canvas to display warped societal ideals placed on black women's bodies,

Spice achieved her goal of getting her audience's attention. A blonde wig is temporary but bleach is a permanent change, so many were relieved to find that this was a performance. However, skin bleaching is common in Jamaica and in many parts of the world and Spice used this opportunity to bring attention to this. In fact, popular Jamaican recording artist Vybz Kartel who'd previously collaborated with Spice musically, is known for bleaching his skin and doesn't shy away from admitting it. Spice clearly found skin bleaching to be an issue of enough importance to risk offending peers with differing views. She uses the song's lyrics to affirm herself in spite of what others might think when she says, "Mi love the way mi look, mi love mi pretty black skin, respect due to mi strong melanin, proud of mi colour, love the skin that I'm in, bun racism, demolish colourism". Here, Spice conveys her commitment to empowering herself by combating the narrative that would have her believe she is less than because she is darker skinned. The topic and point of view shared in "Black Hypocrisy" bear a stark resemblance to Marson's 1937 poem, "Kinky Hair Blues" with its haunting opening line, "Gwine find a beauty shop / Cause I ain't a belle" and its shift to affirm "I like me black face / And me kinky hair" (144). The social circumstances that necessitated a poem like Marson's so many decades ago clearly still exist. Underlying Marson's "Kinky Hair Blues" is a cautionary tale to black women about the danger to one's identity and self when formed in a colonized male gaze.

Marson, Spice, Cliff, and Breeze capture the complexities of dealing with the issue of oppression and obstacles to inclusivity in ways that show us the performance of the body and the damaging effects on the individual beyond the physical. Though Marson makes room for envisioning a life free of oppressive social structures preventing

inclusivity, Cliff, Breeze, and Spice further expand on the intricacies of these oppressions, revealing various barriers to progression and provide the reader with tools to combat particular societal ills. The addition of Spice's move to use her body as a canvas adds a visual component that further brings to life key points on skin color hierarchy in each poet's work. As Jamaican women, they serve as representatives asserting that they are more than the systems in which they live and the limitations of their societies and encourage black women to push beyond limiting structures in order to create their own selves.

Migration & Diaspora: Expanding Concepts of Home & Belonging

Many of Marson's poems find her in consideration of how to navigate spaces where she is not welcomed. Depending on her location, there are shifts in not only how she is perceived, but also how she perceives herself. "Little Brown Girl" from *The Moth and the Star* is one such poem drawing a parallel to Marson's life in London. Marson conveys the condescending tone of the Londoner in their string of strange questions to the person identified as "Little Brown Girl". Marson writes,

> Do you like shows?
> Have you theatres
> In your country,
> And from whence are you,
> Little brown girl?
> I guess Africa, or India,
> Ah no, from some Island, (92)

The subject, "Little Brown Girl," is clearly placed in a diminutive female role throughout the poem. Based on evidence of Marson's difficulties in London, it isn't a stretch to draw comparisons between the author and the subject who is the target of the poem's questions. It is clear that the interrogator doesn't think highly of the person they are

speaking to or where they have come from. As Anna Snaith points out, “In Marson’s ‘Little Brown Girl,’ the white metropolitan speaker expresses not only ignorance about the Caribbean but also an inability to differentiate between black people” (99). Marson shows readers diversity in points of view through her shifts in roles and perspectives, drawing upon several interactions and relationships with the public she interacts with whether directly or manifested through societal expectations; multiple versions of self are always at play within her work.

While Marson exposes to the audience the condescending attitude of the Londoner to the black migrant in “Little Brown Girl,” she considers from a first person speaker, some of the internal conflicts for migrants in “Quashie Comes to London”. In this poem, Marson explores the topic of migration and diaspora, offering the reader a view of London from a newly arrived Jamaican’s perspective. This poem was published in 1937, a little over a decade prior to the Windrush Generation that would find hundreds of thousands of Caribbean people making a move to Britain. The poem lays the groundwork for later explorations on the complexities of migration. The speaker says,

> I gwine tell you ‘bout de English
> And I aint gwine tell no lie,
> ‘Cause I come quite here to Englan’
> Fe see wid me own eye. (99)

