Embodiment and the African Diaspora in the Fiction of Paule Marshall

by

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Abstract

Paule Marshall's fiction is characterized by narration of the body in relation to African diasporic identity. My dissertation project, *Embodiment and the African Diaspora in the Fiction of Paule Marshall*, seeks to examine how Marshall uses body-centered narration to launch discussions about embodiment and its integral connection to African diasporic identity. This narrative technique, and the discussion of embodiment and identity that it engenders, capture well Marshall's position as a diasporic feminist writer. She has often been identified by scholars as either an African American, Caribbean, diasporic, or—though less often—feminist writer. Through this dissertation project, I am committed to unveiling the ways in which Marshall is all of those at once, as evidenced by her focus on Black women expressing diasporic identity through embodied practices like ritual dance, *Vodou* possession, *obeah* medicinal strategies, and spiritual connection to African and diasporic ancestors as felt through the body. Marshall's fiction reveals that these embodied practices are not tangential or complementary to African diasporic identity, but are integral to it. Like Marshall's work, this dissertation employs lenses of Black feminist theory and African and African diasporic theories of embodiment. Through her short stories and novels, Marshall makes an explicit case for examining the role of embodiment within diasporic communities. Her fiction suggests that embodiment will not only strengthen diasporic identity, but will also strengthen diasporic communities. The larger message of Marshall's fiction is that disembodiment, especially of women, is a result of capitalist, materialist ideology that is racist, gendered, and oppressive to Black communities. By reconnecting with and reclaiming their bodies, Marshall’s female characters reveal that embodiment is not only a path toward diasporic identity, but also a resistant act to the systems of oppression, dating back to slavery, that inevitably result in disembodiment. For Marshall’s women, embodiment becomes a source of power. By using body-centered narration, Marshall makes discussions of the body inescapable. My dissertation is a critical analysis of three of her novels, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), and *Daughters* (1991), with the intention of uncovering the ways in which Marshall makes embodiment an integral part of scholarly discussions about and literary depictions of the African diaspora.

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Dedication

To my muse, Paule Marshall, for writing such beautiful and deeply meaningful words and to my Grandmom, Celia Zanchettin, for giving me enough unconditional love to inspire me for lifetimes.

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Introduction

Telling Stories of the Body

Paule Marshall's fiction is characterized by narration of the body in relation to African diasporic identity. My dissertation project, *Embodiment and the African Diaspora in the Fiction of Paule Marshall,* seeks to examine how Marshall uses body-centered narration to launch discussions about embodiment and its integral connection to African diasporic identity. This narrative technique, and the discussion of embodiment and identity that it engenders, illustrate Marshall's position as a diasporic feminist writer. She has often been identified by scholars as either an African American, Caribbean, diasporic, or—though less often—feminist writer. Through this dissertation project, I am committed to unveiling the ways in which Marshall is all of those at once, as evidenced by her focus on Black women expressing diasporic identity through embodied practices like ritual dance, *Vodou* possession, *obeah* medicinal strategies, and spiritual connection to African and diasporic ancestors as felt through the body. Marshall's fiction reveals that these embodied practices are not tangential or complementary to African diasporic identity, but are integral to it. Like Marshall's work, this dissertation employs lenses of Black feminist theory and African and African diasporic theories of embodiment. Through her short stories and novels, Marshall makes an explicit case for examining the role of embodiment within diasporic communities. Her fiction suggests that embodiment will not only strengthen diasporic identity, but will also strengthen diasporic communities. My dissertation is a critical analysis of three of her novels, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), and *Daughters* (1991), with the intention of uncovering the ways in which Marshall makes this case.

The body is a central focus of Marshall's fiction, which invites more thorough analysis about how and why Marshall uses the body in her novels. *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (*Brown Girl*), *Praisesong for the Widow* (*Praisesong*), and *Daughters* all open with descriptions of the body. In *Brown Girl,* we meet Selina Boyce, "a ten-year-old girl with scuffed legs and a body as straggly as the clothes she wore."[1] Selina's straggly body is symbolic of the disconnection she feels from her body. Once Selina reconnects with her body through dance, she is initiated fully into the diasporic community. Similarly, *Praisesong* introduces Avatara (Avey) Johnson as disembodied: "Her mind in a way wasn't even in her body."[2] The text reveals that this disembodiment is a result of her acceptance of materialist ideology. Like Selina, Avey reconnects with her body and her diasporic community—with the help of her ancestors—through the Big Drum Ritual dance in the Caribbean. *Daughters* opens with a scene of disembodiment in which Ursa Mackenzie leaves an abortion clinic after her procedure, feeling nothing, not even "the heat in the room."[3] Ursa is able to reconnect to her body and become a daughter of the diaspora through political activism. Not only do all three of these novels open with narrations of the body, they specifically depict disembodiment. The larger message of Marshall's fiction is that disembodiment, especially of women, is a result of capitalist, materialist ideology that is racist, gendered, and oppressive to Black communities that dates back to colonialism and slavery. By reconnecting with and reclaiming their bodies, Marshall's female characters reveal that embodiment is not only a path toward diasporic identity, but also an act of resistance to these systems of oppression that inevitably result in disembodiment. For Marshall's women, embodiment becomes a source of power. By using body-centered narration, Marshall makes discussions of the body inescapable.

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[1] Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, 1959), 4.
[2] Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), 10.
[3] Paule Marshall, *Daughters* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 9.

Before Marshall wrote novels, she wrote short stories, and her short story, “Brooklyn,” which she began writing in 1952, signals the genesis of Marshall’s focus on the body. We can see that from the onset of her career as a writer, Marshall was concerned about how female embodiment connects to both identity and power. “Brooklyn” is about Max Berman, a white male professor who fetishizes and objectifies the body of his African American female student, Miss Williams. His fetishization of Miss Williams’s body is symbolic of a larger cultural obsession with and desire to control Black female bodies. Max interprets her body as such: “She seemed to bring not only herself but the host of black women whose bodies had been despoiled to make her. He would not only possess her, but them also.”[4] The despoiled Black bodies are a suggestive reference to slave women who were repeatedly raped by their white slave masters. And although Max “scarcely allowed these thoughts to form before he snuffed them out,” his obsession with Miss Williams marks the contemporary residue of the ideology of slaveholding society in which Black bodies, especially female, were objects to be controlled and defiled.[5] Despite Max’s more dominant position of power as university professor and white male, he feels threatened by Miss Williams: “He had not expected so subtle and complex a force beneath her mild exterior and he found it disturbing and dangerous, but fascinating.”[6] Having written an impressive essay on André Gide’s *The Immoralist*, her intellectual work is threatening to him as well.[7] Because Miss Williams threatens to wrestle away power of both body and mind, Max desires to control her body in order to maintain his position of dominance. This desire is reminiscent of how slave masters used to control the bodies of their female slaves through abuse and rape. Angela Davis contends that male slaveholders would rape their female slaves as a way to reify their power and “conquer the resistance that black woman could unloose.”[8] Even though Max isn’t planning to rape Miss Williams (he desires consensual sex with her), his desire to control her body through the act of copulation is born from this same master/slave model of power iniquity that was often codified through rape. The slave master’s physical dominance over the slave woman’s body both disempowered *and* disembodied her, effectively making her body his financial and sexual property. “Brooklyn” demonstrates that residue of this power structure that results in female disembodiment still exists today.

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[4] Paule Marshall, “Brooklyn,” in *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, 1961), 41.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 44.
[7] It is interesting to note here that André Gide’s *The Immoralist* is about Michel, a man who awakens to his homosexuality after falling ill with Tuberculosis. Like Marshall’s work, Gide’s novel explores the connection between the body and identity. Michel’s sick body is symbolic of his false identity and his rejection of his true self. Like many of Marshall’s characters, Michel sets out to reinvent himself. This reinvention occurs through the body.

Like Marshall’s novels, the short story is centrally concerned with how Miss Williams can go about reclaiming her body and her power. What methods are available to her? Because Marshall is a feminist writer at heart, she enables Miss Williams to use her body as a way to reclaim her power. Miss Williams intentionally accepts Max’s invitation to visit him at his lake house in order to execute her plan to coopt his power. By parading in front of Max in a swimsuit, “[holding] herself and her prize out of his desperate reach,” she returns his objectifying gaze and subverts the power dichotomy.[9] By eviscerating Max’s gaze, Miss Williams forces him to look at her body not with a desire to dominate and control, but with an “accept[ance … of] his responsibility for her rage.”[10] By using her body to achieve this reversal, Miss Williams is finally able to express “the outrage of a lifetime, of her history, [that] was trapped inside her.”[11] Eugenia DeLamotte cogently argues that, “instead of becoming an image of the woman whose body Berman would like to claim, it becomes an image of her self-possession, her claiming of her own body and her own destiny."[12] DeLamotte's final analysis, however, is that Miss Williams reclaims her power through voice, though it's clear in the story and in DeLamotte's own interpretation of it, that Miss Williams also reclaims her power through her body. Not only does this story set up the ways in which embodiment can become a path to agency for diasporic women, it connects the body to slave history, a connection that Marshall makes even stronger in *Praisesong*.

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[8] Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” in *The Massachusetts Review* 13.1/2 (Winter-Spring 1972), 96.
[9] Marshall, “Brooklyn,” 61.
[10] Ibid, 63-64.
[11] Ibid, 47.

Although "Brooklyn" never directly connects embodiment to African diasporic identity—a connection that Marshall does not explicitly make until her first novel *Brown Girl* nearly a decade later—it initiates the potential for this connection to be made. The story implies that Miss Williams is connected to the diaspora and diasporic history through her body. Her skin color marks her, from Max's perspective, as "only black after all," with no access to power.[13] The story reveals, however, that this racialized and gendered power dichotomy is culturally constructed and can be undone. When Miss Williams announces to Max that, "even though your lake isn't anything like the one near my house, it's almost as nice," she is essentially claiming membership to a community that exists outside the bounds of his control and power.[14] This characterization is in contrast to how she first identifies Max's lake—"There's a lake near my home, but it's not like this"—implying that his lake is superior. It is not until after her embodied resistance to his gaze and attempts at domination that she sees her lake as superior.[15] This shift mirrors the shift we see in Selina in *Brown Girl*, Avey in *Praisesong*, and the daughters in *Daughters*, in which they, after embodied practice, start to understand their diasporic communities as sources of deep strength and resistance. "Brooklyn" clearly marks Marshall's entry into feminist and diasporic literary discussions about the Black female body, embodiment, identity, power, and community.

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[12] Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom: The Fiction of Paule Marshall* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 6.
[13] Marshall, "Brooklyn," 51.
[14] Ibid, 63.
[15] Ibid, 55.

It should not be surprising to anyone that Marshall's writing has focused on the body since the very beginning of her writing career. Marshall has been telling stories of the body and how it connects to the diaspora since she was a young girl. Her biography and life experiences inform her perspective as a diasporic feminist writer, a classification that my dissertation project contributes to Marshall scholarship. Marshall was "nothing as pretty as her [mother's] first" girl child.[16] As she tells it, "From early on, [my mother] Adriana would recite almost daily the list of my physical flaws: my large, bright-pink lower lip ('like a piece o' raw meat'); my two ugly, oversized big toes; 'the two horse teeth' that replaced my milk teeth up front. As for my gloomy, long-jawed face? It was the face, according to Adriana, 'of a child that's living its old days first!"[17] Years later, that same "beautiful-ugly" face would be claimed as both Ashanti and Bemba by attendees of the World Festival of Black and African Arts in Nigeria, significantly connecting Marshall to her African sisters and brothers of the diaspora, them claiming her as their own.[18] From an early age, Marshall's identity as the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, a Black woman, and a member of the African diaspora has been tied to her body and how people view and talk about it. Like many of the female characters who appear in her novels, Marshall deeply understands that felt connection to her body, or, embodiment, facilitates a stronger, more informed connection to the African diaspora.

In the same vein, Marshall has always cast herself as a child of the diaspora. She was born in Brooklyn to Barbadian immigrants who had settled in New York during an influx of

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[16] Paule Marshall, *Triangular Road* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009), 83.
[17] Ibid, 83.
[18] Ibid, 162. "Beautiful-ugly" is a term her mother and female kinfolk used to describe anything that also "contained its opposite" (88).

Caribbean immigration to the United States during the first few decades of the 20th century. Her mother's place of birth and childhood in Barbados is known to Marshall, "a hilly district called Scotland on the Atlantic or windward coast."[19] Her father, on the other hand, "never mentioned either his family or the name of his birthplace."[20] He was an "illegal alien" with "no passport, no visa, no documents or official papers of any kind, not even a birth certificate" who came to New York via Cuba as "a stowaway" aboard a ship.[21] Perhaps her father's ambiguity in claiming a nation was one influence in Marshall's journey towards defining herself not as an American or a Barbadian, but as a diasporan. Despite this, Marshall claims that both of her parents "gave [her] a very strong sense of the culture out of which they came."[22] Marshall grew up listening to her mother and other female kinfolk, a group of women she refers to as "the poets in the kitchen," tell both personal and political stories with an African aesthetic. She spent time in the Caribbean many times as a girl, a young adult, and as a woman, learning the culture of her parents and discovering her ancestral link back to Africa, an undertaking that Marshall encourages all peoples of the diaspora to participate in. Even so, Marshall grew up in Brooklyn and attended school with non-immigrant African Americans, internalizing Black American culture alongside Afro-Caribbean culture. Marshall has always insisted that these two identities are part of "the same cultural expression."[23] In fact, she gets frustrated with people who attempt to delineate them. She is adamant that there is no "distinction between African-American and West Indian."[24] As Marshall puts it, "All o'we is one."[25]

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[19] Ibid, 63.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid, 72.
[22] 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, "Re-creating Ourselves All Over the World: A Conversation with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, ed. James C. Hall and Heather Hathaway (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 36.
[23] Ibid, 37.
[24] Daryl Cumber Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 102.
[25] Ibid.

Marshall's understanding of this cohesive diasporic identity undoubtedly informs her work as a writer. When asked, "How do you feel your work fits in with black American literature and Caribbean writing?," Marshall responds, "I know that people have trouble defining me as a black American or Caribbean writer. I fall between two stools, I'm neither West Indian nor black American."[26] Marshall scholars have done significant work in the past two decades uncovering the ways in which Marshall engages diasporic identity through her fiction. The 1995 monographs by Dorothy Hamer Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, and Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction*, explore the ways in which Marshall relies on African aesthetic and ritual in order to, according to Denniston, "reconstruct [...] African history and culture to establish an underlying unity that links all peoples of African descent."[27] Pettis contends that Marshall's texts are concerned with a "movement toward spiritual wholeness" as a way to heal "the fractured psyche" as a result of the dispersal of people from Africa to the diaspora.[28] In Heather Hathaway's monograph about both Paule Marshall and Claude McKay, *Caribbean Waves* (1999), she refers to Marshall as an "African Caribbean immigrant" and is conscious of Marshall's dual identity as informing her work and its intention to "envision the position of being an immigrant as providing the opportunity to live not between but within two worlds."[29] In the most recent monograph about Marshall's fiction, *A Human Necklace* (2013), Moira Ferguson argues that Marshall's novels "constitute a long, discontinuous, imaginative saga of African diasporic communities, perhaps the first of its kind."[30] Denniston, Pettis,

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[26] Ogundipe-Leslie, "Re-creating Ourselves," 36.

[27] Dorothy Hamer Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), xii.

[28] Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 3.

[29] Heather Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 86.

[30] Moira Ferguson, *A Human Necklace: The African Diaspora and Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2013), 2.

Hathaway, and Ferguson all read Marshall's novels as diasporic, crossing between and through African American and Caribbean aesthetics and themes. As Isidore Okpewho suggests, African diasporic literature can be said to "examine the ways in which [...] transplanted Africans and their progeny [confront] the host environment and buil[d] a life for themselves, and especially the ideologies of selfhood that [... guide] these efforts of adjustment to the world in which they find themselves."[31] Indeed, Marshall is clearly an African diasporic writer, as her novels explore the ways in which peoples of the African diaspora construct new and self-affirming diasporic identities by referencing African beliefs, practices, myths, and rituals.

Many scholarly discussions of her work have failed to acknowledge that Marshall, too, is a feminist writer concerned with the ways in which the silencing, controlling, and commodifying of women's bodies mute their connection to Africa and diminish their diasporic identity. Few scholars have contributed in important ways to the discussion of Marshall as a feminist writer. For example, Eugenia DeLamotte's *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom* (1998) is the only monograph to explicitly engage Marshall's feminist perspective and narrative techniques. She argues that Marshall's work is feminist because of the ways in which it explores issues of female power and voice. DeLamotte's analysis is significant in that she considers female silence as a potential site of resistance and power. DeLamotte contends that Marshall's "novels are complicated studies of the mechanisms whereby oppressive hierarchies disempower women through silence, and of the ways in which that silence works in turn to sustain and reproduce oppression."[32] My dissertation makes a similar argument in that Marshall pinpoints disembodiment, a different form of silence, as a means of oppression by hegemonic forces. Although I came across DeLamotte's work after my initial inclination about Marshall's use of the body and feminist themes as means to discuss diasporic identity and the systems of oppression that prevent its flourishing, her monograph has influenced my project in significant ways. My dissertation builds on DeLamotte's important work by expanding the conversation about silence and power to include embodiment.

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[31] Isidore Okpewho, Introduction to *The African Diaspora: Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), xiv.
[32] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 1-2.

Other sources have implied that Marshall is a feminist writer, but do not offer any sustained discussion about how. For example, Joyce Pettis analyzes how intersectionality appears in Marshall's fiction in her book *Toward Wholeness* and notes that she is "indebted to black feminist practice and feminist literary theory."[33] However, this more than likely describes Pettis's point of view as a scholar rather than how she understands Marshall's point of view as an author. So even though her methods are feminist and she reveals the significant ways in which Marshall's writing engages with issues of race, class, and gender—what Pettis refers to as "the pernicious triad"—her analysis is mostly anchored by the ways in which Marshall explores diasporic identity in relation to spiritual wholeness.[34] Her text is not focused on Marshall as a feminist writer, but nor does it claim to be. Marshall has also been referenced in recent encyclopedias of feminist literature. In Kathy Whitson's 2004 encyclopedia, she includes an entry for Marshall and a brief analysis of *Brown Girl*.[35] However, other than referencing Marshall's own words in which she claims to provide more complete depictions of Black women in her novels, Whitson does not indicate how Marshall's oeuvre is feminist. Mary Ellen Snodgrass is more convincing in her 2013 encyclopedia entry, in which she claims that Marshall's writing is feminist because she explores the feminist themes of female "empowerment" and "rejuvenation."[36] Snodgrass also references Marshall's depictions of

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[33] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*, 5.

[34] Ibid, 73.

[35] Kathy J. Whitson, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

[36] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2013).

"sensual dance and the passions of a developing body" as tied to character identity.[37] In the same vein, the Feminist Press currently publishes both a 2006 edition of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, with a foreword by Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat, and Marshall's 1983 short story collection *Reena and Other Stories*. Despite these classifications of Marshall as a feminist writer, scholarly conversations have not kept up. It is my hope that my dissertation both addresses and begins to fill in this lacuna in scholarship.

When considering Marshall's entire oeuvre, scholars have either analyzed how Marshall conveys diasporic identity *or* how she writes from a feminist perspective, but none have connected the two. I am concerned with identifying and exploring the places in Marshall's fiction at which her diasporic and feminist aims intersect, which to me is most obviously manifested through her sustained discussion of embodiment and how it relates to the diaspora. In order to access the rich diasporic identity that Marshall's novels celebrate, embodiment becomes necessary. *Brown Girl*, Marshall's first novel, culminates in Selina's felt connection to her Afro-Caribbean heritage through dance and bodily awareness, acceptance, and ownership. Selina rejects the inferiority of living in a Black female body and instead embraces her racial and cultural connections to her African ancestors, deciding to visit the Caribbean for the first time at the very end of the novel. In *Praisesong*, Avey is able to overcome the disembodying effects of pursuing a materialist, middle-class lifestyle by participating in the communal Big Drum Ritual dance on the Caribbean island of Carriacou, an embodied act which also connects her to her African diasporic kinfolk. For the women of *Daughters*, embodiment becomes politicized as they embody the spirit of Queen Nanny and the Maroons in order to abort political agenda that endangers Black female bodies and power. Embodiment through African ritual dance, free bodily expression, sexual autonomy, reverence of the body as connected to the spirit, and recognition of the body as political becomes the cornerstone of how *Brown Girl*, *Praisesong*, and *Daughters* all consider the construction and maintenance of African diasporic identity and communities.

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[37] Ibid.

It is appropriate that my project is theoretically situated at the intersection of African diasporic theories of embodiment and Black feminist theory. My theoretical approach mirrors Marshall's own approach in writing all three novels. Marshall's texts rely on traditional African notions about the body—that the body is culturally and spiritually relevant—but interpret them within a diasporic and feminist context. John S. Mbiti's seminal and important anthropological work, *African Religions and Philosophy*, continues to inform scholarly conversations about traditional African beliefs and values.[38] Mbiti discovers that, within an African ethic of understanding, the body plays a crucial role in identity formation and communion with the ancestral past. In contrast to a Western ethic of understanding, there is no privileging of the mind over the body or vice versa; in fact, there is no separation between them. In "From the Poets in the Kitchen," Marshall's seminal essay about her childhood artistic influences, she reveals that her mother and female kinfolk also believed that the mind and body were equally important and that they "had never heard of the mind/body split."[39] I rely on the diasporic interpretations of this African ethic by Katherine Fishburn and Stephanie Mitchem in their important discussions about the Black body and its relation to identity and power. Both Fishburn and Mitchem make cases for the body to be understood as interconnected with mind and soul and integral to identity formation. They both problematize Western privileging of disembodiment as symbolic of rationality and intellectual progress, which fittingly corresponds to Marshall's condemnation that Western capitalist ideology encourages oppressive disembodiment. Mitchem's work in particular dovetails nicely with the work of *Vodou* and *obeah* scholars in connecting the body to healing knowledge and strategies. Drawing on the work of Karen Richman, Bettina Schmidt, Joan Dayan, Gerdès Fleurant, Walter Rucker, and Lucille Mathurin Mair, I consider the ways in which Marshall invokes *Vodou* and *obeah* practices and rituals as a means to further highlight the cultural significance of the body within the African diaspora. Their discussions of how the body can be used to heal, repair, reconnect, resist oppression, and how the body plays a pivotal role in asserting cultural and political agency are all crucial to my analysis of how and why Marshall insists on discussions of the body in relation to these acts. Scholarship about the role of dance in diasporic conceptions of embodiment also informs my work. Yvonne Daniel, Susanna Sloat, and Brenda Gottschild discuss the importance of dance—as a path to embodiment—within diasporic communities, and Susan Harewood, John Hunte, Jerome Handler, and Charlotte Frisbie trace this importance back to slavery, wherein slaves used dance not only as a means to resist oppressive slave society, but also as a means to express their African allegiances and identities. This dual function of embodiment is explored in Marshall's novels.

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[38] Mbiti notes that he "emphasize[s] the unity of African religions and philosophy in order to give an overall picture of their situation" (xi). He does not delineate between various regions or subcultures within Africa in his anthropological work in order to underscore the commonalities of belief that can be found within the African continent. Using Mbiti's approach as inspiration, I do not delineate between regions or cultures in my discussion of African beliefs as they pertain to the body and community. Marshall, as a diasporic writer, considers the collective experience of slaves and the diaspora, and honors the syncretism of the diaspora's creation. As such, it would seem unnecessary to discern between African regions or cultures when identifying Marshall's influences, as she does not discern between them in her own work or interviews. Just as Marshall makes no "distinction between African-American and West Indian," claiming instead that "all o' we is one as far as I'm concerned," she makes no distinction between the African influences that inspire her stories (102). Dance, "An Interview," 102.

[39] Paule Marshall, "From the Poets in the Kitchen," *Callaloo* 24.2 (Spring 2001), 631.

Black feminist theory is situated well to discuss issues of embodiment as they relate to identity, power, and diasporic connection. Marshall relies heavily on a Black feminist lens when integrating African diasporic theories of embodiment into her work. In the spirit of diasporic and feminist resistance, she does not blindly accept these theories because of their connection to Africa. Instead, she is critical of any notions of the body and embodiment that either undermine female power and subjectivity or fracture African diasporic communities. For example, in *Brown Girl*, Marshall demonstrates that communal ritual dance, as depicted at the Steed wedding, can be used both as a tool to enhance embodiment and the deep connection to the African diasporic community that it affords *and* as yet another form of oppression that replicates systems of power that perpetuate iniquity. Again we see that Marshall's depictions and analysis of embodiment function within a feminist framework. In her work on embodiment, Letitia Meynell likewise signals feminist theory as a relevant theoretical mode in which to discuss embodiment. However, Meynell laments that, "theories about the body have tended to forget that, typically, the human body *is* an agent, inevitably transforming through its actions both the world and itself" (emphasis, hers).[40] According to Meynell,"in directly engaging dominant philosophical conceptions of agency, conceptions that neglect or disparage the body, feminist theorists have often themselves lost sight of the ways in which self-understanding and action are inevitably achieved through the body."[41] Marshall's texts, as does this dissertation project, reject Western notions of the mind and body as separate entities wherein the mind is privileged and the body is seen as an obstacle to identity and agency or, even worse, a dirty and taboo entity. Meynell rightfully implies that embodiment plays a key role in identity formation and agency, especially for women whose lived reality is grounded in intersectionality. Meynell's criticism of feminist discussions of the body is well founded; certain branches of feminism have yet to consciously negotiate the complex role the body plays in women's assertion of agency, claim of power, and shaping of identity.

However, Black feminist theory has done important work in this regard by acknowledging the significance of embodiment in its myriad forms—mind/body connection, sexual autonomy and freedom, unadulterated bodily expression, ritual Africanist dance, corporal connection to the ancestral past, ownership and agency of body, and reproductive control—as integral to how Black women of the diaspora navigate their worlds. My work here is indebted to these conversations. Meynell notes that Black feminist theorists, like Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde, "have called on feminists to see that the ability to ignore the body in theorizing positive agency rests on the ignorance and privilege of those bodies that have not been marked by modes of oppression other than gender."[42] Angela Davis and bell hooks have also called out white feminism for its inability to recognize or acknowledge racial and class differences in relation to gender representation. Since my focus is on Marshall's female characters and their paths towards and away from embodiment, Black feminist theoretical discussions about the role of the Black female body in history and culture heavily inform my dissertation project. These discussions, as Meynell implies, insist on challenging myopic feminist notions that all female experiences are similar. These notions not only ignore issues of race and class, but those who put them forth participate in perpetuating hegemonic and oppressive models of femininity which often marginalize Black diasporic women. Whenever possible, I reference theorists and scholars who consider intersectionality in their discussions about the Black female body and Black womanhood within the diaspora in order to avoid my participating in such marginalization.