In this opening stanza we get the sense of a visitor reporting back on a contentious space and people. As Jamaica had long been at the brutal heel of Britain, it is with good reason that the speaker in the poem is filled with curiosity and skepticism, hoping to mitigate the curiosity of those back home. What is also important to keep in mind is that Marson writes this poem using Jamaican vernacular, as distinct from most of her poetry, which is written in British English normalized through imperial colonial education and at the

expense of Jamaican Patwa. It appears that part of this poem's project is remaining authentic to the character's voice and experience as an outsider in London, a move necessary to note as Marson was doing this work in the early 20th century. Velma Pollard observes in "To Us All Flowers are Roses,"

> The very act of writing in another language, during the fledgling years, was revolutionary in a situation where literature invariably meant English (or at least British) literature. In schools in the Caribbean as in other British colonies, children were taught British and European history and studied English novels, poems, and plays. Merle Hodge in her 1970 novel *Crick Crack, Monkey* dramatizes and satirizes this situation. Olive Senior's now famous words describe it succinctly: "There was nothing about us at all." (93)

Pollard's elucidating words refer to a generation of women writers whose work emerges decades after Marson's and primarily in the 1970's. Therefore Marson's move to write this poem using Jamaican vernacular is a bold move during the early 19th century and would pave the way for the women writers who followed. Marson's decision to place the speaker in "Quashie Comes to London" within the London landscape and to maintain important aspects of his identity such as his Jamaican vernacular, imposes on all who may resist that there was in fact *very much about us*, to invoke Senior's quote.

The poem includes other recurring topics that appear in Marson's poetry, including her project of self-love through highlighting the beauty of black women. The speaker says,

> I know you wan fe hear jus' now
> What I tink of dese white girls,
> Well I tell you straight, dem smile 'pon me,
> But I prefer black pearls! (99)

The tone the speaker takes here is similar to the speaker in “Another Mould”, confident in his adoration of black women. This tone is not unlike the general takeaway of the poem, which finds that though London might have “plenty dat is really nice," there is more disappointment found than joy for the speaker. By the end of the poem we see that the speaker does not find a sense of belonging in London and misses the familiarity of home. The speaker appears throughout as a figure of two worlds, his homeland of Jamaica and his new diasporic existence in England. This is also similar to the experience conveyed in “Little Brown Girl,” where there is a general sense of loneliness and disappointment in the speaker’s experience in London.

The subject of migration and its complexities is later taken on by Louise Bennett in a manner relevant to “Quashie Comes to London” in her poem, “Colonization in Reverse”. Bennett extends the conversation by exposing the irony and comedy she finds in Jamaicans moving to England. Anna Dawson points out in *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*,

> Bennett’s poem is also permeated by a witheringly ironic attitude toward the imperial legacy that connects Caribbean colonial subjects to the British motherland. Migration to the metropolis is not simply a footloose escape from the parochialism of the islands for Bennett. Her poem implicitly suggests that this migration is also a willful and aggressive act, one that springs from the bloodstained history of colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean. (3)

Dawson points out the painful history that underlies the poem’s narrative. Like Marson in “Quashie Goes to London”, Bennett writes this poem in Jamaican vernacular, a move that further subverts the notion of England’s language and customs as dominant. This move

helps readers to experience the Jamaican's position as a linguistic and racial "other" abroad, observing how Jamaicans bring 'otherness' to England in a way that changes the fabric of the country in some similar ways as colonization did to the colonies. Bennett, however, differs from Marson in that she prioritizes and embraces the voice, accent, and culture of Jamaica in all of her poetry. This consistency pushes against the prioritizing of "standardized" English like other poets before her, creating a following bolstered by Bennett to be their authentic selves.

In "Colonisation in Reverse," Bennett considers the inevitable consequences for Britain as a result of the kind of migration explored in "Quashie Comes to London". Bennett, however, exposes the changing Britain and a future where immigrants have changed the country substantially. Though Bennett's consideration of this "colonisation in reverse" is far from the realities of the violent manner in which the British forced change on the countries they've colonized, Bennett uses humor to expose the turn of events . The commonality between Bennett's and Marson's poems through the theme of migration helps us to better understand their own individual connections to homeland, even as Bennett extends the conversation through the addition of humorous consideration of the effects of migration on colonizing countries.

In the preceding poems Marson engages issues of migration demonstrating the space of London as a problem for the migrant. Bennett exposes how migrants from Jamaica perform a pseudo-colonizing act, and though the realities they elucidate remain relevant, many contemporary Jamaican women poets have shared their own complex diasporic experiences, providing updated perspectives on the subject. I highlight the

following writers' works for their contributions in expanding the ways we think about migration, and the diverse diasporic communities created.

Claudia Rankine's first collection of poetry, *Nothing in Nature is Private*, published in 1992, includes poems that weave between Jamaica and the U.S.A. Regarding the collection, Mervyn Morris writes "the composite persona is of a black middle-class intellectual woman, more or less American. But in many of her poems the persona presents herself as *othered* in America" (39). "Rankine's poem, "Fragment of a Border," finds the speaker unapologetically claiming their space. The poem's title invites readers to think of separation of spaces through the idea of borders--that borders could be fragmented--and of humans in relation to their geography. Borders both create separation and perpetuate a notion of exclusivity. Performance artist and poet Guillermo Gómez-Pena adds additional insight on the topic of borders in *The New World Border*, sharing, "I carry the border with me, and I find new borders wherever I go" (5). Both Rankine and Gómez-Pena conjure the abstract nature of borders through their words. The speaker in "Fragment of a Border" states,

> See me standing here
> Waiting for the light to change?
> Recognize me. I
> Was born dark
> With bloodshot eyes
> And when the light turns,
> I'll think, *Go*. (21)

The choice the speaker makes to assert, "Recognize me. I / was born dark," insists that the onlooker take notice, each enjambed line demonstrating keen awareness of the space the speaker is in and has taken up. Readers can infer that the onlooker may have an aversion to the speaker. This is confirmed as the poem continues,

But there is no getting away
Even if you will not see me.
In your face recognize

My Jamaican face,
An American face. (21)

The speaker here claims two identities and the juxtaposition of the possessive and personal "*my* Jamaican face" with the more general "*an* American face," tells us the speaker's position as an immigrant. The speaker also admonishes through this inclusion that their face is one of many diverse faces making up the American landscape. We might even draw a connection between the person asserting their presence in this poem and the "Little Brown Girl" in terms of the disconnect in how they are perceived as opposed to the person they know that they are.

Staceyann Chin's work invites audiences to expand their notions of the human considering aspects of identity as it relates to race, gender, and sexuality. Chin's 2019 collection of poems, *Crossfire: A Litany for Survival*, takes its subtitle from Audre Lorde's famous poem. By her own admission, Chin's departure from Jamaica to move to the USA was "a self imposed exile from [her] home" (11). In her poems Chin expresses elements of her identity, including subverting the gender status quo by considering identities that fall outside of heteronormative structures. Chin, whose sexual identity had come under scrutiny in Jamaica, felt the need to leave her homeland in order to find an environment where she would have more freedom. She writes,

> My work was despised by many. Ridiculed by some. Mostly sensationalized in the Caribbean press. Every time I went home to read, there were numerous articles, ad nauseum, which discussed my sexuality as deviance, something I picked up in the amoral culture of the American North. No one ever talked about

> my worth as a writer. It was always lesbian this and Jesus that and questions about how Jamaican I could be with my sexuality so prevalent in my narrative. (11)

Chin here conveys how the security of belonging at home is called into question when one's identity is deemed as belonging elsewhere. Of course, it is not that Chin's identity belongs elsewhere; her experience speaks to the greater change needed on a national scale in Jamaica to end homophobia, an issue scholar Rhoda Reddock elucidates in her book *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*[5]. For Chin's identity as a Jamaican to be called into question due to her identification as a lesbian imposes that she has to choose heterosexuality thus silencing a part of herself. Chin reflects this conflict in her poem "My Jamaica". She writes,