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[40] Letitia Meynell, Introduction to *Embodiment and Agency*, ed. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 1.
[41] Ibid, 7-8.

More specifically, the works of bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Patricia Hill Collins anchor my critical analysis of Marshall's fiction. These theorists, like Marshall, all acknowledge the Black female body as both a potential site of oppressive inscription *and* embodied power. bell hooks and Angela Davis trace the fetishization and commodification of Black female bodies back to slavery. Marshall relied on Davis's research while she wrote *Daughters*, and I uncover the ways in which this inspiration manifests in Marshall's depictions of how the Black female body is ill-treated and devalued by 20th century healthcare systems and within contemporary cultural consciousness. In *Daughters*, Marshall connects Davis's strong contentions about the necessity for Black women to have control over their reproductive choices to female Maroon communities, wherein women had sole reproductive choice and agency. In "The Oppositional Gaze," bell hooks contends that contemporary, objectifying depictions of the Black female body in popular culture are a continuation of the patriarchal, racist gaze that took root during slavery. bell hooks's concepts of "talking back," "coming to voice," and "the desiring subject" all inform my analysis of how Marshall argues that embodiment is integral to sexual autonomy, ownership over the body as a means to subvert objectification, and coming into power as an embodied woman. hooks, Davis, and Collins all make efforts to dismantle negative stereotypes and archetypes of Black women as matriarchs, mammies, jezebels, and sapphires, and Black female bodies as hypersexual and ugly. Marshall makes this same effort in all three novels by creating complex female characters who stand in opposition to these negative depictions of Black women through a specific focus on their relationships with their bodies. Audre Lorde's concept of the "erotic" as a deep source of power for women is important to my project, because she points to dancing and other embodied practices as how women access and exert this power. Her concept of the personal as political also plays a role, because it insists that the material is indelibly tied to the symbolic. Marshall's fiction argues that we cannot have discussions about the symbolic nature of Black female bodies unless/until we consider their materiality. Lorde, like Marshall, calls on Black communities to have these discussions as one step toward overcoming oppressive ideology that continues to objectify Black female bodies and prevent meaningful embodiment. Finally, I reference Collins's concepts of "activist mothering" and "othermothering" as positions of power in order to decipher how Marshall uses the language and subject position of motherhood in her novels. These concepts connect to the discussion of embodiment because a diasporic woman's access to alternative forms of mothering within her community has implications for her choices in regards to sex, abortion, and reproduction.

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[42] Ibid, 10.

My dissertation connects these Black feminist theoretical concepts to the African diasporic concepts of embodiment that I mentioned earlier in this introduction. By putting these frameworks in conversation with one another, I reveal how and why Marshall writes from a diasporic feminist point of view. My chapters are organized chronologically (from the earliest novel onward) in order to explore how Marshall's works continue to build upon each other as she matures as a writer. In Chapter One, "'She did not quite belong to herself': Coming of Age and Embodiment in *Brown Girl, Brownstones,*" I examine how Marshall re-interprets the Black bildungsroman to make the connection between African diasporic identity and embodiment. This is the first text in which she explicitly connects the two. By depicting the coming of age story of Selina Boyce, Marshall is able to capture how embodiment becomes a central feature of maturation and identity formation within the context of the diaspora. I argue that Marshall's re-interpretation of the Black bildungsroman is precipitated by her feminist perspective. I begin the chapter by revealing how Marshall connects the importance of the body to the diaspora by focusing not only on the individual effects and benefits of embodiment, but also the communal ones. In effect, Marshall condemns diasporic communities that fail to provide models of embodiment for their children; the novel is a literary indictment of Selina's Barbadian community, a community that has been co-opted by disembodying capitalist ideology. In detail, I discuss the models of embodiment and disembodiment that are available to Selina as she ages; these are her sexually expressive neighbor Suggie Skeete, from whom she learns about free bodily expression, sexual autonomy, and a Barbadian ethos as it connects to the body, and her mother, Silla Boyce, from whom she learns about the damaging and violent disembodying effects of buying into capitalist and materialist rhetoric and ideology. In the last section of this chapter, I explore how Marshall sets up dance to be a form of embodiment that can strengthen diasporic identity and community. Through dance, Selina comes fully into her body and her diasporic identity, and the novel concludes with Selina's desire to visit the Caribbean to solidify this newly formed identity position.

Praisesong builds on the themes in *Brown Girl* by further explaining the causes and consequences of disembodiment. It incorporates Africanist ritual dance and other embodied practices like *Vodou* possession more forcefully as pathways to healing and embodiment. My Chapter Two, "'She began to dance then': Embodied Ritual and Historical Reconnection in *Praisesong for the Widow*," is an analysis of how Marshall expands her discussion about embodiment by connecting it to history. At the heart of this chapter is my argument that Marshall forces Avey Johnson to confront the African diasporic past—namely, The Middle Passage and its ensuing repercussions for African peoples—through embodied practices like *Vodou* possession and ritual dance. The results of Avey's visceral journey are a fully formed African diasporic identity and her new role as a transmitter of all that she has learned along the way. This chapter begins with a brief discussion about why connection to the past is significant to Marshall as a diasporic writer. I then turn to analyzing how Marshall loosely re-enacts *Vodou* possession as a means to demonstrate how embodied ritual and practice can be used as healing strategies to cure Avey of the disembodying effects of chasing a middle-class materialist lifestyle. Essentially, I argue that Avey's great Aunt Cuney possesses Avey's body in order to reconnect her with her Ibo Landing and Tatem Island ancestors in the United States. Avey's possession leads her to the Caribbean island of Carriacou where she participates in the Big Drum Ritual dance, a dance that

Avey quickly connects to the Ring Shout, an embodied ritual that her Tatem ancestors have practiced for centuries as a means to maintain ties back to Africa. This chapter also further outlines Marshall's feminist perspective by considering in detail how Avey's female kinfolk become essential to her embodiment journey. My discussion about how Avey's husband Jay and her newfound guide Lebert Joseph devalue Avey's body and/or use the male gaze to attempt to control it demonstrates that disembodiment is a result of both capitalist *and* patriarchal ideology. The feminist implications of Marshall's work come into full light in *Praisesong*, and Chapter Two captures that unfolding.

In my last chapter, "'Always getting on like she's a Congo Jane': Diasporic Daughterhood through Embodying Queen Nanny in *Daughters*," I use Marshall's inspiration, Queen Nanny of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica, as a starting point to discuss how Marshall politicizes embodiment in ways she had not yet done in her other novels. I start with historical background information about Queen Nanny and contend that Marshall creates the character of Congo Jane, who is modeled after Queen Nanny, in order to respond to negative archetypes of Black women. I then analyze how Marshall depicts the abortions of three female characters in order to initiate conversations about the Black female body and how it is judged, ill-treated, controlled, objectified, commodified, shamed, and silenced by society. *Daughters* depicts the damaging physical and psychological effects of this societal disembodiment of women. I argue that Marshall also lays bare the communal effects of this mistreatment of women within the diaspora; female communities in particular are fractured when negative perception and treatment of Black female bodies persists. Marshall invokes Queen Nanny in order to provide an alternative model for diasporic women, one in which women have unfettered reproductive agency within a strong, matrifocal community. In the second half of this chapter, I lay out how

Marshall moves towards a more abstract, politicized discussion of embodiment. By crafting her characters to embody Queen Nanny's subversive spirit and deep knowledge of the body (as evidenced through her *obeah* practices), Marshall complicates traditional diasporic literary representations of mothers and daughters. I posit that the female characters of the novel act as *both* mothers and daughters because of their embodiment of Queen Nanny. They use this "double exposure" to plot a political abortion in the same way Maroon women would have plotted an insurrection. This political abortion has the potential to restore female power, agency, and embodiment within the diasporic community of Triunion. Even though dance ritual and other overtly embodied practices are not the central focus of *Daughters* like they are in *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong*, I chose to include *Daughters* in this project because it captures how Marshall continues to expand her understanding of embodiment as she grows as a writer. In fact, the more Marshall moves away from explicit representations of embodiment, the closer she gets to pinpointing exactly why embodiment matters within the African diaspora. Because of the potential and real implications on a diasporic woman's ability to lay claim to her own body, political acts become just as important as embodied ritual in strengthening diasporic identity and carving out spaces in society in which embodied and empowered subject positions are available to women.

Finally, in the Epilogue, "Marshall's Embodied Oeuvre," I briefly analyze Marshall's other texts—short stories and novels—in order to suggest that body-centered narration and discussions about embodiment and its significance within the African diaspora are central features of her entire oeuvre and not just the three novels and short story I analyze in my introduction and chapters. My epilogue outlines how this project might be expanded and what significance it has the potential to have on Marshall scholarship moving forward. I contend that

Marshall is primarily concerned with creating depictions of an embodied diaspora so that her fiction stands as a testament to the powers and freedom of embodiment that are, according to Marshall, inherently available to the peoples of the African diaspora.

Chapter One

“She did not quite belong to herself”: Coming of Age and Embodiment in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*

Connecting Identity to Embodiment: Marshall’s Intervention

When Marshall was a young girl, she “sat at a smaller table over in the corner” of her family’s “basement kitchen” and listened to the women in her family talk “endlessly, passionately, poetically, and with impressive range.”[43] She admired their ability to insert the sounds and expressions of the Caribbean and Africa into their artistic rhetoric. Having emigrated from Barbados to New York City, these Bajans (Barbadians) brought with them rich cultural and artistic modes of identity expression. To Marshall, the talk of these women was their art, and it fulfilled their “need for self-expression,” while enabling them to “[keep] with the African tradition in which art and life are one.”[44] In “From the Poets in the Kitchen,” Marshall also comments on the fact that her female kinfolk “had never heard of the mind/body split,” and “gave one as much weight and importance as the other.”[45] To them, the expressions of the mind and the body mirrored each other and embodiment was important. In their kitchen, these Bajan women were free to express on the outside through storytelling the frustration, pain, and anger associated with immigration and assimilation that they felt on the inside.

As a young girl witnessing the expression of this embodiment in the kitchen, however, Marshall perceived a disconnect between what her female kinfolk were doing in the kitchen—the identities they were embodying and expressing—and what they were doing outside of the kitchen. In other words, Marshall witnessed a paradox. Because of racism and the material demands of capitalism (every Bajan’s goal was to “buy house”), the daily lives of these women outside of the safety of their homes demanded of them a cover-up of their Afro-Caribbean identities. When they were out scrubbing floors at the homes of wealthier white people, their minds and bodies did become separate entities, resulting in a rejection of their Afro-Caribbean value system. According to Marshall, her female kinfolk believed that, “to deal with adversity […] you had to ‘tie up your belly’ (hold in the pain, that is) when things got rough and go on with life. They took their image from the bellyband that is tied around the stomach of a newborn baby to keep the navel pressed in.”[46] As we learn in *Praisesong for the Widow*, Marshall clearly connects the navel to the African diaspora.[47] When Bajans press in their navels, they are concealing their true identities because their bodies do not express their interior.

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[43] Paule Marshall, “From the Poets in the Kitchen,” *Callaloo* 24.2 (Spring 2001): 628.
[44] Ibid. 629.
[45] Ibid, 631.

Marshall’s first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) dares to ask important questions about the connection between embodiment and Afro-Caribbean and African diasporic identity. Namely, how does the physical body become an access point to identity and a vehicle for identity expression? In this novel, Marshall sets out to understand the process by which second generation immigrant children within the African diaspora fashion their identities and formulate familial, communal, and cultural allegiances, with particular regard to how the body plays a role in identity formation. *Brown Girl* asks how female children of the diaspora in particular tackle the difficult task of embodying their identities within the disembodying and often hostile environment of capitalist America. Marshall’s first novel imagines a world in which Bajan girls living in New York City have the chance to be unapologetically Afro-Caribbean through artistic, bodily expression not only when they are in the privacy of their own homes, as in the case with Marshall’s female kinfolk, but also on the public stage.

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[46] Ibid, 628.

[47] See Chapter Two for an extended discussion of this connection as it relates to Avey Johnson in *Praisesong for the Widow*.

With immense gratitude, Marshall repeatedly credits her female kinfolk with teaching her about artistic expression, wordsmithing, talk as therapy, and the preservation of Africanist orality. Lingering beneath the surface of her adult reflections, however, is her curiosity as a girl kept quiet in the far corner of the kitchen about why these women could only express their real identities in private. This curiosity and Marshall's early recognition that identity and embodiment are connected within Afro-Caribbean cultural ideology form one of the clear inspirations for *Brown Girl*. The linkage *Brown Girl* makes between the body and cultural identity can be traced back to traditional African beliefs and practices. As Stephanie Mitchem points out, traditional African beliefs convey that, "spiritual values and meanings are reflected in the body itself," and "the body signals something about the spiritual life, encompassing the personal, familial, and communal in the present moment."[48] She continues, "More than that, the body connects the person to the ancestors."[49] Marshall's novel suggests that ancestral culture is not only inherited in spirit and practice, but also in body. Selina inherits the cultural practices of her ancestors in much the same way she inherits the physical characteristics of them. Mitchem notes that mind and body are seen as connected in many traditional African religions and spiritual beliefs. She writes, "the human person is not a divided body and soul but a whole being. When the physical or spiritual are in conflict, illness of the body or relationships result."[50] Katherine Fishburn echoes this sentiment when she rejects Western concepts of "ourselves as separate entities, disembodied, rational beings who are dependent on one another for neither our identity nor our well-being" in favor of African and Black traditions of honoring the body, mind, and soul as one.[51] *Brown Girl* is outwardly suspicious of these Western concepts, and this suspicion plays out in Selina’s coming to terms with her body. As Joyce Pettis suggests, “Marshall’s novels [...] have moved progressively toward spiritual regeneration. Even as early as *Brown Girl*, Selina’s and Silla’s experiences suggest that something greater than material, social, or educational success is essential for easing and satisfying the spirit.”[52] Drawing from traditional African beliefs about the spirit and the body, Marshall implies that physical embodiment is a way to harmonize body and soul, and heal fractured African diasporic identities.

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[48] Stephanie Mitchem, *African American Folk Healing* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 35.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, 35-36.

By writing *Brown Girl*, Marshall stages an artistic intervention in order to condemn diasporic communities that have frayed or severed their ties to Africa by accepting or even participating in the disembodiment that is associated with capitalism. The Bajan community in the novel has forgotten about the connection between the body and diasporic identity. Most of the members of this community, and in particular the women—who are the central focus of the novel—are disconnected from their physical bodies and therefore from the African diasporic community. When this community gathers at the Steed wedding, for example, Silla does not remember how to dance like she used to back in Barbados, because she has pressed in her navel for far too long. The image of a disconnected community at the wedding captures Marshall’s fears about the diasporic community’s disavowal of the traditional African belief that the physical body is connected to identity. The effects of this disavowal are even more detrimental to children within the community, because they often feel—as Selina’s character demonstrates—like they don’t belong to a community at all. They also lack models for how to express themselves creatively and artistically. The novel sets out to argue that connecting the body to identity will result in a stronger, better connected diaspora.

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[51] Katherine Fishburn, *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African-American Narrative* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 30.

[52] Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall’s Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 107.

Marshall makes a case for embodiment as a significant factor in Afro-Caribbean identity formation, and the character of Selina provides the diasporic community a model of what embodied coming of age and embodied identity might look like within the African diaspora. Dorothy Hamer Denniston argues that the novel is "about individual development that is inseparable from the development of the collective body."[53] Selina's individual development becomes a model for the collective development of her Bajan community, a community that is depicted as having lost its way. The novel suggests that embodiment has the potential to repair the disembodying and dissociative effects of capitalist, racist, and sexist systems of power that seek to control women and their bodies. Marshall reveals to Alexis DeVeaux that Selina is "an idealized image of myself."[54] Selina's strong connection to her Afro-Caribbean heritage, which is brought about by dance and free bodily expression, is formed at a much younger age than that of Marshall. It was not until Marshall was "grown [that she] began to see the marvelous gift and the great benefit" of belonging to the African diaspora.[55] One of the reasons for Marshall's rejection of her Afro-Caribbean heritage is because she lacked models in her life of full and unapologetic embodiment. She covered the outer residue of her Barbadian identity by getting rid of her Barbadian bangles from her wrists and by obscuring her Barbadian accent.[56] In *Brown Girl*, Marshall gives herself artistic permission to wonder what her life might have been like had she more fully embraced her heritage on the outside and rejected pressing in her navel like her mother did. Out of this wonder, Marshall creates the character of Selina, who asserts agency through her body as the primary way in which she comes to identify as a member of the larger Afro-Caribbean community, which stretches beyond her small Bajan circle in New York. The novel is both an indictment of diasporic community members who press in the navel *and* a creative imagining of what it might look like if they didn't.

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[53] Dorothy Hamer Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 7.
[54] Alexis De Veaux, "In Celebration of Our Triumph," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 44.
[55] Sandi Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 79.
[56] Ibid.

Diasporic and Feminist Coming of Age: Connecting the Body to the Diaspora

By choosing to write a coming of age story, Marshall is able to capture the full maturation experience of a second generation immigrant child and model for her community the rich connection between embodiment and identity that she sees as integral to maintaining the Afro-Caribbean ethos her female kinfolk expressed only in the kitchen. *Brown Girl* is about Selina Boyce who was born in the United States to Silla and Deighton Boyce, immigrants from Barbados. She inherits traits from both parents, most notably her mother's drive to make the most of life and her father's suspicion of the viability of the American dream. More importantly, Selina inherits her parents' complex status as migrants of living in one place, but belonging to another. She is forced to form her identity in light of this inheritance. Selina is born looking both forward and back, inward and out, towards her Barbadian heritage and away. Seeking models of identity and embodiment throughout her formative years, Selina eventually learns how to navigate her inherited migrant status and access a rich Afro-Caribbean identity through the bodily expression of dance. The plot of the novel spans almost a decade during the 1930s and 1940s as Selina matures from a 10-year-old racially and culturally confused girl into a self-assured adult woman. The shadows and effects of World War II emerge at different times throughout the narrative, mimicking and enhancing the depiction of Selina's inner turmoil. Selina's formation of self and how this formation is tied to diasporic identity and embodiment become the novel's central focus.

Marshall arguably writes in the genre of what Geta LeSeur refers to in *Ten is the Age of Darkness* as the "Black bildungsroman."[57] Citing both African American and African West Indian[58] writers as participating in this genre, LeSeur makes a case for the differences between how these two groups of writers cast childhood experiences.[59] Since Marshall identifies as both African American and Afro-Caribbean, we see both signatures in her writing.[60] Selina becomes caught in a web of self-hatred and rejection of her Black identity, but she also senses something ancestral and cultural deep within that she wishes to let express. According to LeSeur, these identity-focused expeiences are characteristics of African American and African West Indian narratives respectively. This doubleness of *Brown Girl* supports Marshall's aims as a diasporic writer. In his article about the *Bildungsroman* genre as it relates to *Brown Girl*, Pascal Buma likewise contends that the novel "serves as a viable nexus between the African-American and Caribbean modes of the genre."[61] According to Buma, the novel's departure from the conventional characteristics of both the African American and Caribbean modes of *Bildungsroman* writing "revitalizes the genre," as it adds new layers of complexity by considering the often marginalized perspectives of racial and ethnic minority immigrants.[62]

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[57] LeSeur uses this term to highlight how "the formative years of young Black children's lives [...] differ from their White peers and from each other because of cultural and colonial differences" (11). She argues that coming of age stories of Black children cannot be placed within the same tradition as those of white and European children, from which the term *Bildungsroman* originally comes. LeSeur contends that some of the original slave narratives are the forestories of 20th century Black bildungsroman. Geta LeSeur, *Ten is the Age of Darkness: The Black Bildungsroman* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995).

[58] African West Indian is LeSeur's terminology. When referring to her work, I will use this term, but in my own work I use Afro-Caribbean. These terms are interchangeable and imply a Caribbean identity with cultural and religious connections back to Africa.

[59] For LeSeur, African American writers are more concerned with protest and the survival of their child narrators, while African West Indian writers are more concerned with exploration of the child psyche.

[60] In her earlier article, "One Mother, Two Daughters: The Afro-Caribbean Female Bildungsroman," LeSeur also argues that *Brown Girl* is both an African American and an Afro-Caribbean bildungsroman, which supports my reading of Marshall as a diasporic writer. Geta LeSeur, "One Mother, Two Daughters: The Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean Female Bildungsroman." *The Black Scholar* (March/April 1986).

[61] Pascal P. Buma, "Paule Masrhall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*: A Nexus Between the Caribbean and the African-American Bildungsroman," *CLA Journal* 44.3 (March 2001): 305.

[62] Ibid.

The novel's insistence that individual growth is strongly tied to community growth is what characterizes its departure from the traditional German model of *Bildungsroman.* Dorothy Hamer Denniston asserts that the novel challenges the traditional *Bildungsroman* novel because it "chronicles African-Caribbean culture thriving in an environment hostile to its mores and beliefs. Because it prioritizes—indeed, celebrates—a black community as empowering to the individual, the novel moves beyond Western literary paradigms to unveil a distinctly African orientation."[63] Indeed, the novel emphasizes the connection between the individual and her community, but Denniston's characterization of the Bajan community in the novel is inaccurate. Because this community has lost its connection to the African diaspora and therefore traditional African notions of community, as illustrated most convincingly at the Steed wedding, it must become empowered by Selina, the individual. Selina's Bajan community has effectively reversed the ideal relationship between community and individual, which is why *Brown Girl* functions as an indictment of African diasporic communities that fail to provide sound guidance to maturing children in crafting hybrid identities that successfully and positively syncretize African American and Afro-Caribbean value systems.

Marshall's choice to write in the genre of Black bildungsroman highlights the connection between the individual and community, rather than the privileging of one over the other. Joyce Ann Joyce argues, "The African-centered scholar understands that the quest for individual freedom is inherently connected to the collective struggle for political, social, cultural, and economic freedom."[64] Selina's highly individualized identity quest eventually runs aground, resulting in her "final alienation," until she recognizes the connection between her individual self and her community and senses that "she was one with them."[65] Her final, individual dance on stage at the end of the narrative is unsuccessful at reconnecting severed cultural links in her community, because she is neither in community nor performing with community when she dances. However, this dance also reveals to her that community is important, and she definitively decides to visit the Caribbean shortly thereafter. Without this recognition of the importance of community, Selina may have never made a connection to her cultural roots. Without her individual quest for identity, however, Selina may have never come to realize her community's role in helping her see this cultural connection. Marshall suggests that a symbiosis between the individual and the community is not only favorable but also necessary in the process of strengthening a contemporary African diaspora. Because the success of Selina's maturation is dependent upon her acceptance of both African American *and* Afro-Caribbean identities, the novel is not only a Black bildungsroman, but a diasporic coming of age story.

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[63] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 7.
[64] Joyce Ann Joyce, "African-Centered Womanism: Connecting Africa to the Diaspora," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 552.

Even though LeSeur, Buma, and Denniston all recognize *Brown Girl*'s re-interpretation of the traditional *Bildungsroman* because it considers issues of race, ethnicity, and the community's role in a child's maturation process, they fail to give Marshall credit for the overtly feminist ways in which *Brown Girl* departs from traditional *Bildungsroman* models. LeSeur gestures towards a reading of *Brown Girl* as a feminist coming of age story, but her discussion is truncated because of her conflation of feminist texts with texts that have female characters as their focus. She rightfully points out that most of the earlier African American and African West Indian bildungsroman strictly followed the maturation of young boys or, if girls were used as protagonists, they were portrayed by male writers. LeSeur contends that *Brown Girl* "launched the Black women's literary renaissance that came to fruition in the 1970s and 1980s."[66] According to LeSeur, Black bildungsromans written by female writers "depict Black woman's internal struggle to unravel the immense complexities of racial identity, gender definition, and the awakening of their sexual being."[67] LeSeur argues that Black female writers, through the genre of Black bildungsroman, "seek to discover, direct, and re-create the self in the midst of hostile racial, sexual, and other forms of societal repression, producing literature not confined to the 'usual' *Bildung* model."[68] According to LeSeur, one of the primary features of the texts of Black female writers is a female perspective that attempts to excavate "stories of the lives of women who have been excluded from the normal processes of development for centuries."[69] LeSeur attributes the same characteristics of the novels of Black women writers to the novels of writers "who exhibit a feminist/womanist consciousness."[70] This conflation is problematic, because LeSeur never fully unpacks why and how Marshall is a feminist writer, even though it is clear that LeSeur believes her to be one.[71]

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[65] Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, 1959), 303, 292. Each subsequent quotation from this text will come from this edition and will be noted in parenthetical citation.

Barbara Christian, Eugenia DeLamotte, and Joyce Pettis all make cases for *Brown Girl* to be read as a feminist novel, but they fail to acknowledge Marshall's use of the *Bildungsroman* genre in order flesh out her feminist concerns.[72] *Brown Girl*, in addition to being read as a diasporic *Bildungsroman*, can be read as a feminist coming of age story, because Selina's body becomes the setting and landscape of her maturation process. It is the site on which Marshall explores issues of Black identity, cultural reparation and reclamation within the African diaspora, and the powerful consequences of performing the act of claiming one's body. *Brown Girl* allows for a coming together of Marshall's feminist and diasporic agendas. The novel asks an important question: what is the Afro-Caribbean immigrant child's relationship to her Black body? In her 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison explores a similar question through the character of Pecola. Pecola internalizes Shirley Temple, a symbol of whiteness, as a symbol of beauty. Lacking models for how to live inside her Black body with joy rather than shame and suffering abuse from her father incite Pecola's mental breakdown. In *Lucy*, a 1990 novel by Jamaica Kincaid, the title protagonist struggles to carve out a space for herself in the United States as a newly transplanted Caribbean immigrant. Like Pecola, Lucy seeks to mirror a white aesthetic and ideology, looking to her employers Mariah and Lewis as her models. When she uncovers the emptiness and fractured nature of their privileged existence, however, she experiences an even deeper identity crisis. These later narratives and their consideration of the female protagonist and her body in relation to identity formation and psychological development contribute to the discussion that Marshall breaches in *Brown Girl*.