> My love affair with Jamaica
> has always been double-edged
>
> two ends of a pimento candle
> burning towards a slender middle
> the indulgent heat pushing me off-center
> on this island
> there has never been safe ground (24)

The poem's title, "My Jamaica," invites us into a narrative from a personal perspective while also showing ownership. This move already subverts those that might question the poet's identity as a Jamaican, if we gather that the poem's speaker is in fact its author. The poem is a complex weaving of a country to which the speaker is tied in conflicting ways. The poet writes, "Jamaica has always been harsh / hard words of rigid correction / connecting with the side of my head," and a few lines later, "Jamaica / has always loved me from a place of random beauty" (24-25). The poem's speaker leads us to reflect with her on a complex relationship with homeland. When we get to the end of the poem, the

[5] Reddock cites Chin's work as one of the various areas within popular culture where the issue of homophobia in the Caribbean has emerged.

juxtaposition of soft and rough imagery leaves the willing reader in the speaker's proverbial shoes. She writes,

> Jamaica has always been able to find me
> A thorn among the hibiscus blooms
> My Jamaica
> Has always been
> The hardest poem to write (25)

Chin's poem invites us to think about migration and the diverse circumstances that prompt people to leave their homelands and create new diasporic communities elsewhere. She encourages readers to believe that their experiences and feelings are just as valuable as anyone else's and should be free from the shame society imposes. Chin does not, however, attempt buying into an American dream of an ideal life in the U.S. Many of her poems expose the injustices that she experiences in American contexts and draw parallels with the injustices Marson exposes during her time in Britain decades earlier. As scholar Hortense Spillers succinctly asserts, "Made up in the gaze of Europe, 'America' was as much a 'discovery' on the retinal surface as it was the appropriation of land and historical subjects" (323). Both Chin and Rankine's creative works elucidate the hardships they endure and observe in America. In reading Chin's "My Jamaica", we become aware of the sacrifices tied to leaving one's homeland.

Marson left Jamaica for greater opportunities in London, finding them in both writing and media, but in her pursuit of achieving her dreams, we see in much of her work that a deep sadness is conveyed as a result of the racism she encountered. Many of her poems reflect a negative experience in London, primarily the great difficulty in navigating racism and being othered. But many poets after Marson demonstrate the manifestation of Bennett's "Colonisation in Reverse," the new, imperfect, dynamic, and

complex communities created as a result of migration. Many of the poems by Rankine and Chin published after their move to the U.S.A. reflect their new lives in a way that finds their identities as black women newly encompassing their lived experiences in the Jamaican diaspora. By nature of their birth and the country they move to, these authors' works become of two places. This is something they hold in common with Marson though she leads as a foremother in this respect. Marson's poetry reflecting her experiences in Britain and Jamaica, paves the way for later Jamaican women writers' deep considerations of diasporic communities and migration narratives.

Closing Thoughts

For Marson, the potential of the country was tied to writers. Today, Marson would be proud to know that the thriving literary scene she hoped Jamaica would have is a reality. As time has gone on, more Jamaican women writers have shown their lived experiences to add to the diverse narratives of Jamaican womanhood. Louise Bennett, Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison, Jean Binta Breeze, Staceyann Chin, Claudia Rankine, and many more stem from a rich writerly foundation of forward thinking. These writers push to make even more space for the nuances of Black womanhood and expand our thinking beyond how to live in a post-colonial society to consider that we can be more than postcolonial: we can decolonize effectively with commitment to self-love, self-awareness, and empowering our communities. Fighting racism, colorism, and sexism are ongoing battles, because there are always those committed to perpetuating the same systems that have led to oppressive conditions and self-hate. As many countries in the Caribbean push towards a fully realized identity after colonization, the conversation of decolonization becomes most attractive though at times elusive. It is in our best interests

to consider how these women help us to identify and work through what still stands in the way.

CONCLUSION

Extending Legacy: Bennett and Marson Today

Jamaica has made considerable advancements on the world stage in sports and arts as a small country having to rebuild after the formal end of colonialism. Within the government, there exists a ministry devoted to preserving and furthering the arts in Jamaica, there are models of black excellence visible and accessible in television programming and cultural events, and images of Jamaica's heroes and icons can be found throughout the country, especially in areas of the capital, Kingston. Bennett is one such figure whose iconic presence has been a mainstay in the cultural fabric of the country. Although she spent her last years in Canada, the icon's image and work are synonymous with Jamaican culture due to the fact that she had devoted so much of her life and career to the country and its advancement in the arts through her creative contributions. Bennett proudly represented Jamaican culture and black womanhood in a way that countered larger hegemonic narratives and the attempt at cultural erasure that a history of white imperialism threatened. In formerly colonized countries, black people are often tasked to maneuver through spaces not designed to include them and thus have to fight for equity and representation as imperialist history relegates them to the margins. One such example of a historical effort to combat this reality was Prime Minister Manley's push towards Jamaican nationalist ideals once independence from the British was achieved (Morris, 12). This initiative attempted to put national identity first and though there is clear evidence that many discriminatory practices persist, the promotion of a people proud to be Jamaicans prevailed. In light of this, Bennett's contributions to Jamaican culture through her creative work play an essential factor in the promotion of the country's

national identity after independence. As a poet and performer, Bennett challenged the status quo as a black middle class Jamaican woman appearing comfortable in her skin and speaking Patwa. As Mervyn Morris points out, Bennett was not comfortable with a middle class distinction as she grew up in "humble circumstances" (xii). Bennett understood the importance of reaching across classes to connect with the audience and claiming one's power through self-representation. Once she had the platform to share her work widely, she was able to cultivate that to inspire others to do the same in a manner that continues to reverberate.

In stark contrast, Marson's legacy and influence are obscured despite her numerous contributions to Jamaican and Jamaican diasporic culture. Despite her groundbreaking efforts and extensive oeuvre, knowledge of Marson's work is less known than many of her contemporaries. As Alison Donnell identifies, Marson proves a "tricky figure to recover" (12). Donnell points out, "She rests on the margins of a Caribbean literary tradition, not only because her work is very diverse, even seemingly contradictory, but because many of her writings are still dismissed as unyielding and unrewarding, even un-Caribbean" (12). These categorizations of Marson's work reveal her as a complex literary figure. In identifying the myriad reasons for the lack of attention paid to Marson's body of work, Donnell makes readers aware of the limitations often placed on literary figures whose work may be hard to categorize. Marson's work in fact proves an exciting representation of black womanhood.

Through examining Marson's oeuvre alongside Bennett's, both women's diverse presentations of themselves demonstrate the necessity of valuing creative works as vital spaces of self production. My primary concern in the first part of this closing section of

the dissertation is to examine representations and references to Bennett through national efforts and in popular culture to glean how Bennett continues to exist after her lifetime in a manner that extends her legacy. I begin with Bennett to establish how she retains an active and bold presence in Jamaican national memory and then move to discuss Marson in the second part of this section to consider what Marson's absence is symptomatic of while setting the stakes for why it is important in a national capacity to retrieve her legacy from the sidelines.

Questions that shape this final section are: How is Jamaican social life served within the country and its diaspora through Bennett's legacy? How might it also be served by closer attention to Marson's work as both groundbreaking and foundationally important, like Bennett's, to the literary and cultural landscape? How can the preservation of Bennett's and Marson's legacies be helpful for the future preservation of literary culture in Jamaica? How can expressive practices generate solidarity and community?

Bennett's Influence

Bennett's work has impacted many artistic forms outside of the primary fields her work engages. Morris highlights, "She has been valued as a pathfinder not only by dub poets and other writer/performers – people such as Paul Keens Douglas, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mikey Smith, Lillian Allen, Joan Andrea Hutchinson and Amina Blackwood Meeks — but by most Caribbean authors familiar with her work" (91). Bennett has also been cited as influential when it comes to Jamaican music. In her 2018 article for Billboard highlighting key contributions from women in reggae's history, journalist Patricia Meschino links the influence of Bennett's imperative to embrace Patwa to the music genre. She states,