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[66] LeSeur, *Ten is the Age of Darkness*, 105.
[67] Ibid, 101.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] LeSeur contends that *Brown Girl* "forecasts the womanist themes of writers like Walker and Shange in the 1980s and 1990s" (108).
[72] Barbara Christian argues that *Brown Girl* "extends the analysis of black female characters" who "both affirm and challenge their communities' definition of woman" (104). Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*: *Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985). Eugenia DeLamotte contends that the novel is feminist because it "[explores a] crucial set of issues that coalesce around the question of silence and voice" (1). Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom: The Fiction of Paule Marshall* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998). Joyce Pettis discusses "the pernicious triad" of race, class, and gender, and identifies Marshall as contributing to feminist understandings of how this triad of oppressions functions (73). Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*.

Marshall also connects her diasporic and feminist aims by fashioning the body as a metaphor for the ties between Black communities and the African diaspora. The result of this metaphor is a serious consideration of what community looks like from a feminist perspective. *Brown Girl* suggests that if the individual body is silenced and fractured, so too will the links between Black communities and Africa collapse. The novel is an example of what Joyce Ann Joyce refers to as "African-centered womanism."[73] According to Joyce, this type of feminist writing "embraces a communal doctrine that has its roots in the interconnectedness and well-being of all Blacks in Africa and the diaspora."[74] It also "emphasize[s] the African-American's African heritage and the need for a strong African-centered identity, rooted in the same sense of communal connectedness in traditional African culture."[75] Through the development of Selina's character, Marshall emphasizes the significance of this communal connectedness, but cautions against the sacrifice of individuality in order to completely favor the community. Selina's character is appealing because she comes to understand her own personal connections to her cultural roots through dance and other cultural practices, but she does not sacrifice these personal connections when she comes to recognize that they are symbolic of the Black community's connection to the African diaspora. Her final gesture is to send off one of her Bajan bangles to her New York community, but to also keep one for herself.

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[73] Joyce, "African-Centered Womanism," 538-554.

In this way, Marshall departs slightly from the traditional African belief that there is essentially no individual, only community.[76] Barbara Christian effectively discusses this departure when she argues that *Brown Girl* "insist[s] on the relationship of woman as self and as part of a community," further contending that this theme "prefigured the major themes of black women's fiction in the 1970s: the black woman's potential as a full person and necessarily a major actor on the social, cultural, and political issues of our times."[77] For Marshall, writing a diasporic *and* coming of age story means not only drawing inspiration from traditional African beliefs about community, but also questioning whether or not those traditions recognize and value individual women as creative agents of change. Selina's coming of age story poignantly captures Marshall's work in this regard and highlights the intersection between Marshall's diasporic and feminist intentions.

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[74] Ibid, 541.

[75] Ibid, 540.

[76] John S. Mbiti notes that in traditional African belief systems, there is no distinction between the individual and the community. See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989).

[77] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 105.

Setting the Stage: Selina's Relationship to Her Body

Selina's relationship to her body is a central feature of her coming of age story and is symbolic of her development of a diasporic identity. When we first meet Selina, we meet her body before any other part of her:

> A blaze of sunlight seeping down from the skylight through the dust and dimness of the hall caught her wide full mouth, the small but strong nose, the eyes set deep in the darkness of her face. They were not the eyes of a child. Something too old lurked in their centers. They were weighted, it seemed, with scenes of a long life. She might have been old once and now, miraculously, young again—but with the memory of that other life intact. (4)

Selina's body suggests a deep wisdom and connection to a lost ethos. From the onset, Marshall connects Selina's body to the diaspora. In *The Flesh Made Text Made Flesh*, Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, and Effie Yiannopoulou, by way of the articles they include in their collection, argue that the "material body" can be read as a "carrier of history, metaphor of imperial practices, indicator of difference, or even a route to the divine."[78] In *Brown Girl* and a number of her other works, Marshall narrates the body as such. Selina's outward body suggests an inward, inherited knowledge of an ancestral past that is in need of expression. Marshall connects Selina's body to the novel's primary concerns of cohesive Black community and continued invigoration of the African diaspora. Joyce Ann Joyce argues that African-centered fiction explores "how Africans on the continent and in the diaspora are carriers of cultural memory."[79] This opening description of Selina implies a coming together of past and present, a merging of ancient African and Afro-Caribbean heritage with the contemporary African diaspora. The former must shine forth through the latter, and Marshall makes a compelling case for the body to be the site of this joining. Katherine Fishburn, in her consideration of slave narratives and how the body functions in them, makes a case for reading bodies as containers of untold wisdom. She contends, “We do not simply have or live in our bodies; we live as and through our bodies. As thinking beings, we therefore think through our bodies, even if metaphysics tells us otherwise. Our bodies have a tacit knowledge that we carry with us but often cannot speak.”[80] Selina’s quest for self-definition also becomes a quest for knowing and speaking the wisdom that her body holds. For Marshall, this wisdom is ancestral and linked first to Selina’s Black community in New York and later to a larger and global African diasporic community that she explores more fully in *Praisesong for the Widow*.

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[78] Detsi-Diamanti, Kitsi-Mitakou, and Yiannopoulou, eds., introduction to *The Flesh Made Text Made Flesh: Cultural And Theoretical Returns to the Body* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 7.

[79] Joyce, "African-Centered Womanism," 552.

Selina grows up seeing and privileging white ethos and beauty standards up until the point when she begins to question the sustainability and value of this ethos. The novel condemns the Black community’s “looking towards those within our community who were closest to white in appearance,” and this condemnation plays out in the damaging results of Selina’s rejection of her dark skin.[81] When Marshall was a young girl, she tried to “rid [her]self of [the] dirty mark” of being Barbadian, an act that she later realized severed her connection to the diaspora.[82] From the beginning of the novel, Selina is confused about her racial identity. Her mother unwittingly embraces white ideology and often hides her Black immigrant body, while her father embraces the race-less ideology espoused by Father Divine.[83] In the opening scene of the novel, Selina recalls the white family who used to live in their brownstone. She romanticizes their presence, desiring to be just like them. She imagines them "crowd[ing] around [her], fusing with her, [so that] she was no longer a dark girl alone and dreaming [...], but one of them, invested with their beauty and gentility" (5). From the onset, Selina accepts the white family who lived in the brownstone before her family as superior. The brownstone's "white walls" in the kitchen in which Selina becomes "immured," "probing for an opening" chain her to this acceptance until she starts exploring the world outside of them (44).

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[80] Katherine Fishburn, *The Problem,* 29.

[81] Sabine Bröck, “Talk as a Form of Action: An Interview with Paule Marshall” in *Conversations with Paule Marshall,* 71.

[82] Sandi Russell, “Interview with Paule Marshall,” 79.

[83] Father Divine was an African American religious leader who founded the International Peace Mission Movement, of which Deighton becomes a member in the novel. According to Jill Watts, Father Divine denied his racial connection to other African Americans. Watts mentions that Marcus Garvey condemned Father Divine’s denial and proclaimed that his race-less teachings would lead to the end of the Black race in the United States. See Jill Watts, *God, Harlem U.S.A.: The Father Divine Story* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

Through the narration of Selina's relationship to her body, *Brown Girl* considers issues of race and racial influence in relation to the body. In contrast to *The Bluest Eye* and *Lucy* in which the white influences that problematize and fracture identity come primarily from outside the home, *Brown Girl* considers what happens when these influences begin at home. This consideration further places Marshall's work within an early African diasporic tradition of unpacking how people of the diaspora, and in particular displaced immigrants, navigate diasporic space. The most revealing scenes that explore the connection between race and the body are the mirror scenes in the novel. For Selina, the mirror often serves as a reminder that she inhabits a Black body, which is, at least at first, a fleshy obstacle in her quest for identity. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks aptly notes that in "wholly racialized societ[ies] such as the US, Europe, or the Caribbean, appearance or physical attributes have come to be more starkly vested, more consequential than anything else such as family, wealth, culture, education or personal achievement."[84] When Selina sees her reflection in the opening scene of the novel and is reminded of her Black body, she suddenly feels as if she is "something vulgar in a holy place" (6). Because she is Black, she does not belong. Because she is Black, she is not worthy of keeping superior, white company.

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[84] Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

The novel fully explores the material and psychological consequences of the acceptance of white beauty standards, which can lead to one's hatred of her body. The mother figure perpetuates a fierce and enraged rejection of her Black body. Selina realizes this later on in the novel: "The mother might have killed them. For they were the ones who drove her to that abuse each day, whose small faces reflected her own despised color. She might have come home some day, the bitterness rankling deep, and seeing them there—Selina with her insolence and uncombed hair and Ina feigning some illness—she might have smashed out and killed them…" (293). Selina's reflection parallels an earlier scene in the novel in which she, "in one swift pure movement," runs "in front of the mirror, struggling out of her shorts and tugging at her matted braids" after her mother's presence bears down on her (16). As a young girl, Selina's identity becomes bound to and defined by the denial of her Black body, as distilled from her mother's beliefs.

Suggie Skeete as Model of Embodiment

Though Suggie Skeete is only written about in passing by other Marshall scholars, she is an important force in Selina's life when it comes to embodiment. She effectively provides Selina a model of embodiment that stands in stark contrast to the other women in the Bajan community who hide their bodies and separate their identities from bodily expression. For the most part, scholars have failed to see her significance. Even when scholars argue that Suggie is an influential figure in Selina's life, their analysis stops there. For example, Moira Ferguson's analysis of Suggie leads her instead to discuss both Deighton and Silla and what ideologies motivate them as immigrants.[85] Ferguson may understand Suggie's importance, but her text lacks an extended discussion about how Suggie influences Selina. Geta LeSeur gestures towards a reading of Suggie as an important model in Selina's life and even characterizes her as a "surrogate," but she does not explore how and where Suggie serves as a model for Selina.[86] Likewise, Dorothy Hamer Denniston asserts, "Perhaps with the exception of Suggie Skeete's portrait, Marshall minimizes the black woman's sexuality in order to emphasize her concern with the date-to-day issues of survival."[87] This is the only time she discusses Suggie and it is by means of calling her out as an exception. But Suggie is far from an exception in *Brown Girl*. In a 1982 interview, Marshall asserts that "Suggie, the neighbor who represents sexual love," helps to shape Selina into "a complex and intelligent protagonist who is seen in terms of her community."[88] If we are to discuss Selina's growth as a character, we must discuss Suggie and how her embodiment affects Selina's future chances at realizing her own embodiment.

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[85] Ferguson, A *Human Necklace: The African Diaspora and Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2013), 12.

Suggie is not ashamed of her Black immigrant body, and she is the character in the novel who is the most comfortable with using her body to express herself. When we first meet her in Chapter 1, she is described as having "full-fleshed legs and arms," and we are told that "her languorous pose, all the liquid roundness of her body under the sheer summer dress hinted that love, its rituals and its passion, was her domain" (13). Suggie is a sexually expressive Barbadian immigrant who lives above the Boyces, from whom she rents her brownstone. Marshall's initial (and subsequent) portrayals of Suggie are so remarkably erotic and body-centered, that we as readers forget that Suggie is often only performing the mundane and routine acts of cooking and eating. As we follow Suggie through the space of her kitchen and bedroom, we follow her body. As such, her body propels the plot of this scene forward. Through her movements, Marshall depicts Suggie as a woman who moves freely through space, leading with her thighs, her hips, and her hands. Even though she technically rents her brownstone from Silla, we are made to see that Suggie owns the space that her body inhabits. Suggie is what bell hooks refers to as a "desiring subject."[89] Instead of using her body to please men, Suggie uses her body through the act of sex to please herself. Geta LeSeur argues that Suggie "introduces Selina to the concept of sex as pleasurable, desirable, and fulfilling and offers a model in herself of an unconventional alternative to Barbadian mores of marriage, motherhood, and monogamy."[90] Suggie eventually models for Selina that bodily expression can be a means to freedom from the confines of rigid community expectations and the ambiguity of living in a Black body.

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[86] LeSeur, *Ten is the Age of Darkness*, 118.
[87] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 16.
[88] Bröck, "Talk as a Form of Action," 64.

Suggie also uses bodily expression, through sex, as a means to lessen the disembodying effects of laboring in the work force. In one scene, Suggie is "wait[ing ...] for a lover, knowing that she could not endure the next week without having someone tonight on the noisy bed" (18). Suggie's various trysts with her male lovers stand in stark contrast to "the sleeping-in job and the insolence of white children" that she maintains in order to survive financially (18). For Suggie, sex "would nullify the long weekend of general house-work and the lonely room in a stranger's house" (35). Like many Caribbean immigrants who moved to the United States in the 1920s to 1940s, most often in search of financial security and freedom, Suggie secures a job working as a nanny and maid to a white family. Throughout the novel, we also see her search unsuccessfully for more lucrative factory jobs, which were made available to Black women during World War II.[91] Suggie's employment is wholly unfulfilling and she often languishes from it, only having "Saturday, her day off" to fully inhabit her body (18). Marshall depicts a paradox of the Black female migrant body. Suggie must disengage from her bodily expression in order to work as a maid and nanny, accepting her role as a Black caretaker of white children and a white household in racialized 1930s New York society. In a similar way to Silla Boyce, Suggie must become machine-like, cleaning and mothering without regard for her own personal needs. In contrast to Silla, however, Suggie finds freedom on Saturdays when she returns in spirit to Barbados and in body to herself. Suggie provides Selina with an alternative model to pressing in the navel and demonstrates that Barbadian women can indeed express their identities through their bodies.

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[89] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: Southend Press, 1989), 136. hooks explains, "During the early stages of contemporary women's movement, feminist liberation was often equated with sexual liberation by both feminist activists and non-feminists. At that time, the conceptualization of female sexual liberation was informed by a fierce heterosexist bias which saw sexual liberation primarily in terms of women asserting the right to be sexually desiring, to initiate sexual relationships, and to participate in casual sexual encounters with varied male partners. Women dared to assert that female sexuality was not passive, that women were desiring subjects who both longed for and enjoyed sex as much if not more than men" (136).

[90] LeSeur, *Ten is the Age of Darkness*, 118.

[91] See Melonie P. Heron, *The Occupational Attainment of Caribbean Immigrants in the United States, Canada, and England* (New York: LFB Scholarly, 2001).

When Selina has her first extended encounter with Suggie in the novel, she immediately begins to understand Suggie as an alternative model of embodiment. On the way down to greet her lover, Suggie "almost stumble[s] over Selina," and this encounter forever changes how Selina thinks about her body in relation to her identity (18). Though this is not the first time Suggie and Selina meet, Marshall sets up this scene to suggest that this is the first time Selina looks to Suggie as a potential model. Ferguson argues, "No family members, in her view, will explain things to [Selina]. So she turns for help to women outside her family in order to cope."[92] Suggie becomes one of the most influential female figures in Selina's life. An intimate connection between Suggie and Selina occurs during this scene: "Slowly Selina lifted her head, and when her eyes met Suggie's they were wide with knowing" (19). It is at this moment that Selina starts to question the adages of her mother and forge her own world-view. Silla's scathing commentary on Suggie bubbles up at this moment in the narrative:

> *But look at she! She's nothing but a living*
> *dead. She been down here since they said*
> *"Come let us make woman." She might of pass*
> *on and pass away and make room in the world*
> *for somebody else.* (19)

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[92] Ferguson, *A Human Necklace,* 10.

Although her mother's words are inscribed in her mind like narrative epigraphs—and quite literally appear this way in the novel—Selina begins to construct her own world perspective quite early on in the novel. Suggie plays a pivotal role in this construction and in helping Selina to enact erasure of some of these motherly inscriptions. Susan Willis asserts, "In Selina's growing up there is a single voice whose function is not to tell anecdotes—but to admonish, threaten, taunt, and cajole. This is the voice of her mother, which fills up and takes possession of domestic space in such a way that both Selina and her father often have to retreat to some isolated corner—usually the sun porch—there to dream of the past and ponder improbable futures."[93]

The sun to which Selina retreats is embodied in Suggie, as she is repeatedly connected to the island of Barbados through Marshall's use of the sun motif. Just before the narrative's opening description of Suggie, we are told that, "the sun was always loud on Fulton Street" (13). A short while later in the narrative, "the late summer sunset flamed above the brownstones" while Suggie cooks "her meal of cuckoo," a traditional Barbadian meal (18). On the next page, "Suggie's door closed [and] the last remnant of the sunset faded" (19). This sunset stands in stark contrast to the "tarnished dust-yellow," artificial light in the room of Miss Mary, a racist, anti-immigrant white woman who desires to see Suggie evicted (19). Marshall's use of the sun motif provides harsh commentary about the inauthenticity within the African diaspora that Suggie attempts to call out at various times throughout the novel. Anyone who is associated with the sun in *Brown Girl,* then, can be read as bearing a strong connection to the Caribbean. Marshall employs this same sun motif to later describe Deighton and Selina as well—suggesting to readers that they authentically embody their diasporic identities in similar ways as Suggie.

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[93] Susan Willis, *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 71.

Marshall later and more clearly connects Selina and Suggie through the sun motif. After Suggie proclaims that she “gon make [Selina] a summer woman too,” she and Selina drink rum together as Selina begins her initiation into womanhood (52). On Selina’s return home, “she felt that she, like Suggie, carried the sun inside her” (52). Drinking rum becomes a ritual for Selina and Suggie. Selina’s engagement in this illicit activity initiates her into Suggie’s occult world of rebellion. Further, the act of drinking rum with Suggie is both a figurative and a literal laying on, or, pouring down, of Suggie’s embodiment onto Selina. Aptly, the rum Suggie drinks is “Bajan rum,” so this ritual not only plants seeds of embodiment into Selina, but it further imbues her with Barbadian ethos. In the final scene between Suggie and Selina before they learn of Suggie’s eviction, this laying on through imbibement is made clear:

> The liquor traced a stinging line down Selina’s throat, and closing her eyes she imagined it lighting up inside her, so that she could see her heart leaping in its socket and the blood coupling with the air in her lungs and all the intricate workings of her body. For the first time she was vividly aware of the small but sturdy life she contained. She rose, reached for Suggie, and felt the same life pulsing there. (210)

The sun motif returns in the form of lightness here. The sun or light is almost always manifested within the body in Marshall’s narrative, drawing a direct connection between embodiment and Barbadian ethos. Suggie offers Selina a space outside the Boyce kitchen and circle of Silla’s friends; in this offering, Marshall reminds us that there is more than one way to be Barbadian, though the novel seems to privilege expressions of Barbadian identity that rely on embodiment and identifies these expressions as authentic.

Considering another way in which Suggie is tied to Barbados in the novel, Moira Ferguson suggests that Suggie is “symbolically associated with slavery itself” because she is "named after sugar."[94] Even though Suggie bears strong connections to Barbados, the novel makes it clear that she is no slave when it comes to her sexuality. In fact, Marshall takes the image of the sugar crop and reappropriates it in the context of Suggie's bodily freedom and sexual autonomy:

> When she finished, something openly voluptuous crept into her pose. With a languorous gaze she watched the darkness race over the cane; her hands rested on the inside of her open thighs. Her pose was so natural that it was innocent. In those moments she became more than just a peasant girl on an obscure island but every woman who gives herself without guile and with a full free passion ... (18)

Suggie's freedom of sexual expression is directly tied to her nostalgia for her past Caribbean lifestyle in which she would leisurely eat her food while overlooking "the yam patch," "the mango tree," and "a susurrant sea of sugar cane" (18). This connection between Suggie's sexuality and Barbados talks back to the other women in the novel—particularly Selina's mother—who cast Suggie as a concubine because of her sexual expression. Until Selina spends time with Suggie, she, too casts Suggie in this way.

Once Suggie and Selina start to spend time together, Selina starts to understand the potential of sexuality as not only a liberating and resistant act of bodily expression, but also as a way to more deeply connect with her Afro-Caribbean roots. Fittingly, it is a bodily gesture between Suggie and Selina that helps to encourage Selina's change of opinion about Suggie: "Suggie's laugh rippled the air and she bent, brushing her lips across Selina's cheek" (19). Suggie is not the woman Selina thought her to be, as distilled through Silla's perspective, but she is instead a sure-minded woman who Selina starts to respect. From this moment forward, Selina and her sense of self become indelibly tied to Suggie's influence.

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[94] Moira Ferguson, A *Human Necklace*, 12.

The novel suggests that the Barbadian women in the novel who have cast Suggie as one-dimensional, merely representational of an overly sexualized outcast figure, are incorrect in their assumptions. Some scholars have made this same mistake. Moira Ferguson, for example, casts Suggie as "one of the recurring outcast figures who populate Marshall's novels."[95] In this way, Suggie is merely a representative symbol of ostracism. Certainly Suggie is ostracized by Silla and her Barbadian community and is literally outcasted when Silla evicts her, but Suggie also plays a pivotal role in Selina's shaping of self. Perhaps ironically, we see this role clearly take shape when Selina reacts adversely to Suggie's departure: "The chill feel of utter desertion she had watching Suggie leave persisted through her first year of college" (212). The narrative makes it clear that Suggie is not merely a one-dimensional figure. Although she does not explicitly refer to Suggie, Alexis De Veaux argues for a reading of Marshall's female characters as "not only in touch with their sexuality but women who reveal their strength as well as their vulnerability."[96] Marshall echoes this about Suggie when she says that Suggie has "come here, she works, but the need on her part to still be a person in her own right is very strong."[97] Suggie is not merely symbolic of sex or ostracism or an influence in a sea of influences in Selina's fashioning of self. While Suggie both represents ostracism within the Barbadian diasporic community *and* sexual freedom, as others have suggested, her other, and perhaps most important, role is the one she plays in helping Selina realize how she might use her body to assert agency.

Contrary to how her community views her, Suggie's force in the novel stretches far beyond the sex she has in her bedroom. Marshall professes that *Brown Girl* "is really about the loss of love."[98] Selina seeks love outside of her mother and father and she finds it in Suggie. She finds it in Suggie's love for her own body, her sexual freedom, and in the unapologetic way she lives her life. Perhaps more importantly, Selina finds it in Suggie's unconditional affection for her, which she rarely receives from her own mother. We might read Suggie's eviction from both the brownstone and the tight-knit Barbadian community as symbolic of her sacrifice—one that is meant to be read as made out of love—so that Selina might be made communally whole in ways that are no longer possible for Suggie. This type of communal wholeness is no longer possible for Suggie because of her outright rejection of the material and capitalist ideologies that Silla and her Barbadian friends espouse.

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[95] Ibid, 2.
[96] De Veaux, "In Celebration of Our Triumph," 44.
[97] Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," 81.

The narrative repeatedly asserts from Selina's perspective that Silla is "the mother," but we might read Suggie as "a mother" in the same communal sense to which Marshall refers. Suggie performs a loving, maternal gesture by literally giving her body over in order for the maturation of Selina to take place so that Selina might carve out a rightful space for herself within the Barbadian diasporic community. Suggie accepts her eviction without a fight in order to protect Selina. In their final scene together, Suggie tells Selina that Silla "did stay downstairs and hear we laughing up here 'pon an afternoon and it did cut she to the quick" (212). Suggie believes that Silla has evicted her not because of her sexual rendezvous with men, but because of her influence over Selina, an influence that can be described as motherly. She refuses to tell Selina where she's moving to, because it wouldn't be safe for Selina to visit her there. In this scene, Suggie takes the place of Selina's mother by prioritizing Selina's best interests over her own. Miss Thompson, the elderly and loving beauty shop owner, is often read by scholars as a surrogate mother to Selina.[99] I argue that the novel suggests a reading of Suggie in this same way; her willingness to walk away without a fight is symbolic of the ultimate motherly love and sacrifice.

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[98] Ibid.

Besides showing Selina Suggie's seemingly unconditional love for her, Suggie's eviction from the brownstone also leads to Selina's bodily and sexual awakening that had begun when Suggie was still living above the Boyces. In response to Suggie's dismissal, Selina spends her afternoons after school wandering aimlessly through New York, disembodied in various ways. At school, she "was only vaguely aware of the bodies crushing her;" Selina takes this vague awareness with her to the streets (213). Her disembodied wandering conjures up feelings of "non-existen[ce]" and eventually leads her to the Metropole, a jazz club, and to the re-awakening of her body: "Standing there with her books stacked on the ground between her legs, her fists plunged into her pockets and her lean body absorbing each note, she would feel sucked into that roaring center, the lights exploding inside her" (214). In much the same way that Selina feels the sun inside of her after drinking rum with Suggie, here she feels the lights of the jazz club inside of her and senses her physical self for the first time since Suggie's banishment. Eugenia DeLamotte suggests that "music stand[s] in for Selina's own art of dance"[100] when, at the end of the narrative, Selina repeatedly dreams that she "plunge[s] into the open grand piano" during her escape from her house (298). DeLamotte makes a case for the piano serving as proxy for Selina's dancing. Taking DeLamotte's cue, I suggest that, earlier on in the novel when Selina is standing outside the jazz club, her felt embodiment as brought about by the music emanating from the

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[99] In *Caribbean Waves*, Heather Hathaway reads Suggie as "personif[ying] seduction" and Miss Thompson as "the opposite of Suggie, since she teaches Selina about unconditional love" (96). As the text and Marshall suggest, however, Suggie, too, teaches Selina about love. Heather Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999). In *The Fiction of Paule Marshall,* Dorothy Hamer Denniston characterizes Miss Thompson as Selina's "mentor and confidante" (29). Geta LeSeur, in *Ten is the Age of Darkness*, calls both Miss Thampson and Suggie Selina's "mentors and surrogates" (118).

[100] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 36.

Metropole can be read as foreshadowing of her dancing acumen. In the same way that Suggie uses her sexuality to counter the disembodying effects of her daily labor as a housekeeper, Selina dances outside the jazz club as a way to become “free of the numbness” caused by her community’s disavowal of Suggie (214). Selina begins to enact what she learned from Suggie: bodily expression as a path to freedom.

Selina’s sexual awakening is yet another way in which we see Suggie’s influence on Selina’s embodiment and identity formation. Soon after the scene outside the jazz club, Selina meets Clive Springer, a World War I veteran, immediately after a meeting of the Barbadian Association. Reminiscent of Suggie’s many sexual rendezvous, Selina has sex with Clive on a park bench shortly after she meets him. This sexual encounter is Selina’s act of defiance and her full coming out as a member of Suggie’s subversive world of sexual freedom. She recalls Silla’s condemnations of concubines: “A concubine was someone who lay impaled by a stranger’s body, open to his dark intrusion, and who felt only innocent and created” (239-240). Selina valiantly rejects this understanding of women as receptacles for male desire and proclaims her sexual embodiment: “She was someone who knew that it was a sin without propitiation yet gladly committed it” (240). To even further deny the mother’s ideology and those in the community who follow it, Selina wishes mid-act that “they might witness how utterly she renounced their way, and have the full proof that she was indeed Deighton’s Selina!” (239). Deighton is connected to Suggie through the sun motif and through his rejection of the capitalist ideology that Silla comes to embody. Furthermore, Selina conjures up an image of Suggie “languorous and laughing amid her tumbled sheets” during this first sexual experience with a man (239). This sex scene between Clive and Selina harkens back both linguistically and symbolically to earlier descriptions of Suggie. When we first meet Suggie and Marshall sets her up to represent both sexual love and the Barbadian sun, she is described as “languorous” and as a woman “who gives herself without guile and with a full free passion” (18). During her sexual awakening, Selina literally becomes Suggie in both body and mind. Marshall makes another poignant connection here when she implies that Selina, like Suggie, uses sex as a means to retaliate against the body-numbing society in which she lives; a society that asks Black female migrant bodies to silence and shrink themselves in order to become disembodied machines in a racist, sexist system. Selina’s connection with Clive turns into a serious, loving relationship and suggests that the reparation of lost love might be made possible through embodiment.

While the risks for bodily protesting an ideological system that maintains control by regulating female bodies are great—including ostracism, being labeled a “whore,” poverty, and displacement—the novel implies that these risks might be necessary for survival. Suggie is evicted from her brownstone because of her protest, but Selina arrives at a fuller understanding of her Barbadian heritage, and her desire to migrate back to the Caribbean is born out of bodily protest. Susan Bordo cogently argues, “At the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to other demoralization, debilitation, and death.”[101] Her discussion of anorexia, dieting, and bodily mutation in the name of patriarchal beauty standards leads her to this important conclusion. What Marshall additionally reveals through *Brown Girl*, and what Bordo doesn’t discuss as an option, is that the *renunciation* of these practices of femininity may also lead to demoralization, debilitation, and possibly death. In Suggie’s case, her renunciation of Silla and her tight-knit Barbadian community’s notions of respectable femininity, to stop “think[ing] ‘bout spreeing or loving-up or anything so,” results in her ostracism and removal from the community (80). Suggie refuses to regulate her body to appease her Barbadian community. Barbara

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[101] Susan Bordo, “The Reproduction of Femininity,” in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 91.

Christian argues that Marshall's female characters" both affirm and challenge their communities' definition of woman."[102] Suggie challenges her community's definition of woman, and the consequences for her are tragic. Heather Hathaway notes that there is a "darker side of this immigrant community's cohesion—its ability to cast out those members who refuse to adhere to its prescribed code of behavior."[103] Marshall aptly reveals that this community's respectability politics[104] mimic those of Maritze and her mother Miss Mary, the primary white (and racist) characters in the novel. Marshall's revelation implies that Silla comes to adopt the same ideology that she vocally rejects, so that Suggie becomes nothing more to her than "that black foreign scum downstairs"(35).[105] It is this part of Silla that both Selina and Suggie protest.

Suggie participates in what Bordo refers to as "embodied protest," which, according to Bordo, is "unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive protest."[106] Suggie's bodily protest is counterproductive in that she is shunned from the community against which she is protesting, but it is nevertheless productive in that Selina is able to understand her protest and its aims. Referring to "the anorectic," Bordo argues, "Through embodied rather than deliberate demonstrations she exposes and indicts [... cultural] ideals, precisely by pursuing them to the point at which their destructive potential is revealed for all to see."[107] Unlike in Bordo's example of anorexia as protest in which the anorectic abides by extremist notions of beauty standards, Suggie pursues her rejection of Barbadian respectability and standards of femininity to the point of eviction from both her home and her community. In her discussion about Black female protest, Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant gestures towards this same reading: "Although women's bodies are targets for bringing them in accordance with gender mandates (through society's regulations and violence, as well as its surveillance and management), women also enlist their bodies and minds to subvert society's claims on them."[108] She continues, "individual women can and do strike out against imposed forms of femininity."[109] We see Suggie adamantly proclaim to Selina that she "ain gon be like them, all cut out of the same piece of cloth" (81). Suggie tells Selina that she will "always [...] have some man or the other" (81). Instead of protesting subconsciously, as Bordo suggests happens with embodied protest, Suggie protests consciously and emphatically, as Beauboeuf-Lafontant suggests. Marshall's rendering of Suggie suggests that embodied protest can be both intentional and discernible, which contributes to feminist conversations about standards of femininity and the consequences of either upholding or renouncing them to the point of destruction. Marshall implies that within African American and immigrant communities, intentional, embodied protest is necessary to challenge rigid standards of femininity that are predicated on white value systems.

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[102] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism,* 104.

[103] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall (*Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 112.

[104] By respectability politics, I'm referring here and elsewhere in the chapter to what Kali Gross refers to as "claiming respectability through manners and morality [that] furnished an avenue for African Americans to assert the will and agency to redefine themselves outside the prevailing racist discourses. Although many deployed the politics of respectability as a form of resistance, its ideological nature constituted a deliberate concession to mainstream societal values." Kali Gross, "Examining the Politics of Respectability in African American Studies" in *Almanac* 43.28 (1997).

[105] This characterization of Suggie is voiced by Maritze in the novel, but it also represents how Silla comes to view Suggie by the time she evicts her. Marshall blends the ideologies of both Silla and Maritze to criticize the inscription of Western, capitalist, racist ideology on Black immigrants. This ideology devalues the body and views it as gross and a hindrance to achieving capitalist wealth. See Susan Bordo's discussions of Western notions of the body as "heavy" in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

[106] Bordo, "The Reproduction of Femininity" in *Writing on the Body,* 97.

Marshall extends her feminist contribution further by making a case for the gendered nature of respectability politics. Suggie's freedom of sexual expression as a means to protest these politics results in her expulsion from her Barbadian diasporic community, but Deighton's freedom of sexual expression merely results in Silla's disgust and general dissatisfaction in their marriage.[110] Deighton's behavior of sleeping with "faceless wom[en]" is accepted by Silla and cast as normalized masculine practice (42). Silla confesses to her close friend Virgie, "Who in the bloody hell care how many women he got" (31). Instead, Silla is disappointed that Deighton "lick[s] out what's left from his pay" to "run bird-speed to the concubine" (31). Silla single-handedly eradicates Deighton from the Boyce family not because he is unfaithful, but because he is unable to "conform to the code" of capitalist ideology.[111] As Marshall points out, "buying a brownstone house [...] was the most visible icon of one's success."[112] Deighton initiates a plan that would eventually prevent Silla from purchasing their brownstone; the ultimate result of this plan is his death. Eugenia DeLamotte argues that Silla comes to assert domination over Deighton by "us[ing] her voice as an instrument of power-over [...] by forging letters in his name to sell his land."[113] Silla also uses an "affidavit," a litigious tool of power, to bring about Deighton's deportation and Suggie's eviction (211). Both Deighton and Suggie outwardly reject a "blind absorption in the material" that Marshall has argued on numerous occasions is what she sees as troubling about American society, to which immigrants frequently and tragically fall victim.[114] Whereas Suggie uses her body to protest, Deighton clings to a lost Barbadian ideal as represented in the land he inherits from his aunt. This distinction demonstrates the gendered nature of protest. In *Brown Girl*, embodied protest is taken up only by women, because the female body is often the site of capitalist inscription.

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[107] Ibid, 98.

[108] Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 46.

[109] Ibid, 48.

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[110] Silla's reaction is also significant, because "visiting relationships" in which unmarried men and women have sexual relations yet live in different homes is a common Caribbean practice. For more information about the cultural practice of "visiting relationships," see Hickling et al., *Perspectives in Caribbean Psychology* (Mona, Jamaica: Caribbean Institute of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, 2008)*;* Robert Parker, David Barker, Dennis Conway, and Thomas Klak, *The Contemporary Caribbean* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004); Annette Mahoney, ed., *The Health and Well-Being of Caribbean Immigrants in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008).

[111] Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," 81.

[112] Ibid.

[113] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 23.

[114] Bröck, "Talk as Form," 64.

Suggie’s protest runs even deeper yet, as it paves the way for potential wholeness through liberation from the paradox of living in a migrant body. Carole Boyce Davies proposes, “If following Judith Butler, the category of woman is one of performance of gender, then the category of Black woman, or woman of color, exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based on the particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which Black women exist.”[115] Suggie intentionally fails to perform these categories of identity within the context of her Barbadian diasporic community. As such, she exists outside of her community. Even though Suggie’s bodily protest leads to her removal from and by community, Selina is forever influenced by it. Through Suggie’s embodiment, Marshall suggests one possible path to wholeness for her female characters. It is important to note that sexual expression is not the only way, and, in fact, it is not even the way Marshall seems to favor. So while Selina’s sexual awakening and embodiment leads to a realization that she, like Suggie and her father, rejects the capitalist and materialist ideology that her mother defends, it is ultimately dance that leads her back to Barbados.[116]

We must not overlook the significance of what Suggie represents, though. As Marshall says about the term “free-bee” that is used to describe Suggie in the novel: “I like the magic it conjured up of a woman scandalous perhaps but independent, who flitted from one flower to another in a garden of male beauties, sampling their nectar, taking her pleasure at will, the roles reversed."[117] It is easy to see that Marshall not only values the agency and power that a woman like Suggie (and Selina) might come to possess, but that she recognizes Suggie's subversive acts of protest as inherently tied to sexual embodiment. She directs our attention to the fact that Suggie's embodiment is not only a path to personal wholeness, but a path to challenging rigid notions of femininity that are perpetuated by the same white capitalist culture that Marshall's novels wish to indict. Susan Willis makes a claim for reading Suggie as "one story" among many with which Selina comes into contact while growing up in New York.[118] Willis suggests, "Selina's life is a process of bringing together all these storytellers."[119] Marshall, too, argues for a reading of Selina as a "complex and intelligent protagonist" who pulls lessons and perspectives from all the characters who influence her growing up.[120] Undeniably, Selina learns embodiment and its liberatory potential from Suggie.

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[115] Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 8-9.

[116] Marshall’s vision of communal dance as a means to wholeness, however, is not fully realized until her later novel*Praisesong for the Widow*.

Silla Boyce as Model of Capitalist Disembodiment

Selina's mother, Silla, stands in stark contrast to Suggie in both body and inscribed ideology. Marshall has frequently made vocal that Silla is symbolic of Western capitalist ideology that views the body as a mere tool in both the production and consumption of goods. In her interview with Sabine Bröck, Marshall says, "So Silla is symbolic of the kind of thing that makes me so unhappy about American society: this kind of almost blind absorption in the material which makes for a kind of diminishing of life, of feeling."[121] Barbara Christian contends that Marshall "questions the values of the immigrant Barbadian-American community so afraid of poverty that it takes on exclusively the material values of America."[122] Silla becomes a capitalist because of her fear of poverty. We can trace Silla's capitalist ideology back to her time in Barbados working the cane fields. Whereas Suggie's background in Barbados implies somewhat carefree living, Silla's background reveals brutal physical labor. Silla recounts this brutality to her friend Iris:

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[117] Mary Helen Washington, "A Talk with Mary Helen Washington," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 56.
[118] Willis, *Specifying*, 70.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Bröck, "Talk as a Form," 64.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 106.

> Iris, you know what it is to work hard and still never make a head-way? That's Bimshire. One crop. People having to work for next skin to nothing. The white people treating we like slaves still and we taking it. The rum shop and the church join together to keep we pacify and in ignorance. That's Barbados. It's a terrible thing to know you gon be poor all yuh life, no matter how hard you work. (70)

Under colonial British rule, Silla and her body were commodified, turned into a profit-producing apparatus. Nothing seems to have changed now that she is in the United States working at a factory, most likely because of Silla's adoption of the economic tenets of Garveyism.[123] Marshall implies that Silla misguidedly embraces Garvey's capitalist philosophy, in which he professed that, "capitalism is necessary to the progress of the world."[124] Although she sees Iris, who moderately supports "England and the crown," as "one ignorant black woman," Silla is unable to see the ideology of colonialism and capitalism that has been inscribed on her body (70). It has literally blinded her to her own co-opted body. Even though she comes to assert agency from within this ideology by evicting Suggie and turning over Deighton to the authorities, "she is only an instrument of power."[125] We see this again when Silla upholds the state apparatus[126] by telling her close friend Florrie, “You best watch that heavy hand [...] ‘cause this is New York and these is New York children and the authorities will dash you in jail for them” (60). She denies traditional Caribbean “authoritarian parenting style” in favor of upholding American law.[127] Breaking the law would threaten her upward mobility, so Silla often takes on the physical and ideological role of a “black-guard,” policing the people in her community.

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[123] Lisa Diane McGill discusses Marshall's relationship to Garveyism, noting its influence on Marshall's ethnic identity. While Marshall certainly had issues with the white left who opposed Garveyism on account of its capitalist leanings, as McGill points out, Marshall likewise had issues with Garvey's capitalist allegiances. Instead, what influenced her more about his philosophy was his insistence on a unified Black people. McGill argues that Garvey "was a source of ethnic pride" for Marshall (85). Lisa Diane McGill, *Constructing Black Selves: Caribbean American Narratives and the Second Generation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

[124] Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. Vol. 2. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 72.

[125] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 22.

[126] My definition of state apparatus is in line with Louis Althusser's Marxist definition, in which he claims that the state apparatus defines the state as "as a force of repressive execution and intervention 'in the interests of the ruling classes'" (92). Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

Whereas Suggie is willing to sacrifice her body for Selina’s maturation and acceptance into the New York Barbadian community, Silla is only willing to sacrifice her body for the materialist dream of owning a brownstone. Silla literally and tragically interprets Marcus Garvey’s words. He proclaimed, “The thing for the Negro to do therefore, is to adjust his own economic present, in readiness for the future. A race that is solely dependent upon another for its economic existence sooner or later dies.”[128] Finding herself at the head of a matrifocal household, Silla relies on no one but herself to financially provide for her family.[129] She quite literally bears the weight of this responsibility on her shoulders by taking a physically demanding job at a war factory. Silla’s initial desire to fashion a better life for herself and her children is ultimately subsumed by her desire to wield the same oppressive power under which she suffers. Eugenia DeLamotte adds that Silla “ironic[ally] attempt[s] to resist that external hegemonic power by affiliating herself with it.”[130] Marshall deftly reveals the paradox of immigrant life for

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[127] Hickling et al., *Perspectives in Caribbean Psychology*, 191. Hickling, et al. note that “corporal punishment is the dominant form of discipline” in the Caribbean (215). In “From the Poets in the Kitchen,” Marshall also comments on this style of punishment, noting that her mother and other female kin “complained that they couldn’t discipline us properly because of the laws here.” According to them, “You can’t beat these children as you would like, you know, because the authorities in this place will dash you in jail for them” (630).

[128] Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions,* Vol. 1. (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 48.

[129] Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch, eds. *The Other African Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 105. According to Shaw-Taylor and Tuch, “While traditional notions of the Caribbean family are patriarchal in nature, there is also what some refer to as a ‘more common’ typology of Caribbean families in which women are economically and otherwise responsible for day-to-day living arrangements of their families and households (referred to as matrifocal households). In these types of households, males typically do not enjoy the dominant presence that they have in the nuclear family structure” (105).

[130] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 20.

Caribbean folks in the United States. Silla must brandish the same weapon that has been used against her Black immigrant body and use it against her family in order to achieve her goal of owning property.

Brown Girl lays bare the disembodying effects of capitalism on Black female immigrants. "The diminishing of life, of feeling" to which Marshall refers can also be interpreted to mean the diminishing of the body. Marshall refers to the "emptiness" of Silla because "she has embraced the American materialistic ethic unquestioningly."[131] The most notable place in the novel in which Silla's disembodiment appears is when Selina visits her at the factory:

> The workers, white and colored, clustered and scurried around the machine-ness, trying, it seemed, to stave off the destruction it threatened. They had built it but, ironically, it had overreached against its overwhelming complexity. Their movements mimicked its mechanical gestures. They pulled levers, turned wheels, scooped up the metal droppings of the machines as if somewhere in that huge building someone controlled their every motion by pushing a button. And no one talked. Like the men loading the trailer trucks in the streets, they performed a pantomime role in a drama in which only the machines had a voice. [...] Like the others, [Silla's] movements were attuned to the mechanical rhythms of the machine-mass. (99)

This description of the factory is reminiscent of Silla's time in the cane fields; she once again becomes an instrument in a capitalist system of power. She is literally dis-embodied, instead taking on the parts and movements of a machine. There is space within this system for protest and resistance, though, which Marshall's narrative makes abundantly clear. After Silla's shift ends, she and her fellow female workers "regain the power of speech" and let their "laughter spill over [their] parched [lips]" (100). The novel suggests that these factory women have some agency over the politics of their bodies. Temporary sacrifice of the body might be made worthwhile if voice and ownership prevail in the end. The danger of asserting this agency, however, is an unapologetic acceptance of bodily inscription rather than an attempt to rewrite it. In the case of Silla, she falls victim to this danger as she brings "her machine role" inside the home to literally bring destruction down on her family in the same way the factory workers fear the destruction of the machine.[132] Silla becomes the machine.

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[131] Bröck, "Talk as Form," 64.

The novel suggests that the act of laying claim to one's body is central to the immigrant Barbadian community's indictment of American capitalist ideals that lead to "self-dissociation" and loss of community.[133] Eugenia DeLamotte cogently connects disembodiment to capitalism: "The ownership of the house is inextricably bound up with Selina's ownership of her own body and with the colonization of her mind."[134] If the quest of property ownership persists, the quest of body ownership will fail. At the same time that Silla embarks on a quest to own property within the context of capitalist New York society, Selina embarks on a quest to own her body. Selina's attempts are stymied by her mother's sacrifice of Barbadian ideals and the Barbadian land Deighton inherits from his sister. Deighton's new land sounds like Silla's American dream: "Two acres almost. A lot in a place that's only 166 square miles—and a lot for a colored man to own in a place where the white man own everything" (25). When Silla learns, however, that the lot is worth eight hundred dollars, she becomes blinded by her desire to own New York property, even though that property would be much smaller and relatively worth less than the land she dupes Deighton into giving up. Silla's pursuit of American middle-class status belies her loyalty to the Barbadian community and reveals the paradox of immigrant life for those who buy into capitalism.

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[132] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 20.
[133] Ibid, 17.
[134] Ibid.

DeLamotte distinguishes between “the power of money” and “erotic power,” and she suggests that in the case of Silla and her husband Deighton, the former usurps the latter most notably in their bedroom. DeLamotte convincingly argues that Silla “brings the machine force into the family with her relentless ambition to assimilate herself to the kind of power it represents.”[135] Like the machines in the factory, marital interactions between Deighton and Silla become mechanical, financial transactions between producer and consumer. Passion is to be negotiated and purchased, just like Deighton’s inherited land. The moment Silla “foolish[ly]” gives in to Deighton’s “few words in the night” by inhabiting her sexual body, she gives up her power. DeLamotte contends that the novel presents a “portrayal of Silla as in a certain sense unwomaned by the pressures of economic dispossession. It is this unwomaning that is represented in the metaphors of Silla’s assimilation to the war machines.”[136] Silla is not only unwomaned, she is also unbodied. Silla can either be a woman with sexual, corporal desires or she can deny her body in favor of maintaining her inscribed power.

In this way, Silla stands in direct contrast to Suggie. Suggie’s bedroom is a liberatory space of embodiment while Silla’s becomes a transactionary space of capitalism. As a result of Suggie’s repudiation of the American dream, however, she has little to no financial stability, and the novel hints that she ends up homeless after Silla evicts her. She tells Selina, “where I’m going ain gon be much. No place for you to come” (212). Silla, on the other hand, ends up with a dead husband and a fractured family as a result of her appropriation of the very power she was attempting to oppose. Both women fall victim to the power structures that pit them against each other. Marshall’s keen awareness of this tragic result is one possible reason why her novels work toward wholeness and reparation. Sandi Russell asked Marshall, “Do you see a sense of wholeness being possible for westernized black women today?"[137] Marshall responded positively, but admitted that "com[ing] up with a self" for Afro-Caribbeans and Afrrican Americans requires a piecing together of the "forces" that have shaped the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American experience.[138] Some of those forces, Marshall laments, "have been terribly negative."[139] These forces play out in full in *Brown Girl*, and neither Suggie nor Silla figure out how to navigate these forces to arrive at wholeness. Marshall places her hope for reparation and healing in Selina.

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[135] Ibid, 22.
[136] Ibid, 21.

Although I make a case for reading Silla as disembodied as a result of her inscribed capitalist ideology, that is not to say that she is a flat or one-sided character or that she is completely detached from her body. Like Suggie, Silla is a complex character with multiple dimensions to her personality. She is not merely defined by her strong-willed constitution. Trudier Harris astutely recognizes the complicated layers of Silla, noting that she is "strong, bitter, frustrated, disappointed, loving, [and] vindictive."[140] Harris claims Silla to be "one of the most complex black women characters in contemporary American literature."[141] Indeed, in one moment Silla feels empty and fractured, while in the next she feels empowered. For example, when Silla thinks about Deighton's love affairs, she feels "old and barren, deprived, outside of the circle of life" (42). The narrative makes clear that "she only succumbed briefly to this feeling, then her back was stiff again, her face resolute, and she sucked her teeth, dismissing them all" (42). Silla expresses jealousy towards the women in Deighton's bed, but understands that if she chooses sexual embodiment, she will reduce her chances of owning property. This scene is reminiscent of a scene earlier in the novel when Silla walks through a park bringing her coldness in the form of “the theme of winter” to “the women lounging on benches there” (16). She asserts her body as a means to “reprimand the women for their idleness,” using her lips to “permanent[ly] protest against life” (16). Silla, like Suggie, uses her body as a means to protest, but she makes her body more machine-like and less expressive. She often purses her lips, tightens her stance, and removes emotion from her face, and so by using her body to protest idleness, the antithesis of hard work, Silla unhinges her connection to her body by closing it off. Silla’s body is only open for use in capitalist production and enforcement.

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[137] Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," 81.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Trudier Harris, "No Outlet for the Blues: Silla Boyce's Plight in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *Callaloo* 18 (Spring-Summer 1983): 57.
[141] Ibid.

Once again the narrative exposes the paradox of the Black immigrant body. Silla and Suggie both disengage from bodily expression in the workplace as a means of financial survival, but their bodily expression outside of work differs dramatically. Whereas Suggie uses sexual embodiment as an escape from societal and communal pressures, Silla continues to disengage from bodily expression by literally making herself stiff as a way to uphold her ideals. This stiffening of the body completes Silla’s devolution. Deborah Schneider argues, “Just as she is connected with machines, Silla represents the antithesis of nature and of sexuality.”[142] Not only does Silla’s capitalist ideology strip her of her femininity, it also strips her of her humanity. Heather Hathaway argues that this stripping is a sacrifice Silla is willing to make in order to make money, because, according to Hathaway, money to the Barbadian community symbolizes “one’s virtue and personal suffering.”[143] Essentially what Hathaway suggests about Barbadian beliefs about money is that if you don’t suffer enough in your acquisition of wealth, it doesn’t have as much value. While this may be true for Silla and some members of her tight-knit community, the novel as a whole certainly does not make this claim. In fact, this type of rhetoric is reminiscent of capitalist notions of work ethic that are often used to justify the income gap, notions that Marshall is adamant result in emptiness and loss. As both Suggie and Silla demonstrate, the American capitalist system in which they both live forces a paradox of the body.

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[142] Deborah Schneider, “A Search for Selfhood: Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstone,”* in *The Afro-American Novel Since 1960*, ed. Peter Bruck and Wolfgang Karrer (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1982), 60.
[143] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 102.

Because of this paradox and Silla's refusal to use her body as a vehicle for expression rather than production, her daughter cannot interpret her mother's body language. In essence, Selina cannot see her mother's body and therefore can often not see her humanity either. In the park scene at the beginning of the novel, Selina struggles to read her mother's body: "There was something else today in the angle of her head that added to Selina's uneasiness. [...] Selina's eyes dropped down to the mother's legs, and with drawn breath she sought the meaning in that purposeful stride" (16). Selina's inability to interpret meaning from her mother's body language serves as a catalyst to her own identity crisis that manifests in her body. Immediately after Selina's confusion about her mother's body, she "struggl[es] out of her shorts and tug[s] at her matted braids" (16). She literally wants to strip off her Black body, a desire that materializes as a result of Silla's ambiguous embodiment. Selina's epithet for Silla, "the mother," is also indicative of Silla's ambiguity as an influence in Selina's life. Selina wants so badly for her mother to be a humanized womanly version of herself, to "know the mother then, in her innocence," but Silla's enigmatic bodily expression frequently silences that desire (145). Silla's bodily expression not only further fractures the mother/daughter relationship, but it also fractures Selina's sense of self. Because Selina cannot see the mother's body, she is frequently blinded to her own body. In another scene, Selina offers to make Silla lemonade. The narrative captures the ambiguity of Silla's body language towards her daughter: "The mother gave her a look that was shifting and complex. On one hand it dismissed her and the offer of the lemonade; on the other, it beckoned her close as though to embrace her" (53). Not only does Silla's body language send Selina mixed messages about identity, but it also sends her mixed messages about mother/daughter intimacy. Just as there are "contradictions of the mother's voice" that force Selina to go "off to look for her own separate identity," as Eugenia DeLamotte claims,[144] there are also contradictions of the mother's body that likewise do the same.