Prior to reggae's birth in 1968, Jamaican women had already played significant roles in shaping the identity of their island's music...[Miss Lou] celebrated the island's native patois, a defining element within reggae's dancehall strain, as early as the 1940s when many in (then colonial) Jamaica considered it an unrefined language. (No Grammy, No Cry)

Meschino highlights that Bennett's use of her large platform to celebrate what many thought of as an "unrefined language" helped to bring positive attention to the use of Patwa. Bennett's influence as a successful middle class woman allowed for more Jamaicans from similar class distinctions to embrace Patwa, but an upbringing exposing her to various walks of life is reflected in her confident presentation of the language and relevant conversations in the country. Carolyn Cooper points out the long history of Patwa being relegated to the margins as reflective of socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. She writes, "as the use of Jamaican in the scribal literary tradition becomes acceptable and conventional, then the rude impulse of the language, formerly manifested in 'backward' folk culture, can be seen to now reassert itself in contemporary forms of verbal marronage" (136). This self-empowering move of language ownership is a praiseworthy one and in connection with the centenary anniversary of Bennett's birth, there has been a strong push by the Jamaican Language Unit at UWI Mona to elevate the Jamaican vernacular within the country to an official language (JIS). Prime Minister Andrew Holness, however, has raised concerns, stating in part "my fear is that the debate is going in such a way as to abandon English and speak Patwa and we must be mindful of that" (PM Holness Raises Concerns). Though the prime minister highlighted the value of Patwa to Jamaican culture, he cited the importance of standardized English to heighten

employment opportunities in society. A subsequent petition and similar initiatives in the country trace a clear line to the unifying potentiality of the distinction. As stated in the Jamaica Gleaner, “Among other things, the petitioner argues that all Jamaicans are united by one common language, Jamaican, adding that it is a marker of unity and identity for citizens at home and in the diaspora” (Petition Launched). Despite the positive intentions of the petition, it is apparent that the discussion of whether to make the language official is still controversial within the country.

Bennett has continued to be one of the most recognizable figures and major influences in Jamaican culture and society since her passing in 2006. For this reason, in 2017 when popular Jamaican music artist Ishawna seemed to pass judgment on Bennett’s image on her Instagram page, there was an outburst of criticism towards the singer on social networking sites. Paired with an image of Ishawna dressed in a bikini and fur, Ishawna’s statement that she “nuh wear tablecloth like Ms. Lou" referenced the national bandana clothing of Jamaica that Bennett often wore in her staged performances. Though Ishawna did not provide onlookers a nuanced explanation of her caption, one could gather that her outfit was more provocative than anything Bennett’s public image had ever presented. Bennett’s donning of the national outfit over the course of her career helped to enhance its popularity and it became common to see photographed images of her in mid-performance styled in this attire. The thought that through one post from a popular current artist, Bennett’s influence could seemingly be reduced to her physical image and attire was a shock for many Jamaicans. Still, this well known visual of Bennett only aides the popularity and impact of her written and staged performances.

In addition to the insult to Bennett's image, Ishawna's post was widely read to mean that she felt Bennett was no longer relevant, especially as it included the hashtag "RipMissLou". The comment prompted some debates online on whether the poet/folklorist/performer's time and work had come and gone, but mostly triggered an outpouring of support and admiration for her contributions to society. What may have started out as just another post of promotion for Ishawna's image and style, led to a country-wide conversation. Many Jamaicans posted pictures in bandana, representing Jamaican national culture and in honor of Bennett. The bandana (Madras cloth) was originally imported from India during the 18th century and is typically worn at cultural events and often by school age children on days of national celebration. Despite the bandana's historical ties to slavery as common dress during the colonial period, Bennett's committment to the attire coupled with her affirmitive messages towards Jamaica aided in reclaiming the costume for Jamaican purposes. In the days after Ishawna's post, Jamaicans turned out in droves via social media wearing bandana as a counter to say that Bennett was still indeed relevant. Criticisms of Ishawna focused on her disrespect of what Bennett represented. Bennett's wearing of bandana was an extension of the fact that she built a platform whose mission was to celebrate Jamaican culture in its fullness.