As my above reading of Silla implies, the effects of capitalism take on a tone of loss in Marshall's texts. Marshall's themes of reclamation and wholeness are often carried out by a supplanting of what has been lost. Silla, more than any other character in the novel, is symbolic of this loss. Deighton and Suggie are consistently described as symbolic of Barbadian ethos, an ethos that values bodily expression, community, and dreams. By contrast, Silla is consistently described as symbolic of the loss of this ethos in favor of what Marshall refers to as "the American materialist ethic."[145] Barbara Christian argues, "In order to succeed materially, Silla must destroy essential parts of herself. Although she is a wounded character, she does have a language to convey her fighting spirit, and she passes unto her daughter, Selina, the knowledge of the intricacies of womanhood and the sense of the struggle necessary to define oneself."[146] Marshall sets up Selina as the one in Silla's lineage to rightfully reclaim what has been lost, fulfilling the novel's aims of exploring "the relationship between the mother and daughter" and working towards "connection and reconciliation."[147] Primarily through Deighton's narratives about who Silla used to be in the past, Marshall painfully reveals what has been lost. In a particularly tender scene in which Silla's intentions to free her family from the confines of society are revealed, we glimpse into Silla's past through Deighton's words to his children about their mother. He relays to them a time when he and Silla went to a movie and "laughed [their] guts full" (117). He shares what Silla used to be like when he was courting her: "Never a hard word. A look on her face that did make you think of Jesus meek and mild" (118). From Deighton's perspective, Silla used to embody softness and laughter, having "skin like none I ever touch" (119). Through Deighton's memories, we learn that Silla has lost her soft edge, both physically and emotionally. She has gone from being tender with Deighton to "think[ing] up a plan that would make Al Capone cry shame" (118).

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[144] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 40.
[145] Bröck, "Talk as a Form," 64.
[146] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 226.
[147] Daryl Cumber Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations*, 102-103.

Perhaps the most revealing scene in the narrative that portrays Silla's change is when she dances at the wedding of 'Gatha Steed's daughter. Seon Braithwaite, an older man who knew Silla when she was a girl, approaches Silla at the wedding and asks for a dance. Silla responds, "G'long nuh, you know I don does dance" (144). To this dismissal, Seon reminisces:

> "I know what?" he cried, angering. "But what wrong with you, Silla, that you change up so since you come to these people New York? You don does dance! You must think I forget how you used to be wucking up yourself every Sat'day night when the Brumlee Band played on the pasture. You must think I forget how I see you dance once till you fall out for dead right there on the grass. You must think I forget, but, girl, I ain forget." (145)

Simone Alexander interprets Seon's words as a "cautionary message [...] meant for the entire Bajan community. They, the members, have lost themselves on their way to 'freedom.'"[148] Selina witnesses this interaction like she does the countless interactions between her mother and other Bajans in her mother's kitchen. When she realizes that Silla's initial refusal to dance is symbolic of the loss of her Barbadian ethos, Selina's quest of reclamation through dance begins.

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[148] Simone Alexander, *The Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 156.

Shortly after her mother reluctantly joins Seon on the dance floor, Selina "suddenly jump[s] up" and implores her close friend Beryl to dance with her (146). What has been lost in Silla will be restored within Selina through dance, which will cultivate in Selina both outward and inward recognition of her own body.

Many scholars have likewise analyzed Silla as a character who is symbolic of loss. Joyce Pettis contends, "Silla's philosophy of economic power and survival thus makes her compatible with the philosophy of the system and insures her economic survival but condemns her spiritual vitality."[149] Dorothy Hamer Denniston also claims that Silla is fractured spiritually.[150] Eugenia DeLamotte's entire discussion about Silla's relationship to the factory machines exudes a tone of loss and fracture as well.[151] Toby Rose reads Silla as "having sloughed off ancestral culture for the economic and social gains of becoming upwardly mobile."[152] Perhaps most forcibly, Simone Alexander argues that Silla's "quest for upward mobility" in the form of owning a brownstone "calls for the relinquishment of the Caribbean homeland and dispossession of the (spiritual) self."[153] Alexander further claims that Silla "sever[s] connection with her homeland" and "eventually los[es] her practicality and thereafter her soul."[154] I add my voice to this conversation by asserting that Silla has also lost her connection to her body and its potential connection to Barbados. While many scholars refer to Silla as a "vacuum"[155] and "devoid of life,"[156] they don't explicitly reference her body. One of Marshall's important contributions to feminist considerations of migration is her illumination of the effects migration has on the body. As we clearly see with Silla, the hardening of her body and shedding of cultural practices that involve the body, like dance, indicate that migration has the potential to disembody its participants and create sometimes irreparable fissures between migrants and their homelands.

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[149] Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*, 114.
[150] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 25-26.
[151] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 21. I previously referred to this section of DeLamotte's argument about Silla's "unwomaning" earlier in this chapter.
[152] Toby Rose, "Crossroads are Our Roads: Paule Marshall's Portrayal of Immigrant Identity Themes," in *The Immigrant Experience in North American Literature: Carving Out a Niche*, ed. Toby Rose and Katherine B. Payant (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 116.
[153] Alexander, *Mother Imagery*, 139-140.
[154] Ibid, 140.
[155] Rose, "Crossroads," 116.
[156] Alexander, *Mother Imagery*, 140.

Other scholars, however, have argued for a reading of Silla as strongly representative of Barbadian ideals and the force by which Selina desires to return to her Barbadian roots by the end of the narrative. I find this interpretation problematic, because, as I argued earlier in this chapter, Suggie is the one who initiates Selina's propulsion toward self-creation and re-creation, processes by which she momentarily denounces her mother and kitchen community in favor of what Suggie offers her in the forms of sexuality, embodiment, and outsiderness. Selina's life experiences sustain that propulsion. Until Selina comes to realize at the end of the novel that Deighton, Suggie, and Silla are all tied to Afro-Caribbean identity in various ways, she denies her mother's influences, echoing Marshall's own "adolescent rebellion against family and community."[157] So it is not Silla who draws out Selina's interest in her own Afro-Caribbean identity, but rather Selina's own experiences of racism and marginality as a second-generation Barbadian immigrant. She comes to learn the power and significance of community through her own navigation of life in her dancer body rather than through direct persuasion by Silla.

Interpretations of Silla as the primary influence in Selina's journey of returning to her roots fail to consider this possibility. Heather Hathaway and Sabine Bröck's analyses are the most potent. Hathaway argues for a reading of Silla as "embrac[ing a] philosophy" of "community."[158] According to Hathaway, Silla believes that "the community must be willing to sacrifice the needs of an individual for the needs of the group."[159] She interprets Silla's actions and decisions in light of this philosophy, minimizing Silla's attachment to capitalist and materialist ideologies. Bröck, too, minimizes Silla's quest for the material American dream, contending that "Silla's sense of purpose cannot derive from some capitalistic drive to accumulate material possessions."[160] In fact, Bröck lambastes scholars who have read her in this way. However, if we consult Marshall's own interpretations of her texts, which this dissertation makes a conscious point to do, we come into conflict with Hathaway and Bröck. Marshall admits, "I don't see, for example, Silla [...] as all that strong a woman. I see her as someone who has perhaps foolishly or unquestioningly bought the whole American materialistic ethic."[161] Ironically, in an interview with Bröck, Marshall conveys these same sentiments, pointing to Silla as representing what makes Marshall "so unhappy about American society."[162] To Marshall, Silla *is* the capitalist ethic.

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[157] Sylvia Baer, "Holding onto the Vision: Sylvia Baer Interviews Paule Marshall," in *Conversations*, 117.
[158] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 100.

Certainly, Silla engages in traditional Barbadian practices; however, she interprets these practices through a capitalist lens. For example, Silla cooks traditional Barbadian food, but instead of using cooking as a means to "cling defiantly to her Barbadian heritage," as Heather Hathaway suggests,[163] Silla uses cooking as a means to make a profit: "On Saturdays the kitchen was filled with fragrances, for Silla made and sold Barbadian delicacies" (67). Silla commodifies her Barbadian culture for profit; her kitchen becomes a site of production much like the factory where she works, and her daughters become apparati in this production. As a result of making these delicacies, Ina and Selina's "fingers were torn and their blood mixed with the shreds" (67). Bodily injury at the hand of capitalism is mentioned again in the novel when Deighton's arm gets crushed in a factory machine. When Silla delivers the news to her daughters, she minimizes Deighton's injury: "Yuh father had something happen to his arm today at the factory. Nothing serious but he's in the hospital for a few days..." (154). Selina, on the other hand, dramatizes Deighton's injury: "The mother talked and Selina saw the huge hungry maw of the machine opening while her father tended it absently" (155). Her repudiation of her mother's capitalist allegiances allows Selina to see acutely the bodily effects of capitalist production. The production of Barbadian treats in Silla's kitchen allows Selina to feel these same effects. Silla's participation in the Barbadian Association likewise reveals her underlying motives. When Selina declines the association's scholarship, Silla spins into a "rage" and physically bears down on her daughter (304). Silla draws a parallel between Deighton's incompetency and Selina's failure to, in her opinion, make something of herself. Again, we see that Silla values financial success and community reputation over the preservation of Barbadian cultural practices and ideals. The choices she makes in regards to her husband and her daughter are in spite of herself, however. Ultimately, Silla falls victim to the competitive, racist society in which she lives. Admitting that "people got to make their own way" and "sometimes misuses others, even [their] own," Silla earnestly reveals that her fear of living on the bottom is often the incentive for her actions (224).

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[159] Ibid.
[160] Sabine Bröck, "Transcending the 'Loophole of Retreat': Paule Marshall's Placing of Female Generations," *Callaloo* 30 (Winter 1987): 85.
[161] Baer, "Holding onto the Vision," 123.
[162] Bröck, "Talk as a Form," 64.
[163] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 103.

This scene and others in the novel painfully reveal that the Barbadian community, and in particular the women within this community, are frequently at war with each other. Silla confesses, "people got a right to claw their way to the top and those on top got a right to scuffle to stay there" (225). However, there is only room for a few at the top. Marshall chooses to write against the backdrop of World War II to explore both the warring within the Boyce family and within the Barbadian community. In essence, the racist capitalist systems of power in 1930s and 1940s America pitted Black immigrants against one another. Philip Kasinitz highlights the tension within immigrant communities in New York as well as between Black immigrants and African Americans and between Black immigrants and European immigrants. He notes that West Indian immigrants were often ridiculed for their outward appearance, dress, and Caribbean accent.[164] West Indian immigrants had to veil bodily pronouncements of their ethnicity in order to assimilate. In a conversation between Silla and her close friend Virgie who is pregnant, Silla advises Virgie to "go hide yourself," because "you don't see the white people having no lot" (30). Silla attributes repeated pregnancies to Caribbean lifestyle, and, in order to succeed in the American economy, Virgie must hide her pregnant body so that she gives off no outward indication that she is a Barbadian immigrant. Kasinitz claims, "Ethnic division was only one aspect of the intraracial discord which became more pronounced as New York's black enclaves grew during the twenties."[165] During the war, the highest paying factory jobs were made available to lower class immigrants and African Americans, so they were forced to compete with one another and whites for employment. Marcus Garvey advocated the taking back of jobs that he perceived European immigrants had stolen from Blacks.[166] This pronouncement might account for Silla's sense of entitlement that a higher paying factory job, as opposed to the cleaning job she used to have, is rightfully hers. It also helps account for Silla's competitive attitude towards others in her community, most notably Suggie. Moira Ferguson asks an important question: "Is Suggie Skeete, the old, easygoing other of Silla whom she temporarily is forced to bury in such a competitive racist society?"[167] Suggie and Silla are competitors not only in economic and community spheres but also in terms of shaping Selina's identity and sense of self. While both women teach Selina about embodiment, disembodiment, and the potentials of cultural expression within and through the body, she must ultimately learn this lesson for herself. She most notably does this through her love of dance.

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[164] Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 46.

[165] Ibid, 44.

[166] Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, vol. 1, 50-51.

[167] Ferguson, *A Human Necklace*, 12.

Dance and the African Diaspora

Dancing is a central and symbolic narrative feature of *Brown Girl*, and Marshall explores the relationship that each of her major characters has with dance. Silla has abandoned her love of dance in order to chase her American dream of materiality, Suggie uses dance as another means of sensual and sexual embodiment, and Deighton is ritually ostracized from his Bajan community during the wedding dance. Selina's relationship to dance is more complex and forms the foundation on which Marshall builds a case for incorporating African-centered practices as a means to re-invigorate African diasporic communities. As I've argued earlier in this chapter, Selina's body becomes the site on which Marshall explores the implications of these practices. Selina's dance performances in the novel both bind her to her community and other her. By fashioning Selina as a "black dancing body,"[168] Marshall is positioned well to explore the inner workings of dance as performance, ritual, and protest within the context of the African diaspora. It is by no mere accident or coincidence that Marshall chose dance as a significant mode of embodiment in both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong for the Widow*. Susanna Sloat notes that "dance in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, tends to reflect multiple elements of a culture and to encapsulate aspects of identity—national, local; religious, ritual, spiritual, ancestral; fun loving, sexual; creative, resistant, traditional, progressive, professional, amateur; communal, personal."[169] Susan Harewood and John Hunte contend that, "dance is an extremely fruitful site at which to explore the dynamic ways in which Caribbean identities are constructed."[170] Dancing is both a means of constructing and expressing diasporic identity and allegiance. It is also a means of maintaining the vitality of the diaspora. Toyin Falola argues, "All diasporas have to be managed once they have been constructed by migrants, slave traders, owners, and host societies."[171] Marshall positions dance as one possible tool of management, a tool that relies on the body to function. As Yvonne Daniel points out, "dancers are relinking historical connections across Diaspora communities to the African continent."[172] Marshall positions Selina to do this important work.

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[168] "Black dancing body" is a term borrowed from Brenda Dixon Gottschild's work on the aesthetics of Black dance and what it means to dance within a Black body. According to Gottschild, there is a Black dance aesthetic that has influenced dance in the United States for decades. She connects this aesthetic to Africanist dance practices. See Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[169] Susanna Sloat, ed. *Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), xii.

The potential for ritual dance to bring about wholeness within self and community is strong in *Brown Girl*. Eugenia Collier contends that Marshall uses dance as ritual in her novels, suggesting that "the rituals in Marshall's works, particularly the ritual of dance, make unforgettable the theme of the self made whole through the community and in turn enriching that community for those yet to come."[173] Marshall draws our attention to the adulterating effects that Western ideology has had on African-centered art forms. Dance can be used as both a protestation of Western hegemony, but also as a way to maintain its power and scope. *Brown Girl* not only rejects the latter use, but implies that diasporic dance forms must be used as a means to protest systems of power that oppress peoples of the diaspora. In this way, the novel praises ritualistic protest dance, which can be traced all the way back to slavery as early as the mid-17th century.[174] In their work on slave dance in Barbados, Susan Harewood and John Hunte note that slaves often danced on days when they weren't working.[175] They interpret the slave "dances as opportunities not only to accommodate the slavery system, but also to resist it. The dances provided opportunities for the slaves, through the embodied movements of dance, to articulate their own histories and identities."[176] The dualistic nature of dancing that Marshall captures in both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong* is rooted in the practices of Caribbean slave communities. Ritual dance expresses and resists, makes whole and protests. In her various interviews over the decades and in her fiction, Marshall beckons her diasporic community to use embodiment through African art forms in the same way their enslaved ancestors did.

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[170] Susan Harewood and John Hunte, "Dance in Barbados: Reclaiming, Preserving, and Creating National Identities," in *Making Caribbean Dance*, 265.

[171] Toyin Falola, *The African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 3.

[172] Yvonne Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora: Igniting Citizenship* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 10.

[173] Eugenia Collier, "The Closing of the Circle: Movement from Division to Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Edition*, ed. Mari Evans (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1983), 296.

[174] Jerome Handler and Charlotte Frisbie note that there is evidence to support the fact that music and dance were integrated parts of Barbadian slave cultural patterns as early as the mid-17th century. See Jerome Handler and

The first time we witness dance in the novel is actually in the form of anti-dance at the factory where Silla works. It's worth requoting the passage here:

> Their movements mimicked its mechanical gestures. They pulled levers, turned wheels, scooped up the metal droppings of the machines as if somewhere in that huge building someone controlled their every motion by pushing a button. And no one talked. Like the men loading the trailer trucks in the streets, they performed a pantomime role in a drama in which only the machines had a voice. [...] Silla worked at an old-fashioned lathe. [...] Like the others, her movements were attuned to the mechanical rhythms of the machine-mass. (99)

There is no freedom or improvisation in the movements of the factory workers. In essence, they perform a production dance that is, by definitions of African and Caribbean dance, anti-dance. In Brenda Gottschild's important work on Black dance culture, she outlines the defining characteristics of Africanist dance. According to Gottschild, Africanist dance incorporates the

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Charlotte Frisbie, "Aspects of Slave Life in Barbados: Music and Its Cultural Context," *Caribbean Studies* 11.4 (1972).

[175] Harewood and Hunte, "Dance in Barbados."

[176] Ibid, 267.

elements of polyrhythm, circle formation, improvisation, communal trust, and connection between human and spirit worlds.[177] The factory workers, Silla among them, work and move in community only in the sense that they are all performing roughly the same physical tasks. Contrary to Africanist dance, the bodily movements of the factory workers are repetitive, pre-determined, and emanate from a central location in the body. These movements are reminiscent of slaves working the cane fields. In both cases, though there appears to be a lot of outward movement of the body, it is contrary to the Africanist principles of dance that Gottschild discusses in her work. As such, slaves would counter production movement with cultural and spiritual movement by gathering in large groups whenever they could to dance and make music that was "fundamentally African [in] nature."[178]

This same type of gathering occurs in the novel when the community assembles together at the Steed wedding. Toby Rose argues that Marshall's heroines, "to understand and complete themselves, [...] must go on to understand how their African traditions and the events of Empire and slavery have led to their present feelings of unease in the modern world. [...] They must encounter the past [...] through ceremonies that reenact important cultural affirmations of solidarity or symbolic rituals that reverse historical tragedies of slavery and colonialism."[179] As Eugenia Collier has argued, ritual dance is one way in which Marshall's heroines might understand their historical past within the context of the African diaspora in order to fashion a strong diaspora for the future. In this factory scene, Marshall again positions Selina as the one who will reclaim the diaspora for her people, her body the site on which this reclamation will take place. The pull of capitalism is so strong, however, that "the machines' howling seemed to announce the futility of her mission" (99). Selina's mission of embodiment and diasporic reclamation will gain traction at the Steed wedding.

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[177] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Crossroads, Continuities, and Contradictions: The Afro-Euro-Caribbean Triangle," in *Caribbean Dance From Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity*, ed. Susanna Sloat (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002).
[178] Handler and Frisbie, "Aspects of Slave Life," 14.
[179] Rose, "Crossroads," 111.

The wedding scene in the novel is significant because it both highlights the potential of ritual dance to strengthen diasporic community, and reveals that ritual dance might also be used to ostracize and fracture diasporic community by maintaining Western hegemony and respectability politics. Marshall's diasporic and feminist agendas collide in this scene. As did West Africans in the 17th century and West Indian slaves in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Boyces prepare for the ritual dance first by dressing extravagantly. According to anthropologist and historian Robert Farris Thompson, a 1600 account written by Pieter de Marees, a Dutch sailor who visited West Africa, stands as one of the first written descriptions of African ritual dance preparation. In his account, de Marees observes that the women in particular "dress quite elegantly" and "embellish their arms with many bracelets of copper, tin, and ivory. To their legs the women attach rings with bells so that when dancing they will resound; their head is curled and braided on the crown."[180] Even though West Indian slaves had little access to dress and accessories, Handler and Frisbie note that slaves made great efforts to "elaborate their dress and body ornamentation when attending the dances."[181] Instead of metal jewelry, slaves fashioned bracelets, necklaces, and anklets out of string and beads.[182] In preparation for the Steed wedding, the Boyces dress lavishly, Selina in a "yellow taffeta gown" with "gold bangles," her head adorned in a "large bow which held up her curls" (134). Silla dons a "blue satin gown," which highlights her beauty (134). Gottschild suggests, "The real story in African dance is the manifestation and presence of the dancing body. It doesn't mean something else: It is what it is!"[183] How the body is presented, adorned, and expressed is significant, because ritual dance is about the body and all that it contains.[184] Like their African and enslaved ancestors, the women are ready for ritual dance, and the narrative prioritizes their physical preparations.

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[180] Pieter de Marees quoted in Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 30.
[181] Handler and Frisbie, "Aspects of Slave Life," 27.
[182] Ibid.

Although the narrative connects Selina and Silla as creative agents gathering for ritual and community making, and we get the sense that they might finally connect as mother and daughter, the narrative challenges these assumptions. Selina feels "owned" by her dress, "imprisoned" in her shoes, and "estranged" in her gloves (134). Selina's "feeling that she did not quite belong to herself" is a direct result of capitalism. The dress she wears to the wedding is one her father bought her on his consumerist rampage as a way to undermine Silla's buying power and put on display the detrimental consequences of embracing capitalist ideology. We know before the Boyces even get to the wedding that Deighton must pay for challenging the new Bajan status quo. Silla cries, "Don he know shame? Don he know that every Bajan in Brooklyn know 'bout 'Daffy-Deighton' and his nine hundred odd dollars cash throw 'way and does he laugh at he? Be-Jees let him come!" (136). In other words, if Deighton decides to attend the wedding, his community will make him pay for his choices. Just as the Bajan community evicted Suggie because she challenged the politics of femininity, Deighton, too, is evicted from the community because he challenges Western capitalist agendas and the respectability politics of masculinity. Susana Morris argues that Marshall's later novel *Praisesong for the Widow* "invokes a hermeneutics of suspicion toward respectability politics, countering the hegemony of [...] middle-class materialism as [a] normative cultural symbol."[185] *Brown Girl*, too, is suspicious of respectability politics that both literally and figuratively disembody diasporic communities. In a poignant and eerily portentous way, Marshall uses the evictions of both Suggie and Deighton to warn her diasporic community against participating in the oppression of diasporic peoples, especially through the use of African-based art forms in schismatic ways.

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[183] Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body,* 15.

[184] This is in contrast to the dance performance Selina participates in at the end of the novel, where the dance becomes about capturing ancient Greek notions of life and death rather than Selina as a dancer. She is praised for how well she captured Greek drama and now for the aesthetic of her dance as it relates to her body.

[185] Susana Morris, *Close Kin and Distant Relatives* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 18.

When the wedding dance begins, it doesn't happen in the same way the ancestors did it, with jubilation and an abundance of movement. Silla refuses to dance at first and gets put in her place by her elder Seon Braithwaite. The others at the dance move with "graceful restraint—their backs stiff and only a suggestion of movement in their hips and legs" (145). Yvonne Daniel indicates that "African Diaspora cultures use dance and music [in order to build] a connection to [...] ancestors."[186] As Joyce Pettis argues, Marshall's characters often need elders to guide them in this quest for connection to the ancestors.[187] Seon Braithwaite serves in this way, for his words to Silla are directed at the entire diasporic Barbadian community in New York, rather than at Silla alone. In a way, he reprimands the younger members of his community for turning their backs on diasporic practices. In his address to Silla, he refers to the dance style of "wucking up" (144). According to Susan Harewood and John Hunte, "wukking up [is] a dance activity focused primarily on coordinating rotary, percussive, and vibratory actions in the hip and pelvic region of the dancing body."[188] In other words, it's a style of dance and expression of the body that stands in contrast to the movements of the bodies at both the factories and at the wedding, at least initially. Harewood and Hunte also note that this style of dance was often viewed as "indecent" by European onlookers; this term was often implemented as a means of defining blacks as morally inferior to whites.[189] Harewood and Hunte argue that the "binary of decent/indecent is deployed as a means of social control," and that "questions as to what is decent and what is indecent are never far from the dancing body on the stage, in the dancehall, or in the street."[190] The Bajan community's respectability politics and capitalist agendas are reminiscent of the same European perspective that wielded control over the dancing slave bodies centuries ago. Braithwaite reminds his community of this by asking, "How can you forget the past, mahn? You does try but it's here today and there waiting for you tomorrow" (145). Harewood and Hunte contend that wukking up, or, presumably, any African-centered dance traditions, can also be used as "a source of pride and a distinctive feature of Bajan culture."[191] The novel, too, suggests that instead of shying away from African-based dance traditions and movements as yet another attempt to assimilate into white middle-class culture and prove "decency," the Bajan community could (and should) use these traditions and movements as a means to protest a culture that oppresses them.

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[186] Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora*, 16.
[187] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*.
[188] Harewood and Hunte, "Dance in Barbados," 276.
[189] Ibid, 266.

Braithwaite intimates that the force of the ancestors and the past of the African diaspora is a strong one to contend with, and even the disembodying powers of capitalism, in the end, are no match. The ancestors and the diaspora will not be silenced. After Braithwaite's speech and a sip of Bajan rum that serves to remind Silla from where she comes, she follows her elder to the dance floor, her "protest [...] lost" (145). Yvonne Daniel argues, "African dance and music understandings survived efforts to destroy or marginalize 'things African' within European hegemony."[192] These music and dance traditions serve as a remembrance of those who came before and their efforts to preserve African practices. Through the elder character of Braithwaite, Marshall demands respect and reverence for her ancestors. The community binds together through the act of dance in order to honor their heritage. Even though the wedding dance starts off with rigid bodies and reluctant participants, once the music "flared in loud lilting rhythms through the hall," the bodies of Selina and her best friend Beryl "gave way to the music, their feet caught the rhythm and they were dancing" (146-147). Daniel explains the strong tie between music and dance: "the dancing body is almost inseparable from music, and dance and music together are esteemed aesthetic performance that has the capacity to symbolize the full range of human expression. Its after-effects leave a sense of individual centeredness, wholeness, and calm, group connectedness and well-being."[193] Indeed, once the music intensifies at the wedding, so, too, does the dancing, and the dancers become like "a giant amoeba which changed shape yet always remained of one piece" (148). The music "bind[s] the dancers together" (148). Selina, too, feels a strong connection to her community in this scene; both her body and spirit are "lifted [...] up" (147). The thrust of the narrative can be found in the traditional Caribbean songs that Marshall includes in italics and in the physical descriptions of the movements of the dancers. Song and dance drive the plot and re-ignite this community.

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[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid, 277.
[192] Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora,* 3.

Proving they are a community, however, is not the issue for the Bajans in the novel. Proving they can use the strength of their community to create and maintain a vibrant diaspora is. The list of victims at the hand of their exclusivity is lengthy, and includes important characters like Suggie and Deighton, not to mention those ostracized by the Barbadian Association. This is the type of community Marshall cautions against, showing that it only results in further oppression and fracturing of the African diaspora. At one of the Barbadian Association meetings, Selina calls out her people, declaring that their association is merely "the result of living by the most shameful codes possible—dog eat dog, exploitation, the strong over the weak, the end justifies the means" (227). She shames her community for being "a band of small frightened people. Clannish. Narrow-minded. Selfish. [...] feverishly courting [... the] white world" (227). When Selina witnesses her community's preliminary expulsion of Deighton at the wedding, the seed is planted for this calling out at the Association meeting. Eugenia Collier emphasizes the paradox of Selina's role within her community during the wedding: "Selina sees herself first as an integral part of the community, reveling in a new sense of wholeness, then imprisoned by that same community, helping it to persecute her most beloved person."[194] She is not an active agent in this persecution, however, and tries emphatically to signal to her father the impending attack and pull away from the dancers around her. It is merely by association, not by collusion, that Selina partakes in the casting off of Deighton from the Bajan community. Just like Selina's participation in the production of Barbadian sweets in her mother's kitchen, her role in the ritual dance is an unintended one. Marshall's sharp, yet subtle narration reveals a slow but deadly silencing of pure diasporic practices and community. Through the appropriation of middle-class power, albeit an often false and empty power, the Bajan community in the novel ends up participating in the same oppressive behavior they had initially set out to protest. One result is the adulteration of African-based dance ritual and other communal gatherings, which ultimately threatens the diasporic community.

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[193] Ibid, 1-2.

Brown Girl instructs that not all dance forms are intended to create or maintain community. Selina's final dance performance is one in which she performs her Otherness in front of a white audience. From the onset of her time in her school's Modern Dance Club, Selina felt out of place. The first time she joins the other dancers, she was met with "a funny silence, [...] the abrupt drop in their animated talk, [...and] the subtle disturbance in their eyes before they said hello" (251). In a conversation with Clive after this initial meeting, Selina observes, "The funny feeling you get is that they don't really see you. It's very eerie and infuriating" (253). She declares, "What am I supposed to do—curl up and die because I'm colored? Do nothing, try nothing because of it? [...] I don't want to do that, Clive" (252). Selina's choice to continue with the dance club is a choice of individual protest to make herself visible in the same ways that Marshall uses her narratives to make Black women visible.[195] This protest is also reminiscent of Audre Lorde's call for the breaking of silence, the making visible that which has been covered up or erased. According to Lorde, "that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength."[196] Marshall's texts often linger in paradoxes, which situate them at the intersection of Caribbean, African American, African diasporic, and feminist concerns. Similarly, Brenda Gottschild contends that white audiences love Black culture, but they "disdain its creators—love black dance but oppress/repress the black dancer, the black dancing body."[197] According to Gottschild, "This double bind of being seen and unseen, each position fraught with danger, is the crux of the American contradiction regarding its black populace."[198] Selina desires to be seen and acknowledged, but she also wishes to be included. At the end of her performance, she joins her fellow dancers backstage and "erupt[s] in a wild hoot that cut through the din—and suddenly she wanted to remain with them always in the crowded wing" (282).

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[194] Collier, "The Closing of the Circle," 302.

This new sense of community, which is reminiscent of what she feels at the Steed wedding, is proven false when she is forced to confront another dancer's racist mother. Just as Selina's sense of wholeness at the wedding is interrupted by her community's attack on Deighton, her sense of wholeness after her dance performance is interrupted by the white mother's racist commentary. In both cases, the result is that Selina feels as if she doesn't fully belong to her communities. Again, Marshall draws parallels between the Bajan community and the racist, white community against which they think they are protesting. The words of the white mother are reminiscent of Silla's words, making this parallel even sharper. The white mother says to Selina, "you don't even act colored. I mean, you speak so well and have such poise" (288). These words and the respectability politics they endorse are eerily similar to Silla's earlier epigraphs, in which she chastises Suggie for disavowing the community's respectability politics regarding proper female behavior.[199] In both cases, if you act "right," you will be accepted into the community. At the very heart of the novel is a warning to the Black diasporic community to be cautious about who to trust and what politics to enforce, especially as they pertain to the body. In the same way that Suggie's bodily displays were used to manifest Marshall's critique, Selina's bodily display at the performance is used to bolster it. This narrative method is a signature of Marshall's feminist perspective.

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[195] See Dance, "An Interview."
[196] Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 226.
[197] Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 5.
[198] Ibid, 9.

The conversation between the white mother and Selina also reveals Marshall's suspicion of tokenism.[200] The white mother alludes to Selina's token status: "it's just wonderful how you've taken your race's natural talent for dancing and music and developed it. Your race needs more smart young people like you" (288). To the white mother, Selina is the exception; she is the token. Audre Lorde contends, "the tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is not an invitation to join power; our racial 'otherness' is a visible reality that makes that quite clear."[201] During their heated interaction, the white mother physically subdues Selina, "pounc[ing] on her knee [and] restraining her" (288). The white mother attempts to control Selina's Black body, not only by forcing her to sit and listen to her diatribe about Blacks, but also by demanding that Selina once again perform her Otherness, her Blackness. Just as Miss Williams denies the white gaze of her professor Max Berman in Marshall's short story "Brooklyn," Selina denies the white mother power over her by shoving her hands away and rushing out of the apartment building. Eugenia DeLamotte interprets this scene as Selina's "coming to voice," referring to bell hooks's concept of "talking back" as a means to resist the silencing powers of oppression. DeLamotte argues that Selina confronts the white mother's "benevolent racist matriarchy" and its "overt effort to appropriate her voice."[202] According to DeLamotte, "Selina's task is to voice [...] an alternative conception of desire that will be liberatory rather than imprisoning, self-generated rather than dictated by outside forces."[203] Selina must fashion her own artistic aesthetic. Fittingly, Selina's aesthetic is wholeness and embodiment; "her sole concern became to mold her body into an expressive whole" (275). We might then repurpose hooks's concept of "coming to voice" and argue that Selina's artistic and creative powers through dance enable a "coming to body" as "an act of resistance."[204]

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[199] For example, one of Silla's epigraphs reads: "*That concubine don know shame. Here it tis she just come to this man country and every time you look she got a different man ringing down the bell…*" (17).

[200] I use the term tokenism here in the same way Audre Lorde uses it in her work. See Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).

[201] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 118.

Despite the fact that Selina is othered during and after her dance performance, the aesthetic of wholeness that she achieves on and off stage while performing the dance underscores Marshall's case for embodiment as an avenue by which an African diasporic identity can be fashioned. During Selina's performance, "her body instinctively responded" to the music, and she became "sure, lithe, controlled" as she "gracefully" moved (281). The narrative again returns to the same image of Selina's eyes that opened the novel: "the huge eyes in her dark face absorbed yet passionate, old as they had been old even when she was a child, suggesting always that she had lived before and had retained, deep within her, the memory and scar of that other life" (281). When Selina dances, even when it's not with her Barbadian community, the diasporic wisdom she holds inside wells to the surface of her body. Through her eyes, the ties that bind her to her ancestors and cultural heritage are made visible. Of course, her white audience is unable to accurately interpret Selina’s bodily expression. Instead, her onlookers only witness what they want to see: Selina’s capturing of the emotions as portrayed in Greek drama. To see and acknowledge the deep, rich history of the African diaspora through Selina’s body would threaten their power over the Black community. Selina, the diasporic artist, is dangerous, yet Selina seems unaware of her power in this moment. She recognizes the white mother’s attempts to “rob her of her substance and her self,” but she is not confident she can fight against them (289). After she rushes out of the apartment and comes face to face with her Black body reflected in a shop mirror, Selina “crie[s] in outrage” and vows to “battle illusions” (292).

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[202] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 24.
[203] Ibid.
[204] bell hooks, *Talking Back*, 12. "Coming to body" is my term as inspired by bell hooks's concept of "coming to voice."

In this final mirror scene, Selina is forced to fully recognize her Black body. Without this recognition, her maturation is incomplete. Up until this point, she had failed to see herself as Black because of her mother’s rejection of her own Black body. Until Selina sees herself as a member of the Black community, she can never lay claim to her body.

Her violent reaction to her reflection (“her arm slashed out, her fist smashed that mouth, those eyes”) reveals the vexed process of seeing beyond the symbolic nature of her Black body, a process that is necessary if she is to assert ownership of her body (291). The narration sharply captures this process: “Their idea of her was only an illusion, yet so powerful that it would stalk her down the years, confront her in each mirror [...] It would intrude in every corner of her life, tainting her small triumphs—as it had tonight—and exulting at her defeats. She cried because, like all her kinsmen, she must somehow prevent it from destroying her inside and find a way for her real face to emerge” (291). Selina attempts to reject the illusory image whites and her mother see when they look at her. This rejection enables Selina to become an agent of change within and for the African diaspora. Even though Selina’s agency doesn’t fully manifest by the end of her coming of age story—the novel implies that it will when she visits Barbados—her awakening in this final mirror scene is hopeful. Her rejection of and "deviation from dominant beauty standards [is …] reflective of a reclaiming of the self."[205] Selina spends the majority of the novel feeling disembodied, "trapped," "seized by a frenzy of rejection," and that "she did not quite belong to herself" (62, 78, 134). As Eugenia Collier points out, "Her very body has separated her from the others."[206] When Selina finally comes to terms with the symbolic nature of her Black body, a coming to terms that Silla never experiences, she starts the process of "overcom[ing her] alienation from [her] blackness, and [she] begin[s] to affirm and be proud of [her] black bod[y]."[207] She initiates a healing process throughout the entire African diaspora, an act that nobody else in the novel was brave enough or positioned well enough to perform. Dorothy Hamer Denniston remarks that "Selina, on the other hand, chooses to fight."[208]

The novel suggests that the power her ancestors imbue her body with through dance will be her guiding force. Of course, Selina will need the help of her community in this endeavor, but she also comes to discover that they can only give her so much strength. At the end of the novel as she remembers those in her community who have touched her (Suggie, Miss Thompson, Miss Mary, Clive, Deighton, and Silla), she recognizes that, though they "had ruined her," they had also "bequeathed her a small strength" (308). This strength, however, "did not seem enough" (308). Selina sees herself as "the sole survivor amid the wreckage" and at once recognizes her mission: to make whole again "the broken bodies of all the people she had ever known" (310).

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[205] Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, and Effie Yiannopoulou, eds., *The Flesh Made*, 7.
[206] Collier, "The Closing of the Circle," 299.
[207] Jennifer E. Michaels, "From Rejection to Affirmation of Their Bodies: The Case of Afro-German Women Writers" in *The Flesh Made*, 87.
[208] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 30.

Selina uses her dancing body to conjure her passage to the Caribbean.[209] Her community, as voiced through her mother's dissent, does not actually support her return to Barbados. Instead, she must rely on herself to make it happen. Marshall again makes clear her theoretical stance that combines African-based and Western beliefs. Both the efforts of the individual and the collective can strengthen community. When a diasporic community is unwilling to recognize the liberatory potentials of their cultural heritage, a single member must step forward to do the work for them.

The dancing body that Selina comes to inhabit—one that has the potential to heal her fractured community—was not only fashioned during the times she spent dancing at the Steed wedding and with the dance club. Her dancing body, and her embodiment, was also fashioned during the time she spent in Suggie's brownstone. While many Marshall scholars discuss the ritual dance at the Steed wedding and Selina's final dance performance, none address the dance scene between Suggie and Selina. This scene further reveals Marshall's feminist agenda. Suggie and Selina dance together a little while after the Steed wedding and just prior to Suggie's eviction. This dance scene is significant, because it connects dancing to sexual embodiment and autonomy *and* to Barbadian ethos.[210] It is also a seminal moment for Selina, because it further encourages her, beyond the wedding, to take up dancing as her artistic calling. When Selina witnesses Suggie dance for the first time, she observes Suggie's body in a new way: "With all the different mouths and hands and bodies that had touched her Suggie seemed untouched, still innocent" (205). When Suggie inhabits a dancing body, she is able to erase the Bajan women's narrative about her dirtiness. Suggie can be sexual *and* innocent. Selina learns that dance is a means for Black women to reclaim sexual autonomy and bodily control. This reclamation responds to the use of female slaves as sexual and reproductive objects in an important way. In a way, it is a taking back of the Black female body. It is also a taking back of the creative powers, or, "the erotic," that have been robbed from and suppressed within Black women. Referring to her concept of "the erotic," Audre Lorde suggests that it is "an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered," and it can be reclaimed through "our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives."[211] Selina's bodily work, then, has a dual function. As I've discussed earlier in this section, Selina uses dance as a means to protest "white power structure" and "the metamorphosis that the white power structure as wrought in her mother" and her community.[212] This dance scene with Suggie reveals that Selina also uses dance as a means to protest the mistreatment and misreading of Black female bodies.

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[209] Selina's Jewish friend Rachel will help her travel plans come to fruition by using her aunt's connections. Rachel tells Selina, "Once she sees you dance you'll get it," implying that Selina's dancing body will be her ticket back home (308).

[210] As I've argued earlier in this chapter, Suggie is connected to Barbadian ethos in various ways. One such way is through her drinking of Barbadian rum. She frequently passes this rum to Selina, likewise imbuing her with Barbadian ethos. It is worth noting that in this dance scene, the two women drink rum while they dance and the narrative pairs "dancing and drinking" multiple times over the course of this scene, implying a connection between the two (208).

Marshall's employment of the Black bildungsroman allows her to pursue her diasporic and feminist aims simultaneously. Selina's growth and awakening as a result of her coming of age can be read as a metaphor for the growth and awakening that the African diaspora is called by Marshall to participate in. Just as mothers caution and guide their children through the maturation process, Marshall serves as a metaphorical mother and guide to her diasporic community. Above all, she ushers in unity and collectivity. Eugenia Collier says about Selina, "she rejects forever the futile dream of acceptance into the white world. In this rejection comes epiphany: She is one with all the Black people of her world."[213] When Selina comes to this realization at the end of the narrative, she pictures the bodies of her community; Suggie's "violated body" and Miss Thompson "bearing the life-sore and enduring" come to mind (307).

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[211] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power," in *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life*, eds. Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 89.
[212] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 24.
[213] Collier, "The Closing of the Circle," 303.

One of the final images of the narrative is of “vast waste—an area where blocks of brownstones had been blasted to make way for a city project” (309). This waste reminds Selina of the broken bodies of her community. *Brown Girl* makes clear that members of the diasporic community are connected not just through heritage, but also through body. The wholeness Marshall strives for in both her fiction and within her community is cultural and spiritual, indeed, but it is also bodily. Embodiment is a means to protest, connect, heal, and strengthen. Decades after Marshall published *Brown Girl*, Audre Lorde, too, urged her community to not only protest “the external conditions of our oppressions,” but to also initiate and demand change from within.[214] She proclaims, “Hopefully, we can learn from the 60s that we cannot afford to do our enemies’ work by destroying each other.”[215] By celebrating individuality while at the same time collectivity, according to Lorde, a stronger community can be forged. Lorde’s call to action echoes the novel’s push for a stronger, more vibrant African diaspora that values and celebrates women’s bodies, encourages and lauds embodiment as a path to wholeness, and that refuses to participate in racist, patriarchal, capitalist systems of power that seek to oppress the women and men of the diaspora. This is the novel’s greatest hope. Selina’s character demonstrates that, through embodiment in the forms of self-love, sexual autonomy, and African-inspired dance, the African diaspora can be strengthened.

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[214] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 142.

[215] Ibid.

Chapter Two

“She began to dance then”: Embodied Ritual and Historical Reconnection in *Praisesong for the Widow*

Embodied Historical Connections

In Marshall’s most recent text to date, *Triangular Road* (2009), she almost obsessively makes historical connections between the past and the present, between the African diaspora today and its birth at the hands of colonialism and slavery centuries ago. In this memoir, Marshall calls herself a “history buff.”[216] When she visits the James River with a friend in Richmond, Virginia, Marshall imagines the chattel cargo ships passing up and down the river, trading human flesh at a swift pace. When she recalls her familial lineage in Barbados, she contends that her parents are “descendants perhaps of the incorrigibles left behind” during the slave trade.[217] At the Second World Festival of Black and African Arts that Marshall attended in Lagos in 1977, she connects the opening ceremony to a traditional West African praisesong. When Marshall attends and dances the Big Drum Ritual on the island of Carriacou in 1962, she connects it to The Ring Shout, a ritual dance that she had read about in James Weldon Johnson’s memoir. During her narration of the dance, Marshall recalls the words of Olaudah Equiano, who, according to Marshall, spoke of “the things that sustained us in our wide dispersal” when he spoke of dance, music, and poetry.[218] After Marshall participated in the Big Drum Ritual, she “wrote nonstop,” her previous writing “paralysis broken.”[219] The powerful experience of the dance liberated Marshall from her writer’s block and enabled her to take up the pen again to write about the African diaspora. Marshall’s own embodied journey through the diaspora is arguably the same journey that Avey Johnson takes in Marshall's third novel, *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983).

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[216] Paule Marshall, *Triangular Road* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009), 141.
[217] Ibid, 63.
[218] Ibid, 146.
[219] Ibid, 149.

Praisesong, as its title implies, is an exaltation of reconnecting to the larger diasporic community as brought about through embodied ritual like The Big Drum dance. Joanne Gabbin contends that the "vitality" of African American and Caribbean women writers like Marshall is "rooted in their unabashed confrontation with the past and clear-eyed vision of the future, in their inclination away from empty protest toward revelation and informed social change."[220] *Praisesong* forces its characters and readers to confront the past over and over again. Karla Y.E. Frye argues that Marshall insists on "connections to the past, specifically the African past, as crucial to the continued survival of important ideas and values in the future."[221] In an interview with Alexis De Veaux in 1979, Marshall reveals that one of her sole intentions as a writer is to recall the past and "trace history" so that African Americans and Afro-Caribbean folks can "engage [their] past [...] in order to move forward."[222] In her fiction, she creates "psychological and spiritual journey[s] back" for both her characters and her readers.[223] In her 1992 interview with Melody Graulich and Lisa Sisco, Marshall reveals that the idea behind *Praisesong* "started with a place."[224] Marshall had been reading about Ibo Landing and the folktale of how African slaves landing in coastal Georgia and South Carolina "decided they didn't like the looks of America as soon as they were brought ashore and turned around and walked back home across the Atlantic Ocean."[225] Marshall is not only concerned with revisiting history in her texts; she is earnestly invested in how history connects to the body, a connection that she so strongly felt while sitting on the banks of the James River and while dancing in the circle of the Big Drum Ritual on Carriacou.

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[220] Joanne Gabbin, "A Laying on of Hands: Black Women Writers Exploring the Roots of Their Folk and Cultural Tradition," in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind*, ed. Joanne M. Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 249.

[221] Karla Y.E. Frye, "'An Article of Faith': Obeah and Hybrid Identities in Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell's *When Rocks Dance*," in *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, ed. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 213.

[222] Alexis De Veaux, "In Celebration of Our Triumph," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, ed. James C. Hall and Heather Hathaway (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 49.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Melody Graulich and Lisa Sisco, "Meditations on Language and the Self: A Conversation with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 141.

Historical reconnection is a central focus of *Praisesong*, and Marshall uses Avey's body and her physical journey to the Caribbean as sites on which she can explore its full potential. Avey's body becomes the canvas on which Marshall can "set the record straight" about the history of the African diaspora and its people.[226] Karla Holloway contends, "We cannot trust, within the dense characterization that Marshall offers, the simplistic and self-serving textbook histories of slavery."[227] *Praisesong* can be read as a truth-telling, supplemental text within the oeuvre of historical texts. Dorothy Hamer Denniston argues that *Praisesong* "traces cultural patterns," whereas Marshall's earlier novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969) "traces historical patterns."[228] Each section of *Praisesong*, however, highlights a different historical place, event, tradition, or practice. *Praisesong*'s four sections stand as monuments to the African diasporic past. In fact, the novel makes the argument that cultural representations and memory cannot be distinct from historical representations and memory. When cultural practices and rituals are invoked in the novel, they are tied to historical places and memories.

Praisesong follows Avey Johnson's journey to the small Caribbean island of Carriacou where she participates in the Big Drum ritual and the Beg Pardon. Avey, a middle-aged African

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[225] Ibid. At first, Avey believes the legend to be a folktale, a figment of her ancestors' imaginations used to teach her about the past. However, as she journeys to various historical places throughout the diaspora in both body and mind, Avey comes to believe the legend as a truthful retelling of what her real enslaved ancestors experienced when they arrived at the shores of Tatem Island. This realization is a central feature of her transformative journey.
[226] Daryl Cumber Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 100.
[227] Karla Holloway, *Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 101.
[228] Dorothy Hamer Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 126.

American widow, leaves the United States each year to embark on a Caribbean cruise with her friends. The cruise in the novel is different, however, as the spirit of her great Aunt Cuney visits her through dreams and visions and initiates Avey's journey to Carriacou. During her brief stay on the island of Grenada before she departs for Carriacou, Avey recalls memories of her childhood, her fractured marriage with her late husband Jay, and their difficult life on Halsey Street in Brooklyn during the first years of their marriage. While in Grenada, she meets Lebert Joseph and Rosalie Parvay, who become Avey's living guides and accompany Aunt Cuney, Avey's spiritual guide, in reacquainting Avey with her Afro-Caribbean roots. As she crosses from the island of Grenada to Carriacou, the narrative elicits the memory of the Middle Passage through Avey's visceral experience of the crossing. Once on the island of Carriacou, Avey is bathed and her body is prepared for the music and dance ritual. Avey's participation in this ritual inaugurates her as a cultural and historical guide for other African Americans seeking reconnection with their African roots.

Marshall published *Praisesong* more than two decades after *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Her attempts in both novels to underscore the connection within women between embodiment and the African diaspora are markedly similar. Like Selina in *Brown Girl*, Avey's body becomes the site on which historical reconnection and rememory are made possible for her people back in the United States. Joyce Pettis reads *Praisesong* and Avey's "quest and return to the community" as "fulfill[ing] the potential began in *Brown Girl*."[229] Indeed, Avey's journey back to the Caribbean is similar to the journey Selina plans to take at the end of *Brown Girl*. Avey's highlighted disembodiment and her materialistic ethic, however, suggest that Avey is more akin to Selina's mother Silla. In fact, we might read Avey's journey as the journey that Silla never planned to take. In effect, Avey never planned to take it either. Instead, ancestral spirits inhabit her dreams, dissociate her body from her mind, and consequently manipulate her into journeying to Carriacou where she is forced to confront the history of her people. Avey's dissociative experience that dominates the majority of the novel's plot is reminiscent of traditional *Vodou* spirit possession ritual, in which a spirit, known as the *lwa*, either calls on someone or inhabits her or his body in order to deliver a message to the earthly world.[230]

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[229] Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 134.

In *Praisesong*, Marshall continues the work she began in *Browngirl* of highlighting the disembodying and dissociative effects of embracing American materialism by severing one's connection to Africa. In an interview with Donna Seaman, Marshall acknowledges that "reparations are due" to the ancestors of slaves, but, according to Marshall, "the idea is to take what is due without relinquishing what has made you unique as a people."[231] As Gay Wilentz notes, "Marshall [...] underscores the essentiality of acknowledging one's African heritage, [...] especially for relatively successful, assimilated middle-class Blacks."[232] The narrative suggests that all African American and Afro-Caribbean people follow Avey on her quest to rediscover her African roots. I argue that Aunt Cuney and Avatara take possession of Avey's body in order to remind of her of her African roots, and Marshall takes possession of her readers through abstract and disembodying narration to remind them of the same. This chapter serves to demonstrate how Marshall extends her discussion about embodiment in *Brown Girl* by considering how embodiment can be used as a healing strategy and a tool for historical reconnection.

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[230] See Jean La Fontaine, ed. *The Devil's Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009).

[231] Donna Seaman, "The *Booklist* Interview: Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 127.

[232] Gay Wilentz, *Binding Cultures; Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 100.

By focusing on healing ritual that works with the body as its primary strategy, *Praisesong* contributes to a tradition among African American female writers of writing about historical and spiritual reconnection and healing as enacted and felt *through the body*. Writing at the same time as Marshall, both Octavia Butler and Toni Cade Bambara reference and make use of similar healing rituals. In Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Dana risks her bodily wellbeing as she physically travels back to 19th century slaveholding Maryland. Dana's corporal time travel serves to reconnect her, in body, to her enslaved ancestors; the result of this reconnection is a more rooted African American identity. In Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980), Minnie and her spiritual guide Old Wife perform a healing ritual on Velma in front of members of the community in order to heal her afflicted mind. Velma's tormented psyche is healed through reconnection with her body. The healing strategies in *Praisesong, Kindred,* and *The Salt Eaters* all focus on embodiment as the desired outcome, which suggests that Marshall is not alone in considering the significance of embodiment within an African American or diasporic context. *Praisesong* is not only in conversation with Marshall's other novels, but also in conversation with the canon at large.

Bodily Dissociation and Vodou Possession

Praisesong opens with a description of Avey dissociated from her body, which immediately signals the central problem in the text: Avey's disembodiment. Avey is depicted as frantically packing her suitcase in order to quit the annual and ritual Caribbean cruise with her friends. Avey's mind is described as dissociated from her body: "Her mind in a way wasn't even in her body, or for that matter, in the room."[233] Avey's materialistic lifestyle, as evidenced by the contents of her six suitcases, "her shoes [...] in their special caddy," and "her hats in their cylindrical box," has repeatedly gotten in the way of Avey's connection to her body (13). In fact, these material possessions have only served to cover up her body and make her forget that she even has one. Avey's disembodiment comes to a head aboard the cruiseship—a place that is symbolic of Avey's numbing, materialistic life—and she is forced to deal with the consequences of living separately from her body and therefore, as the narrative suggests, disconnected from her diasporic roots.

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[233] Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), 10. Each subsequent quotation from this text will come from this edition and will be noted in parenthetical citation.