It can be difficult to orient moments in time when our access to information is so immense and shifts in what is trending information moves at such a rapid pace. With this in mind, how might we glean further understanding of the cultural moment represented by Ishawna's post and the reactions it prompted? The response of the people seems to fight against the notion that the new must dismantle the old. In this case, when it comes

to a figure who has reached a status like that of Bennett whose mission was devoted to building up the people of Jamaica, her legacy becomes one to protect.

One might venture to think that the boldness of a performer like Ishawna was made possible as a result of Bennett's push to be bold using her platform as an entertainer to empower Jamaicans to be themselves and express their opinions, even ones that may be controversial. However, it is likely that Bennett might have actually found humor in Ishawna's comment if she were alive. Such a reaction would be in line with her ability to turn insult and controversy into humorous yet teachable moments, as is the case with many of Bennett's poems and monologues.

In part, this occurrence makes visible the impact of social media in extending legacies and influence. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" Stuart Hall states, "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', positioned" (222-223). Hall reminds us of the importance of considering the current moment one operates within and how people are positioned in relation to it. This invites us to embrace the access and opportunities that tools such as social media provide. The imperative then is how might our interactions with the work and the artist continue and be extended based on our current moment. Alejandra Brofman points out, "[Bennett] transformed those forms of media with which she interacted. In the Jamaican context, her work in radio and television coincided with moments of growth of those media, and she made them relevant to Jamaican audiences" (7). Clearly, Bennett was able to take advantage of technological advances to elevate her talents and aid the mission of her work for larger impact. In a related manner, the outpouring of support for Bennett through these social media posts is another instance

that shows her reach. The public's engagement through social media also shows how modern technology makes it so that artists can continue to inspire posthumously in a collaborative way with their audiences.

Furthering conversations of Bennett's important presence on the island, in 2018 a statue of her, sculpted by Basil Watson and commissioned by the Jamaican government, was unveiled in Jamaica's famous Gordon Town Square. The life size statue captures Bennett mid-performance. Prime Minister Holness described Bennett as a person "who proudly and without reservation, put our rich cultural heritage on display for the world to see and admire...What Miss Lou did, is that she was the first Jamaican to bring our language on the world stage" (JIS). Responses to Bennett's statue included impromptu performances by residents in front of the statue, many of which went viral online. The reactions were similar to the outpouring of support for Bennett after Ishawna's post. Both instances are examples of how expressive practices can generate solidarity and community. Performances like these intervene to extend legacy through public conversations. The observers for these performances moved beyond in-person interaction to reach those online, opening up the potential for a wide and international audience.

Legacy to be Excavated

Some legacies, like Bennett's, are easier to identify, whereas Marson's is much more subdued. Though there has recently been a resurgence in attention to Marson's work in academic circles, her achievements are far less known and thus not commonly celebrated in and outside of Jamaica. While the more attention researchers bring to Marson can aid in the reentry of her work into national conversation, a concentrated effort conveying the importance and relevance of her message might help to elevate her

legacy. How do we excavate the histories of literary greats who are forgotten by the public in a manner that makes their stories accessible to the general public and not just a part of conversations that occur in academia? I would argue that extending Marson's legacy has to go beyond her trailblazing efforts across multiple creative spaces, to consider the importance of how deeply her work engages current conversations potentially important to various educational levels. In addition to conversations on race, colorism, and community building, Marson's work engages topics on diaspora as both a state of being and becoming. Though Marson's work speaks to experiences within the first half of the 20th century, we can interact with her words to create a dialogue that continues to resonate due to its relevance to the current social climate. Marson's work presents and examines concepts of diaspora as condition and how one's connections to their homeland become in flux/fluid. Marson does this by exposing her experience maneuvering multiple spaces, causing her to negotiate, proclaim, and reclaim parts of her identity in both Jamaica and Britain.

While in Britain, Marson takes on multiple selves as is evident in her lyric poetry on the subject, but also in her additional work across genres. Marson's work and presence outside of Jamaica is in quiet conversation with multiple spaces and becomes diasporic in nature.