The catalyst to Avey's recognition of her disembodiment while aboard the cruiseship is her great Aunt Cuney, who comes to play the most important role in Avey's reconnection with both her body and her diasporic heritage. A series of weird bodily feelings on board the ship and a vivid dream of her Aunt Cuney have propelled Avey's departure. After years of having no dreams at all, Avey vividly dreams of her Aunt Cuney "standing waiting for her on the road that led over to the Landing [...] motioning for her to come on the walk that had been a ritual with them" when Avey was a girl (32). Avey had not even thought of her great aunt or Ibo Landing for years. Aunt Cuney abruptly reenters Avey's life in the form of a dream that takes her back to Ibo Landing. This dream serves to remind Avey of the importance of ancestors, ritual, myth, and embodiment through dance within the African diaspora. The role of ancestors in *Praisesong* is of paramount importance. The entire plot of the novel is propelled by Aunt Cuney's reappearance in Avey's life. Venetria K. Patton argues that "ancestors are a crucial element to communal well-being; nevertheless, the protagonists in these texts have become disconnected from their ancestors and must be reminded of the value of these relations."[234] Aunt Cuney's disruption reminds Avey of her ancestral links. Avey was named for Aunt Cuney's grandmother, Avatara, who "had come to [Aunt Cuney] in a dream" (42). In much the same way that ancestor Avatara visits Aunt Cuney in her dreams to initiate a connection to familial lineage, Aunt Cuney visits

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[234] Venetria K. Patton, *The Grasp that Reaches Beyond the Grave: The Ancestral Call in Black Women's Texts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2013), 50.

Avey in her dreams for the same reason. Ancestral intervention becomes necessary for Avey's reconnection to her ancestors and her body.

Aunt Cuney's intervention extends beyond Avey's dreams, however; instead, she takes full possession over Avey's body. This is evidenced by Avey's inability to control or understand her own body, her "aching head," and "the mysterious welling up in her stomach" (54). Because of this, I argue that the spirit of Aunt Cuney inhabits Avey's body in loosely the same way as occurs during a traditional *Vodou* possession.[235] While many scholars have successfully analyzed Avey's dreams of Aunt Cuney and Avey's unexplainable and disconcerting bodily sensations in compelling ways, none have referenced *Vodou* possession in order to more fully explain them.[236] *Vodou* possession provides a unique lens through which to analyze Avey's dissociation because of its focus on and use of the body.[237] Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argue that possession is "the centerpiece of [*Vodou*] communal ritual."[238] *Praisesong*'s invocation of *Vodou* possession ritual through Avey's dissociation aboard the cruise ship scaffolds the novel's insistence on healing practices that focus on the body. These practices are intended to undue the disembodying effects of capitalism and severed connection with the African diasporic community, a severance that is often characterized by a stiff, numb body. Further, the novel positions women and female community to initiate these healing practices. Joan Dayan argues that *Vodou* is "a locus of feminine strength" *and* "the religion that kept alive the lives and deaths of the ancestors."[239] *Vodou* practices, including bodily possession, connect women to history through their bodies. Aunt Cuney's possession of Avey is not only meant to remind Avey of her great aunt and her other ancestors, but is also meant to remind Avey of a collective history of resistance, cultural appropriation, and survival. Even further, Avey's being possessed enables her female ancestors to reclaim her body from materialism and Western hegemony in a resistant act of preparing Avey's body for the Big Drum Ritual in the Caribbean, a dance that will inspire Avey to reimagine African diasporic history and her connection to it.

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[235] In Elizabeth McNeil's article, "Gullah Seeker's Journey in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," she interprets Avey's journey as "a Gullah initiation journey" (186). Whereas I interpret the role of the ancestors within the framework of *Vodou* tradition, McNeil interprets their role within the framework of Gullah. While I find her argument compelling, using Gullah as a reference is limiting the scope that I think the narrative is attempting to contain. Instead, I rely on *Vodou* practices and traditions to explain Avey's dissociation, because *Vodou* connects Tatem, South Carolina to the Caribbean more explicitly than Gullah does. Gullah is only practiced on the Sea Islands of the United States, from Florida to North Carolina, whereas *Vodou* is practiced in both the United States and throughout the Caribbean. For more about Gullah culture, see Wilbur Cross, *Gullah Culture in America* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publisher, 2012). In Keith Cartwright's article, "Notes Towards a Voodoo Hermeneutics: Soul Rhythms, Marvelous Transitions, and Passages to the Creole Saints in *Praisesong for the Widow*," he makes a case for reading *Vodou* possession in the novel, but he uses a creole music lens, and he focuses on the transformation of Avey's soul rather than her body *and* soul together. Cartwright's claims merge with mine when he argues that Avey is possessed by her ancestor Avatara, but his analysis falls short in that he doesn't follow through with any extended conversation about how exactly that possession functions. Cartwright is more concerned with discovering the loss of musical aesthetic as it pertains to ritual rather than embodiment, as is the case in my chapter.

[236] For example, Paulette Brown-Hinds characterizes Avey as being "haunted by memories of the past" and "tormented by separation and dislocation from [African] culture" (107-108). Paulette Brown-Hinds, "In the Spirit: Dance as Healing Ritual in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow," Religion & Literature* 27.1 (Spring 1995). William David Hart suggests that Aunt Cuney "haunts Avey like a deceased ancestor whom the living have failed to remember" (53). Hart reads Aunt Cuney as "embod[ying] reverence for the ancestors," and he argues that she "pays respect to the ancestors by passing on the tradition of the ring shout to her great-niece" (53). William David Hart, *Afro-Eccentricity: Beyond the Standard Narrative of Black Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Venetria K. Patton disagrees with readings of Aunt Cuney as "haunting" Avey and instead argues that her visit serves as a "prodding" in order to "remind Avey of her history and the importance of maintaining family legacies (60). Patton, *The Grasp that Reaches*. Joyce Pettis argues that Aunt Cuney "becomes the catalyst in resurrecting Avey's memories of the past," and "her insistent beckoning initiates a series of events that eventually reawaken Avey to the value of her cultural past and to the importance of keeping the lessons of the elders alive" (121). Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*. Dorothy Hamer Denniston refers to Avey's "recurrent dream of Aunt Cuney," but explains Avey's dissociation as "her mind [...] play[ing] tricks," rather than attributing it to Aunt Cuney's agency (130). Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*.

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[237] My working definition of *Vodou* is borrowed from the definition advanced by Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert in their Introdution to *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, in which they define *Vodou* as "center[ing] around a complex system of myths and rituals linking the devotees to the divine entities and the entire spiritual community, with possession of believers by the loa being the system's cornerstone" (4). I have chosen to reference *Vodou* practices instead of *obeah* for a number of reasons. First, as this definition posits, *Vodou*'s central ritual and communal practice is possession. Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert point to these communal practices as what distinguishes *Vodou* from *obeah*. They argue that *Vodou* is a "group phenomen[on]" while "obeah, by contrast, is a more individualized system" (6). Because Avey's embodiment manifests within community and was catalyzed by her Aunt Cuney's possession of her, Avey's experience seems more in line with traditional *Vodou* practices than the other syncretic Caribbean religions. Even further, Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert trace *Vodou*'s lineage back to West Africa, and specifically to the "Dahomedan, Congolese, and Nigerian regions" (4). This is important, because *Praisesong* references the Dahomey warrior women, who would have been connected to *Vodou* practice. I discuss these women later on this chapter. And finally, in other scholarly conversations about the novel, *Vodou* is also referenced; by pursuing this same avenue of analysis, I am contributing to an already ongoing conversation about how Marshall uses *Vodou* in her narrative. See footnote 234.

[238] Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 3.

[239] Joan Dayan, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti," *Research in African Literatures* 25.2 (June 1994): 6, 11.

The dissociation that Avey feels aboard the cruise ship is Aunt Cuney communicating with her, forcing Avey to reconnect with her body and her past. As Avey's ancestor, Aunt Cuney plays a vital role in Avey's possession. Joyce Pettis also notes the strong presence of ancestors, and particularly female ones, in the works of many Black female writers. Within these works, she claims that ancestors "bridge history, melding present strategies with those of the past as they assume responsibility for instructing new generations in survival techniques. This cultural role is a part of the heritage of West Africa, where the elderly are revered."[240] According to Pettis, the survival technique that Aunt Cuney attempts to pass on to Avey *is* dissociation, which demands a "separation between her mind and her body."[241] Pettis continues, "If she cannot physically remove herself, then she must protect her mental state regardless of her physical location."[242] We learn that Avey's dissociation is reminiscent of the dissociation of Aunt Cuney's grandmother while describing the legendary slaves at Ibo Landing who "walked on water right back to Africa."[243] Aunt Cuney says about her grandmother, "Her body she always usta say might be in Tatem but her mind, her mind was long gone with the Ibos" (39). This dissociation strategy, however, is only temporary. As we see in the novel, Avey can barely function while in this state of dissociation, so we must understand it to be a temporary means to the goal of embodiment. It is merely a survival strategy, not a permanent way to live within the diaspora.

Avey's dissociation connects her to both Avatara and to her enslaved ancestors, so it serves the purpose of forcing Avey to revisit her individual past and the collective past of her people. Dissociation was used by slave women to distance themselves from the abuse they suffered at the hands of abusive slave owners. MarKeva Gwendolyn Hill asserts that the abuse slave women endured “forced and/or reinforced an adaptation mechanism of dissociation in order to survive the emotional trauma related to the constant and continual loss of loved ones, as well as other mishaps experienced in such an abject form of slavery.”[244] Cathy McDaniels-Wilson, a psychologist who works extensively with female trauma victims, contends that dissociation is still a common survival strategy among African American women “and as such is not only a process of the past.”[245] Aunt Cuney not only passes along a survival strategy that is linked to Avey’s slave ancestors, but one that is predominantly practiced by women and through the body, which further highlights Marshall’s diasporic feminist perspective.

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[240] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*, 117.
[241] Ibid, 120.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Marquetta L. Goodwine and The Clarity Press Gullah Project, eds. *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 1998), 6.

McDaniels-Wilson distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary dissociation, claiming that voluntary dissociation is what Darlene Clark Hine refers to as “dissemblance,” or, a “conscious act that involves choosing to present oneself in a certain light.”[246] There is evidence of Avey’s dissemblance when she is confronted by her friend Thomasina Moore about leaving the boat. When Avey explains her plans to Thomasina, her “words [are] terse and final, her manner calm” (20). Avey covers up the fact that she is completely disheveled on the inside. Not long before, Avey had “awakened in a panic” and, after making “the reckless decision” to disembark, she excitedly threw clothing into her bags to prepare for departure (10). The narrative also reveals that Avey had “developed a special silence to deal with” challenging situations or people, which is what she seems to be doing when Thomasina confronts her about her decision to leave (14). On the one hand, the scene with Thomasina suggests that Avey *has* learned the dissociative strategy Aunt Cuney tried to teach her when she was a young girl. On the other hand, however, the novel makes clear that dissociation is not a sustainable substitute for embodiment. Even though Avey's namesake is with her ancestors in mind and spirit, she must also be with them in body through historical and cultural practices like dance and communal gatherings in order to complete the connection. Marquetta L. Goodwine argues that, "the core of African American survival mechanisms are the traditions or the 'old ways.'"[247] Marshall's insistence on a return through ritual to historical, cultural, and familial roots in order to repair the diaspora is in line with Goodwine's claim. In *Brown Girl*, we see the damaging effects of disembodiment on Silla. She becomes disconnected from her elders and ancestors, as evidenced in the wedding dance scene in which she first refuses to dance and then literally can't make her body move like her ancestors did.

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[244] MarKeva Gwendolyn Hill, *Womanism Against Socially-Constructed Matriarchal Images: A Theoretical Model Towards a Therapeutic Goal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 32. This strategy is likewise narrated in Edwidge Danticat’s 1994 novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, in which both Martine and Sophie go somewhere else in their minds during sexual intercourse as a means to repress painful memories of rape and sexual violation. This strategy is referred to as “doubling” in the novel. Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Soho Press, 1994). Using dissociation as a temporary healing strategy is another way in which Marshall participates in a tradition of body-centered healing among African American and Caribbean women writers.

[245] Cathy McDaniels-Wilson, “The Psychological Aftereffects of Racialized Sexual Violence,” in *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner*, ed. Mary E. Frederickson and Delores M. Walters (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 201.

[246] Ibid.

The novel insists that dissociation is only the first step toward embodiment. The goal of dissociation is only temporary survival of trauma by separating the mind from the body, while the goals of *Vodou* possession are deep connection between the body and mind and a more permanent perspective change.[248] The narrative privileges the non-dualistic nature of *Vodou* and traditional West African religious beliefs and practices in which the body and mind are understood to be joined as one.[249] Aunt Cuney uses dreams and possession to guide Avey from dissociation to embodiment in order to draw her closer to her African origins. Catherine A. John thoughtfully connects Avey's dream with Africanist practice: "Marshall's use of the dream as catalyst for Avey’s awakening privileges African cultural and spiritual practices.”[250] John continues, “The dream, therefore, is significant within various traditional African contexts as a space in which communication from the other side occurs.”[251] John makes no direct connection between Avey’s dream and a specific African-derived ritual, though.

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[247] Marquetta L. Goodwine, "Rebuilding the African American Community by Returning to Traditions," in *The Legacy of Ibo Landing,* 9.

[248] See Joan Dayan, "Vodoun, or The Voice of the Gods," in *Sacred Possession* and Kenaz Filan, *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2007).

[249] Joan Dayan, in her article, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti," states, "Unlike Western religions that depend upon dualisms such as matter, spirit, body, and soul, for their perpetuation and power, vodoun unsettles and subverts such apparent oppositions" (6).

However, Avey’s dream and her subsequent visions and physical disturbances are directly indicative of *Vodou* possession. Karen Richman claims that the practice of *Vodou* possession is a way to “[connect] the living and spirits in a deeply embodied way to their ancestors, their lineal history, and their family land.”[252] Bettina E. Schmidt offers an important explanation of what *Vodou* possession is and why it is historically significant. She explains that the practice of *Vodou* is a “consequence of the transatlantic slave trade,” and was founded as a physical and spiritual survival strategy for slaves of different cultural and religious backgrounds.[253] A “spirit possession,” according to Schmidt is the “the practice of incorporating a divine being in a human body.”[254] The basic premise behind a possession is that the *lwas*, “the spiritual entities or ancestors who lived in the remote past and are considered the founders of the lineage” take over the body of a living being as a way to communicate through it.[255] Schmidt notes that when someone’s body has been taken over by a *lwa*, their outward appearance, including “movements, [...] attitude, [and] body language” changes to reflect the *lwa* who inhabits him or her. During a *Vodou* possession ritual, onlookers watch as the *lwa* communicates through the possessed person’s body. The ceremony often involves food and music and can last for hours.[256]

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[250] Catherine A. John, *Clear Word and Third Sight: Folk Groundings and Diasporic Consciousness in African Caribbean Writing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 186.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Karen Richman, “Possession and Attachment: Notes on Moral Ritual Communication among Haitian Descent Groups,” in *Spirited Things: The Work of ‘Possession’ in Afro-Atlantic Religions*,” ed. Paul Christopher Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 207.
[253] Bettina E. Schmidt, “The Practice of Spirit Possession in Haitian *Vodou*,” in *The Devil’s Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children*, ed. Jean La Fontaine (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), 93.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Gerdès Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 8.

It’s important to note that *lwa* are not the same as ancestors, though they can be ancestors. Karen Richman explains that the role of the ancestors is to “mediate relations between members of kin groups and their inherited *lwa*.”[257] Keeping this in mind, my reading of Avey’s dream of Aunt Cuney as a possession warrants further explanation. Richman indicates that when “*lwa* feel neglected or ignored by the heirs, [...] they retaliate by sending affliction, ‘seizing’ heirs with somatic illness, misfortune, and property loss.”[258] Since Avey’s possession forces her to revisit Ibo Landing, we can read Aunt Cuney as the ancestral mediator between Avey and Avatara, Aunt Cuney’s grandmother, who we can read as Avey’s *lwa*. Gerdès Fleurant points out that a person’s *lwa* is frequently a direct familial ancestor.[259] Avey’s dream of Aunt Cuney beckoning her to return to Ibo Landing, then, is not only a visit by Aunt Cuney, but also a visit by her great-great-great-aunt Avatara, who witnessed with her own eyes African slaves arriving to the tiny South Carolina island of Tatem. The naming of Avey after her ancestor Avatara further supports this reading of Avatara as her *lwa*. Avey’s name can also be traced back to the word *avatar*, which is the “manifestation in human form” of a deity.[260] Both Aunt Cuney and Avatara stage a spiritual and historical intervention in the form of an involuntary possession of Avey.[261] By invoking *Vodou* possession ritual, Marshall reclaims the body as a space of healing and reconnection through Aunt Cuney's attempts to teach Avey about the wisdom her body holds, wisdom that can be traced back to her ancestors at Ibo Landing.

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[256] Schmidt, “The Practice of Spirit Possession in Haitian *Vodou*.”
[257] Karen Richman, “The Protestant Ethic and the Dis-Spirit of Vodou,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, ed. Karen I. Leonard, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (New York: Altamira Press, 2005), 174.
[258] Ibid, 174.
[259] Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits*, 8.
[260] "avatar, n." *OED Online*. December 2015. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[261] As Luisah Teish notes, possession is “a welcomed and heart-warming occurrence” that “happens in communal rituals.” Luisah Teish, *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman’s Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 60. Avey’s possession is, at first, unwelcomed and involuntary. When she participates in the Big Drum and the Beg Pardon at the end of the novel, her possession resembles to a greater degree an authentic *Vodou* possession ritual.

Aunt Cuney and Avatara call upon Avey to re-embody the spirit of these ancestors that she has shunned over the years. The novel alludes to a time when Avey honored the wisdom of her ancestors contained in her body. When she was a young girl, she captured the spirit of Ibo Landing in the same way her Aunt Cuney did: "Back home after only her first summer in Tatem she had recounted the whole thing almost word for word to her three brothers, complete with the old woman's inflections and gestures" (38). In the early years of Avey's marriage to Jay, Avey's body seemed to contain "the most ancient deities of Africa" (127). Over the years, however, Avey has suppressed these parts of herself in favor of material and economic advancement. Interestingly enough, possession and dissociation are linked in theories of psychology, so Avey's possession also serves to highlight Avey's dissociation as a result of her materialism.[262] Marshall notes that, in the process "to make it and make it big, [...] Avey reject[s] what was really special and unique and important about [herself]."[263] She no longer recognizes the power of bodily expression. When her friend Clarice joins a Carnival dance during one of their cruises, Avey is "mortified" because Clarice is performing her Africanness to a white audience (25). This scene is reminiscent of the final dance scene in *Brown Girl*. Avey can only see Clarice in the same way the white audience does: a fetish to be gazed upon. Avey no longer acknowledges the power of Africanist dance and refuses to participate in it. The narrative reveals, however, that young Avey subversively danced as she looked on at The Ring Shout with Aunt Cuney and that she frequently danced to jazz music with Jay when they lived in Halsey Street. Aunt Cuney and Avatara's possession of Avey seeks to reclaim what has been lost.

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[262] For more information about this connection, see Steven Jay Lynn and Judith W. Rhue, eds. *Dissociation: Clinical and Theoretical Perspectives* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994), and in particular Stanley Krippner's article "Cross-Cultural Treatment Perspectives on Dissociative Disorder," 338-364.
[263] Donna Seaman, "The *Booklist* Interview: Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall,* 127.

Ibo Landing

Marshall stages Avey's intervention at the site of Ibo Landing because it serves as a historical and cultural bridge between African American and African culture. In his thorough research about the Gullah people and culture of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, where "more than 120,000" Africans and West Indians landed as slaves, William S. Pollitzer highlights the cultural beliefs and practices that these slaves transmitted to numerous islands like Tatem.[264] He notes that the Gullah culture of these islands is similar to African culture in a variety of significant ways, including family structure, "kinship patterns," religious practices and beliefs, "rhythmic pattern[s]" of "call-and-response" in church, music and dance, "folklore and folk medicine," crops, and "material culture."[265] Pollitzer also comments that "the biological person, at least until recent times, is a blend of West African forebears with less apparent white admixture than that of African Americans elsewhere."[266] Both Avey's dream in which she physically fights Aunt Cuney in order to avoid confronting her historical and cultural roots by revisiting the landing and her rememory of when she was a young girl journeying out to Ibo Landing with her great aunt serve to reunite her with the historical context that made her existence possible. Even though *Vodou* is practiced most notably in Haiti, Gerdès Fleurant notes that its "underlying philosophy is African," which makes it a relevant and significant spiritual reference for Marshall to conjure in her novel.[267] Marshall's choice to loosely enact a *Vodou* possession as a means to draw Avey back to Ibo Landing further punctuates African practices that are enacted through the body, and marks them as a means of historical reconnection.

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[264] William S. Pollitzer, "The Relationship of the Gullah-Speaking People of Coastal South Carolina and Georgia to Their African Ancestors," in *The Legacy of Ibo Landing*, ed Marquetta L.Goodwine and The Clarity Press Gullah Project *(*Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 1998), 54.

[265] Ibid, 64-65.

[266] Ibid, 66.

[267] Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits*, 10.

Marshall's choice to figuratively return Avey to Ibo Landing through dreams and visions by way of her ancestral possession rather than literally returning her to this site is significant in two primary ways. First, this figurative return emphasizes that African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans must have meaningful and deeply felt experiences of their roots rather than contrived, touristy ones. Second, the guidance by Avey's female ancestors underscores Marshall's insistence that reconciling one's historical past "has to be done within the context of the community that shapes you, to which you belong."[268] Avey's return to the past cannot be done on her own. In her 2001 interview with James Hall and Heather Hathaway, Marshall briefly reveals that the driving force behind *Praisesong* is "what was being said by those Africans to this well-heeled African American woman."[269] Avey's possession, then, takes on yet another layer of meaning. Aunt Cuney and Avatara's communication with Avey is also symbolic of the transmission of the Ibo Landing folktale. Avey's enslaved ancestors speak to her from the past through visions in order to remind her of her historical roots.

Gay Wilentz asserts that in Marshall's fiction "the search for one's heritage [...] is seen as a woman's search," and that "to maintain cultural continuity and wholeness is the function of the women, both the female characters and Marshall herself."[270] Luisah Teish vies for an understanding of *Vodou* possession as "divine companionship" and "attunement with [...] ancestors."[271] Venetria K. Patton reads Aunt Cuney as "beneficial despite the disruptive nature of [her] presence."[272] Despite Avey's resistance, her ancestors are well-intended when they inhabit her dreams and body. Possession, then, at least in the novel, is meant to heal rather than to haunt. Wilentz indicates that one of the primary roles of women in traditional African society was to transmit "the values and traditions" of the culture through "stories and songs commemorating the lives and the legends."[273] Avey's possession is not only about initiating her own personal healing, but the healing of the entire African diaspora. In her work about disease and healing in the texts of African American women, Ann Folwell Stanford argues that *Praisesong* "refuse[s] to separate [individual] illness from its social context."[274] Avey's "aching head" and "the mysterious welling up in her stomach" after she dreams of Aunt Cuney are not signs of her disease, but are instead symptoms of her healing (54).

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[268] Angela Elam, "To Be in the World: An Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 155.

[269] James C. Hall and Heather Hathaway, "The Art and Politics of Paule Marshall: An Interview," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 187.

[270] Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*, 100.

[271] Teish, *Jambalaya*, 96.

Even after Avey's vision of Aunt Cuney, she continues to feel the bodily effects of possession. She wanders around the ship unsteady on her feet. Ann Folwell Stanford separates Avey's "unsettling dream and her physical symptoms," yet they blur together in the narrative and together work to propel Avey toward Carriacou.[275] In one particularly disturbing scene, "bizarre things began happening" including unexplainable physical sensations and visions (55). The narrative reveals that "each time [Avey] rose to leave, a tremor would sweep the deck under her feet for an instant as the liner gave the troubled heave and roll only she seemed to be aware of" (54). Further, "as if her eyes were playing tricks on her, the numerous shuffleboard games she saw there seemed to turn for an instant into a spectacular brawl" (56). Even though Avey's dream of Aunt Cuney has ceased, her body still seems to be guided by an unknown, outside force. Bettina Schmidt notes about *Vodou* possession that "the manifestation is physically exhausting for a person" and that "sometimes the spirit can become too demanding."[276] Avey attempts to evade the mysterious hold over her body:

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[272] Patton, *The Grasp*, 57.
[273] Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*, 102.
[274] Ann Folwell Stanford, "Mechanisms of Disease: African-American Women Writers, Social Pathologies, and the Limits of Medicine," *NWSA Journal 6.1* (Spring 1994): 36.
[275] Ibid.

> What was left of the morning she spent wandering the decks in a dazed, shaken state. She abandoned the search for a quiet place to herself. She no longer wanted to sit or even to stand in any one spot for too long. Her eyes and ears might act up again, turning the ordinary and familiar into something surreal, and causing her to see the same faces everywhere she went. (57)

The other passengers on the ship notice Avey's altered state and "step quickly out of her way" as she rushes by them (58). Avey has little control over her body at this point in the narrative. Roland Littlewood describes possession as causing "an altered state of consciousness."[277] This description could also be used to characterize Avey's experience aboard the ship. Even after she locks herself in the library and calms down a bit, "her eyes [had] retained the look of someone in the grip of a powerful hallucinogen-something that had dramatically expanded her vision, offering her a glimpse of things that were beyond her comprehension, and therefore frightening" (59). Avey appears to be in two places at once. Simone Alexander contends that, "Marshall stresses the need for and the importance of the ancestor, who functions as the anchor of both the real and the ancestral worlds."[278] Through her unexplainable visions and bodily sensations, Avey is being shuttled between these real and ancestral worlds in order to not only learn but *feel* their connection. Avey's dream of her Aunt Cuney coupled with the lingering physical and psychological effects of her possession compel her to leave the ship.

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[276] Schmidt, "The Practice," 97.

[277] Roland Littlewood, "Possession States," in *The Devil's Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children*, ed. Jean La Fontaine (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), 29.

[278] Simone Alexander, *The Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 200), 138.

The reverberating physical effects of Avey's possession are so powerful that they take on a mystical quality. They serve to remind Avey of the mythical power of the Ibo Landing story. Avey has difficulty explaining to her friends why she has chosen to leave the cruise ship, because her decision comes from a feeling inside: "She hadn't been feeling herself the last couple of days. It was nothing she could put her finger on. She had simply awakened in the middle of the night and decided she would prefer to spend the rest of her vacation at home. It didn't make any sense, she knew, but her mind was made up" (20). The narrative reiterates this explanation shortly thereafter: "It was just that something—she couldn't say what—had come over her the past couple of days" (28). Avey's possession encourages her to listen to her bodily instincts; these instincts lead her toward a diasporic homecoming. Avey's choice to honor the mystical message of her instincts rights a wrong she made as a child when she questioned the truthfulness of the Ibo Landing folktale by asking Aunt Cuney, "But how come they didn't drown?" (39).