Marson helps us address some age old questions about diaspora and displacement, as well as thinking of legacy and diaspora together. Arguably, factoring in one's connection to a particular country for better understanding of their identity increases in difficulty when we have such vastly differing contexts to take into account. In a similar manner to Claude McKay, whose life and work primarily spanned the first half of the

20th century, Marson belonged to two different worlds. While for McKay, his work would become associated with both Jamaica and the United States, Marson's work became both of Jamaica and Britain. Many of today's celebrated Jamaican literary artists also belong to Jamaica and to varying degrees to another country, many moving with similar goals as Marson, for greater opportunities to further their craft and reach more people (such as Claudia Rankine, Marlon James, Kei Miller, Olive Senior). As Homi Bhabha states in an interview with Klaus Stierstorfer, "in my movements, there is a narrative. There are reasons why I move; there are the losses of it, of where I moved from, and the gains of where I move to. So, it is part of a process of choice and judgment" (Stierstorfer). Bhabha brings our attention to multiple aspects of migration, including specific reasons that might cause a person to want or need to move, though acknowledging that the potentiality of the new location does not erase feelings of connectedness or longing for what was experienced in the previous one. As a 2018 study reports, 1.3 million Jamaican-born persons now live outside of the country (JIS). Marson offers us an early account of what it is like to live a similar diasporic existence of one's own choosing, homeland being both past tense and at the forefront of her mind in many of her poems and engaging themes of displacement, resistance, and nostalgia. Marson's body of poetic work enacts Hall's assertion that "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). It is also important to keep in mind that Marson's work predates the Windrush generation and critical theoretical considerations of diaspora that would emerge after. The notion of diaspora as a condition and continuously being elsewhere reverberates through Marson's work. She offers a different representation of Jamaica. As

a creative Jamaican of the early to mid 20th century, her experience draws commonalities with many of today's literary artists who have to negotiate their identities, personal relationships, and histories according to the multiple connections and the disconnect to people and country that they may feel after leaving their homeland.

In addition to what Marson can teach us about diaspora, we might also consider how many of her individual works have an empathetic ear towards the possibilities of humans to grow and change. Marson's body of work also enacts bell hooks' well-known line, "For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?" (Interview with Melvin McLeod).

Closing Thoughts

Many may focus primarily on how Bennett and Marson differ in their approaches to language, where Marson's writing and speech reflect a prioritization of standardized English, and Bennett's Jamaican vernacular. However, Bennett never abandons standardized English, having mastered both. It is clear from interviews that she accesses it when she deems necessary, modeling a multilingual capability and ability to capture the ear of several Anglophone audiences even as she remained, at the core, a representative and promoter of Jamaican language and culture. Marson's approach to language use is in somewhat of an opposition to Bennett's as it is primarily in standardized English, but pulls in Jamaican vernacular in a few poems, "Quashie Comes to London" being the most popular.

In retrieving literary histories the focus has to be on what we can learn and how we might further current conversations and initiatives through continuous engagement

with the ideas of those who have come before. Marson's work and importance in Jamaica and its diaspora deserve the recognition of other celebrated Jamaican figures. More incorporation of her work on a national level through school curriculums and cultural programs would only enhance understanding of diverse perspectives of Jamaican women during the 20th century. This would allow for deeper considerations of how far the country has come and what has remained the same and demands intervention. Marson's texts can do different work to illuminate often silenced voices in the room, voices of difference in how they might present themselves, but who are valid in their connection to country and desire to represent it. By virtue of her contributions it would serve the public to be reminded of the foundation she paved for those that followed and the value of embracing diasporic narratives. Literature is a unique vector to convey culture and history in that the writing remains the same, but can be accessed and studied years after the author has passed on. Arguably, Marson's work is better at creating community now, many years after her passing, as new readers can connect to her life through the themes that emerge and the varied roles she plays in society. The understanding and appreciation of Marson's work can change and grow over time as it is open to new interpretations and understandings.

In engaging both women's creative work alongside one another, their foundational importance to Jamaican literary culture in reflecting the diversity of black women's voices and experiences are elucidated. With social justice at the core of their creative contributions to society, both Marson and Bennett create space through their work and presence, physical space in breaking new ground and space as a possibility.

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