John McCluskey argues that, "at the novel's conclusion, Avey is able to understand the myth of Ibo Landing as a narrative of resistance, of return as profound resistance and not simple flight."[279] Avey's subsequent return to the Caribbean can be read as an act of resistance. Before Avey even lands on the island of Carriacou, however, her healing has already begun. After Avey's lived experience on Carriacou, the narrative alludes to its mystical qualities: "The island more a mirage rather than an actual place. Something conjured up perhaps to satisfy a longing need" (254). Avey knows her experience to be true, however, and she commits to delivering its message to anyone who will listen, speaking its truth on "street corners and front lawns," in "the shopping mall and train station," in "the office buildings of Manhattan," and in "the entranceways of the skyscrapers" (255). Because of Avey's felt experience, her African roots are no longer mythical; instead, they become her deep truth.

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[279] John McCluskey, Jr., "And Called Every Generation Blessed: Theme, Setting, and Ritual in the Works of Paule Marshall," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Edition*, ed. Mari Evans (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 333.

The Ring Shout

The historical place of Ibo Landing is linked in the novel to the cultural practice of the Ring Shout, which is derived from African dance and call-and-response tradition. When Avey was a child, the community of Tatem held Ring Shouts in its only church. Her Aunt Cuney used to participate in these communal gatherings until she was banned from the circle for making incorrect movements with her feet. Avey's memory of watching the Ring Shout from afar and her later connection to it through the Big Drum Ritual dance once she's in Carriacou signal its significance within the African American community in Tatem. It not only provides an opportunity for the people of Tatem to gather in union with one another, but it also insures that they will never forget their African ancestors and the African presence within their community. This African presence is preserved through the Ring Shout. John Stauffer notes that, "The Ring Shout, with its rhythmic, call-and-response singing and counterclockwise dancing, was the most notable of [the] African cultural forms" that have shaped African American culture "over the past 150 years."[280] In his research on the Ring Shout tradition, Sterling Stuckey takes note of the movement principles of the Ring Shout. By researching Ring Shout practices in New Orleans, Stuckey deduced that "the dance was distinctly African, involving a leaping and a flailing of the arms."[281] Johann Buis likewise contends that the Ring Shout is distinctly African-derived.[282] In his essay about the African influences on the Ring Shout, Buis includes testimony from Lawrence McKiver, the founder of the McIntosh County Shouters in Georgia. McKiver declares that, “every bit of [the Ring Shout] is an African act.”[283] Immediately after arriving in The United States, enslaved Africans began singing songs accompanied with “dancelike movement,” which eventually became the songs and dances of the Ring Shout.[284]

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[280] John Stauffer, forward to Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Stauffer is describing Stuckey's findings here.

[281] Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 62.

[282] Art Rosenbaum and Johann Buis, *Shout Because You're Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 18.

The birth and continued practice of the Ring Shout was one way in which slaves were able to preserve African-derived rituals. In an effort to strip enslaved Africans of their cultural practices as a means of control and domination, slave owners prohibited many slave dance rituals. Even after the abolishment of slavery, these prohibitive measures remained. Sterling Stuckey explains that over time, starting in the nineteenth century, “African dance movement underwent change in the church,” as larger, full-bodied movements were no longer permitted.[285] Yvonne Daniel explains that “restrictive Protestant rules” resulted in the “curtail[ment] or prohibit[ion]” of “religious dance, African dance, and dancing itself.”[286]According to Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright, during the “nineteenth and into the twentieth century black and white clergymen tried to purge black folk rituals of their African elements, particularly holy dance [the Ring Shout] and spirit possession, but to no avail.”[287] This finding is significant because it confirms that the dancing and movement elements of the Ring Shout are most likely derived from traditional African practices, and it connects the Ring Shout to spirit possession, as Marshall does in her novel. For example, when the people of Tatem dance the Ring Shout, “the Spirit [takes] hold of their souls” (34). Gerdès Fleurant contends that *Vodou* is “a danced religion” that employs movement of the body to connect with ancestral spirits.[288] By connecting two Africanist practices that rely on dance and bodily movement to make connection with community and ancestors, Marshall stresses the necessity of embodiment within sustainable African diasporic communities. African-derived dancing, because of its strong tie to spiritual connection, was perceived as a threat to the Christian god, and was consequently banned in the church.

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[283] Quoted in Rosenbaum and Buis, *Shout Because You’re Free*, 18.
[284] Rosenbaum and Buis, *Shout Because You’re Free*, 18.
[285] Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 58.
[286] Yvonne Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora: Igniting Citizenship* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 154.
[287]Quoted in Stauffer, forward to Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, xxi.
[288] Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits*, 10.

Minimizing bodily movements that resembled African dance during the Ring Shout quickly became a subversive strategy of cultural preservation. Minimization of dance was an alternative to abolishment and ensured the continuation of dance-like practices even when these practices were under intense scrutiny by both white and Black clergymen. Both Sterling Stuckey and Yvonne Daniel indicate that many African Americans started incorporating movements during Ring Shout ceremonies that were not seen by the church as dancing, and were therefore allowed, so that they could preserve the element of movement that is foundational in traditional African ring circles.[289] Most notably, it was construed as “taboo” in the Protestant church to lift or cross the feet, so African Americans “found ways to shift weight from heels to toes, to insides and outer edges of the feet [...] without ever crossing them or lifting them from the ground.”[290] These adaptive dance moves insured that African Americans could still participate in African-derived dance ritual without the suspicions of authority figures in the church who disapproved of them.

The novel highlights the Tatem community’s participation in this cultural preservation. The narrative’s description of the dance movements during the Ring Shout precisely mirror historical accounts: “They allowed their failing bodies every liberty, yet their feet never once left the floor or, worse, crossed each other in a dance step” (34). Susana Morris argues that, “because the ring shout is the result of the syncretism of Judeo-Christian religious prohibitions regarding dancing, African worship, and African musical practices with a transgression of those prohibitions, it also provides a model for identity and community that does not abandon tradition in the face of colonialism and racist repression."[291] Simone Alexander asserts that by practicing traditional African dance rituals, the people of Carriacou "refuse domination [...] of their African cultural heritage."[292] The Ring Shout in Tatem not only connects these coastal people of the diaspora to their African heritage, but its preservation is an act of defiant protest that embodies the resistance enacted by the legendary slaves of Ibo Landing.

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[289] See Stuckey, *Slave Culture* and Daniel, *Caribbean and Atlantic.*

[290] Brenda Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 114.

However, Aunt Cuney does not participate in this communal protest, which not only weakens her relationship with the citizens of Tatem, but also young Avey's. In fact, Aunt Cuney rejects this protest, because of the time she was banned from the Ring Shout for "crossing her feet" (33). Instead, she launches her own individual protest against the church's authority. Even though Aunt Cuney was only banned for that same night, she refused to participate in any more Ring Shouts and stopped attending church altogether. The narrative reveals that the "people in Tatem said she had made the Landing her religion after that" (34). The novel subtly condemns Aunt Cuney's protest in significant ways. Susan Rogers alludes to this condemnation when she contends that many scholars have misread Aunt Cuney's role in the Ring Shout by "wrongly associat[ing] Cuney, rather than the church congregation, with the dance Avey is so pleased to remember."[293] First, Aunt Cuney's decision to permanently leave the church and the Ring Shout creates schism within the community. Years after her decision, there are only a "handful of elderly men and women still left [...] who still [hold] to the old ways" by participating in the Ring Shout (34). Johann Buis's research on the Ring Shout in The United States reveals that

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[291] Susana Morris, *Close Kin and Distant Relatives*: *The Paradox of Respectability in Black Women's Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 21.
[292] Alexander, *Mother Imagery*, 16.
[293] Susan Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," *African American Review* 34.1 (Spring 2000): 89.

McIntosh County, Georgia is “the only community where the African American southeastern coastal ring shout is known to have survived.”[294] Aunt Cuney’s refusal to participate in the Ring Shout contributes to its dissolution in The United States as an important cultural and spiritual diasporic practice. Marshall’s novels uniformly reach toward a balance between the individual and the community, and Aunt Cuney’s arguably selfish protest upsets this balance. Aunt Cuney later redeems herself through her possession of Avey that leads Avey back to these dying cultural practices and encourages her to revive them.

Additionally, Aunt Cuney’s protest denies opportunity for Avey to participate in the Ring Shout with her community, and consequently hinders Avey’s ability to know the wisdom of her body and its deep connection to the ancestral and spiritual worlds. When Avey was a young girl, she used to join her Aunt Cuney in watching the Ring Shout from afar “on the darkened road across from the church” (34). As she looked on, Avey secretly “performed in place the little trudge” (35). Her subdued participation is short lived, however, as she and Aunt Cuney press on toward Ibo Landing. Avey never gets the chance as a young girl to become initiated into the ring circle with the people of Tatem. Because of this, she moves through life into adulthood and middle-age disconnected from her historical and cultural roots. She also moves through life disconnected from her body’s inherent wisdom. Katherine Fishburn contends that “enslaved Africans [drew] on the gift of their bodies for thinking” by using “the gestures and motility of their bodies (in crafts, laboring, singing, dancing, and walking)” in order to “redraw [...] the boundaries of Western metaphysics” and “redefine what it means to be human.”[295] She notes “how important dancing was to Igbo culture and how cultural and/or ancestral memory is instilled in the body."[296] Aunt Cuney fails to teach Avey these lessons of embodiment up until the moment of Avey's possession. By taking hold of Avey's body and drawing attention to her disembodiment, Aunt Cuney rights her wrong in much the same way that Avey does when she fully acknowledges the Ibo Landing story as historical rather than myth. The theme of remaking oneself in this novel is important to Marshall. She emphasizes that, "women especially have [...] the absolute right to reconstitute their lives at no matter what age."[297] By reminding Avey of a past she has nearly forgotten, Aunt Cuney helps to recalibrate the balance between community and the individual that has been offset by materialism and extreme individualism.

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[294] Rosenbaum and Buis, *Shout Because You’re Free*, ix.

[295] Katherine Fishburn, *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African-American Narrative* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 35.

Aunt Cuney's failure to see the connection between the Ring Shout dance and the legend of Ibo Landing is the novel's final condemnation of her abandonment of the Ring Shout. For Marshall, the story and place of Ibo Landing are indelibly linked to the rituals and practices of enslaved Africans who stayed in the United States, and particularly those practices involving dance. In a 2000 interview with Dawn Raffel, Marshall explains why connecting to the past is so important to her: "It gives us a deeper sense of self. History tells us in a very dramatic way where we've come from, what we've had to endure and how we have overcome it. Also—and especially with Carriacou—our cultural strength and inheritance, those songs, those dances, those rituals, were part of a whole survival system."[298] In order to excavate this survival system, Avey must participate in Africanist dance ritual in community. The Caribbean, and in particular Carriacou, is a rightful place for Avey to reconnect with her body and her roots, because there African-derived dance ritual is more commonplace and less adulterated than it is in the United States. Simone Alexander notes that "the Carriacouan folks [...] preserve their unique African culture by living it."[299] It is not enough to know; one must *do*. Avey's enactment of the Ring Shout dance during the Big Drum ritual enables her to feel the connection between her body, her diasporic community, her ancestors, and her past. In order to create the vision Marshall has of an interconnected African diaspora, one (or more) of these parts cannot be separated from the rest.

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[296] Ibid, 53.

[297] Sylvia Baer, "Holding onto the Vision: Sylvia Baer Interviews Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 119.

[298] Dawn Raffel, "Paule Marshall on Race and Memory," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall, 190*.

Erzulie and African Female Deities

The ancestral and spiritual wisdom that resides inside Avey's body, though repressed, is further revealed in the second section of the novel, "Sleeper's Wake." This section takes Avey back in place and time to when her husband Jay was still alive. Avey's dreams and flashbacks of an earlier period in her life function in much the same way as the narrative flashbacks of Silla in *Brown Girl*. Again, Marshall uses the narrative technique of flashback in order to highlight the loss of African culture at the hands of American materialism and awaken Avey to this loss. When Jay and Avey make love, Jay "sens[es] around him the invisible forms of the deities who reside [inside Avey]: Erzulie with her jewels and gossamer veils, Yemoja to whom the rivers and seas are sacred; Oya, first wife of the thunder god and herself in charge of winds and rains …" (127). These African deities—Erzulie, Haitian *Vodou* goddess of love; Yemoja, Yoruba/Santería goddess of creation and protector of women; and Oya, Yoruba/Santería warrior goddess of wind and change—are powerful cosmic figures in the African-derived practices of *Vodou* and Santería.[300] As perceived by Jay, these goddess spirits reside inside Avey's vagina: these "most ancient deities [...] had made their temple the tunneled darkness of his wife's flesh" (127). Erzulie, Yemoja, and Oya reside inside Avey's life-giving canal, waiting for their powers to be birthed. Avey's possession by her female ancestors prepares her for this birth by compelling

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[299] Alexander, *Mother Imagery*, 16.

[300] For more information about these deities and their qualities, see Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010) and Joan Dayan, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti."

Avey to pay close attention to her body’s voice, which, the novel implies, Avey hasn’t honored since early on in her marriage to Jay.

The African deities that take up residence in Avey’s body have relevant and significant connections to Avey’s journey to embodiment. Erzulie, Yemoja, and Oya are all connected to the female body and female well-being. More importantly perhaps, these deities help connect Avey to a rich Afro-Caribbean female lineage. Erzulie, in contrast to Yemoja and Oya, is a “goddess [...] born on the soil of Haiti who has no precedent in Yorubaland or Dahomey.”[301] Similar to the Ring Shout, Erzulie symbolizes and celebrates the multifaceted ways in which slave culture of the Caribbean and the United States birthed new forms of expression as a means to resist the “cultural terrorism” and spiritual hegemony that was often exerted over slaves by slaveholders.[302] As Elizabeth J. West notes, “Africans did not give over their worldview to a European one,” but instead “merged [...] traditional African worldview [...] with European Christianity.”[303] Susana Morris extends this discussion by suggesting that “Jay and Avey’s intimate practices are connected to the transgressive syncretic religious practices of peoples of African descent who were brought to the Americas—practices, such as the ring shout, that preserve African cosmologies under the guise of Western religious symbols.”[304] Marshall’s intentional and affirming invocation of Erzulie, a *Vodou* goddess and lwa who is the result of this religious syncretism, and a spirit who appears during Jay and Avey’s most intimate moments as a couple, serves to underscore Avey’s deep connection to her historical roots. Barbara Christian asserts that Avey "must return to her source, must remember the ancient wisdom of African culture."[305] This ancient wisdom is stored in Avey's body, as depicted by the presence of Erzulie when she and Jay make love.

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[301] Dayan, “Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti,” 6. I understand that there is disagreement among scholars about Erzulie’s origins. For example, Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert mention that Erzulie “traces her ancestry to Whydah in Dahomey (or Benin) and Oshun in Nigeria” (5). However, they also note that she is still to be understood within *Vodou* tradition as a syncretic figure. My point about her syncretic nature is still valid whether or not we understand Erzulie as originally from Africa. See Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Sacred Possessions*.

[302] Elizabeth J. West, *African Spirituality in Black Women’s Fiction: Threaded Visions of Memory, Community, Nature, and Being* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 20.

[303] Ibid.

[304] Morris, *Close Kin*, 24.

The love making scene between Avey and Jay is also significant, because it suggests that sexual freedom and sensual, intimate connection rooted in love are not only paths to embodiment and wholeness, but also have the potential to unveil historical representations as told from female perspectives. When Jay and Avey make love, Avey feels a sense of authentic wholeness: "She gave the slip to her ordinary, everyday self. And for a long pulsing moment she was pure self, being, the embodiment of pleasure" (128). Jay's recognition of Avey's wholeness is perhaps equally as profound as Avey's wholeness. The beginning of this scene focuses on Jay talking, excessively even, as a means to seduce Avey. As soon as they begin making love, however, Jay falls into an "abrupt, awestruck silence" (127). He quietly listens to the stories that her body weaves through the spiritual presence of the African deities who reside there. Erzulie, who often plays the role of a *lwa* in *Vodou* possession, takes over Avey's body in this scene in order to deliver her message. As Joan Dayan has noted, Erzulie "tells a story of women's lives that has not been told."[306] Erzulie's complexity as a goddess figure who loves both women and men and who values both sexual activity and abstinence challenges gender stereotypes and historical representations of women.

Thus, the love making scene between Jay and Avey becomes a storytelling scene, an opportunity to revise history, which is one of Marshall's primary aims as an Afro-Caribbean feminist novelist. The lovemaking scene bears a heavy resemblance to Avey's possession during her cruise, as spirits take over her body with the intention of drawing her closer to her African heritage. Avey's body and the spirits that inhabit it become frequent and significant palimpsestic tools in Marshall's narrative. According to Joan Dayan, "Erzulie and the rituals associated with her store and reinterpret the past."[307] The novel suggests that Jay and Avey's passionate and spirit-filled lovemaking is ritualistic and was often preceded by domestic dance ritual, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Melanie Otto argues that many feminist writers from the Caribbean invoke the figure of Erzulie, as she "unites the Americas by bringing into consciousness their submerged African heritage."[308] Jay, even more than Avey, is brought into consciousness in this scene, as his symbolically patriarchal words fade into "a more powerful voice" as he, too, begins to express with his body (127). In the spirit of Erzulie, Jay and Avey seem to swap gender roles here as Avey morphs into the one "in command" and the one doing all of the telling/talking (127). Susana Morris argues that, "the description of Jay and Avey's lovemaking [...] links sex-positive intimacy to a Diasporic consciousness."[309] Indeed, the presence of these African deities during Jay and Avey's lovemaking is beautifully affirming in regards to the relationship between Black women and men of the diaspora. Beyond this, though, this scene reveals the beauty of Jay listening to the story that Avey's body tells. The power of Avey's story—of the richness of Afro-Caribbean heritage, ritual, and practice—is not only in the telling, but also in the listening.

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[305] Barbara Christian, "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction," in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 243.
[306] Dayan, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti," 6.

The lovemaking scene is not the first time in the novel that Jay has willingly listened to Avey's story, however. Every summer, Avey used to take Jay out to Tatem, and they would stay at Aunt Cuney's house:

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[307] Ibid, 10.

[308] Melanie Otto, "The Caribbean," in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. John McLeod (London: Routledge, 2007), 104.

[309] Morris, *Close Kin*, 24.

> On their first visit, the year they were married, she had walked him over to the Landing, and standing beside the river which the Ibos had crossed on foot on their way back home, she had told him the story. "What do you think?" she had asked him at the end, half expecting him to dismiss the whole apocryphal tale with a joke. Instead, his gaze on the dark still floor of water, he had said quietly, "I'm with your aunt Cuney and the old woman you were named for. I believe it, Avey. Every word." (115)

Unlike young Avey, adult Jay doesn't question the myth of Ibo Landing. Instead, he adamantly believes in its truth, in its power. His quiet reaction to and acknowledgment of this legend is similar to his quiet acceptance of the African deities in Avey's body. Instead of casting him as naive or immature, Marshall casts Jay as possessing an inherent, albeit inexpressible understanding of his cultural heritage. In her discussion of film and literature, Judylyn S. Ryan references the Ibo quality of "seeing in more ways than one" that Aunt Cuney mentions when she tells Avey the Ibo Landing story.[310] According to Ryan, "the Igbos' ability to choose life and reject the most intensely nightmarish aspects of the American experience is motivated by" this quality.[311] We see this quality in Jay early on in his marriage to Avey, as he senses deeper meaning and spirituality in his wife and her family stories. He is open and willing to accept the stories of Erzulie and the ancestors. He can see Avey in more ways than one. This is important to Marshall, because she has repeatedly emphasized in her interviews that one of her primary intentions as a writer is to "express [her] hope for reconciliation, cooperation, love, and unity between black women and men."[312] The Jay and Avey love making scene and their summer visits to Tatem are clear references to this hope, and the powers that drive and encourage this reconciliation are the female ancestors and deities.

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[310] Judylyn S. Ryan, *Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women's Film and Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 27.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Dance, "An Interview," 99.

Over time, however, Jay and Avey’s lovemaking becomes disembodied, and their lovemaking ritual that had once seemed “inviolable,” like Jay and Avey, falls “victim to the strains” of chasing middle-class status (129). Jay’s mind becomes disconnected from his body, as “his thoughts were elsewhere, and [his] body, even while merged with [Avey’s], felt impatient to leave” (129). This negative change in Avey and Jay’s intimacy is directly linked to American materialism. In his pursuit of a college degree, because employer after employer told Jay he needed one to land a job—although the fact that he is a Black man seemed to have more do with his rejections than any other factor—Jay exhausts his body to the point of numbness and rigidity. According to the narrative, “He went about those years like a runner in the heat of a long and punishing marathon, his every muscle tensed and straining, his body being pushed to its limits; and on his face a clenched and dogged look that was to become almost his sole expression over the years” (115). The demands of American materialism are harsh on Jay’s body and on the Johnson marriage.

Domestic Dance Ritual

The rise and fall of embodied ritual in Avey and Jay’s married life is likewise depicted in the scenes in which Jay and Avey’s love for music and dance is described. The couple create their own domestic dance ritual that connects them to the richness of their Black identities. On numerous occasions, Jay and Avey would dance in their living room, just the two of them, moving their bodies in sync to classic jazz standards by African American jazz artists like Duke Ellington. The couple see their dance ritual as a feature of their African American culture and identity. Jay implies that Avey’s dance moves have an African American aesthetic, as he compares her to Bojangles (Bill Robinson) and Snake Hips (Earl Tucker), famous African American dancers who were known for their contributions to innovation in dance. After the couple would dance together (sometimes Avey danced solo while Jay watched) at home, they would spend hours at dancehalls, only to return home and dance some more. Even more than the dancehalls they frequented, their living room became the locus of their ritual dance practice, a practice that affirmed the aesthetic and value of their Black bodies.

On Sundays, Jay and Avey would listen to their Philco radio as it streamed African American music from bands like The Five Blind Boys. The narrative points out that Sunday was "the day when the phonograph in the living room remained silent" so that Jay and Avey could listen to the radio (124). The radio program they listen to connects them to a larger Black community. Susana Morris argues that the couple's ritual practices "provide a type of spiritual sustenance that supports them individually and as a collective."[313] The collective in this case stretches beyond the other African Americans who are tuned into the same Sunday radio programs as Jay and Avey. Their Sunday domestic dance ritual also subtly connects the Johnsons to their enslaved ancestors and the Sunday dance rituals that were enacted in and with community on slave plantations. Many slaves participated in musical and dance gatherings and performances on Sundays, a day that slaves were not required to work.[314] In their research on Barbados slaves, Jerome S. Handler and Charlotte J. Frisbie note that the "Sunday and Marriage Act" was implemented in 1826 in order to facilitate and encourage Christian indoctrination.[315] Instead, slaves used this time to create their own ritual practices that centered on dance and music. Handler and Frisbie emphasize that, "dances played a central role in the slaves' cultural life."[316] They also note that slaves often used their communal Sunday rituals to commune with their ancestors through grave-site ceremonies.[317] Marshall again invokes historical reconnection through the body during the narration of Jay and Avey's domestic dance ritual. Sunday was "truly their day" to authentically express their identities without adulteration or inhibition. Like their enslaved ancestors who created unique communal practices that revolved around Africanist dance and rejected pure Christian indoctrination, Jay and Avey, too, learn how to navigate racist, capitalist society through music and dance that pays tribute to rich African American culture. And like Avey's ancestors on Tatem Island who carry on the Ring Shout in order to honor the traditions that enslaved Africans initiated centuries ago, Jay and Avey participate in African American cultural practices of dance that have deep roots. Jay and Avey's narrative and physical connections through dance to significant historical moments of the African diaspora celebrate African diasporic resistance to American materialism and hegemony.

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[313] Ibid, 26.

[314] See Jerome S. Handler and Charlotte J. Frisbie, "Aspects of Slave Life in Barbados: Music and Its Cultural Context," *Caribbean Studies* 11.4 (1972): 19.

[315] Ibid.

For a while, Jay and Avey are able to employ their domestic dance ritual as a means to lessen the blow of being Black and desiring middle-class status in mid-20th century New York, but they painfully abandon it for the promises of materialism. Susana Morris argues that, "Black families can flourish by retaining aspects of their heritage even as they navigate mainstream American society."[318] Indeed, Avey and Jay are happy for years doing this, but they eventually accept the Eurocentric values of materiality that accompany middle class life, and which are not compatible with their desire to retain the African parts of themselves. Two acts signal this acceptance. First, Jay's eventual acceptance of American capitalist ideals—which often demand sacrifice of self in order to uphold—so that he and Avey can live in a larger house and acquire more possessions, squashes the couple's ability to continue their domestic dance ritual. Second,

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[316] Ibid, 14.
[317] Ibid, 15.
[318] Morris, *Close Kin*, 26.

Avey’s hate for the pregnant, Black image she sees of herself in the mirror signifies her acceptance of white beauty standards, which further alienates her from her Black community and contributes to the eventual decline of the couple’s domestic dance ritual. Avey frequently compares herself to “the white salesgirls at the store [...] with their flat stomach and unswollen breasts” (91). Her dissatisfaction with her inferior physical appearance leads to what Keith Sandiford refers to as Avey’s “nagging tirades against the constricted quality of her life as a mother and wife.”[319] The root of these tirades, which Sandiford does not acknowledge, is Avey’s belief that, as a Black woman, she is not enough. According to Dorothy Hamer Denniston, "Marshall illustrates the problem inherent in accepting Euro-American values that displace those of traditional African culture. Their lives are torn asunder by the sacrifices they feel they must make, but they are sacrifices that are far too costly.”[320]

The Johnsons sacrifice their connection to a larger Black community within the African diaspora by abandoning that which connects them to it. Not only do they stop dancing in their living room, but Jay, driven by his newly adopted ideology that is upheld by both racism and classism, opposes any African American ritual or practice that is rooted in music and dance, which subtly suggests the inherent culture-affirming power of embodied practice. Jay, “speaking of his own in the harsh voice that treated them as a race apart,” proclaims, “If it was left to me I’d close down every dancehall in Harlem and burn every drum! That’s the only way these Negroes out here’ll begin making any progress” (140, 132). According to the narrative, “Even things that had once been important to him, that he needed, such as the music, the old blues records that had restored him at the end of the day, found themselves abandoned on the sidelines, out of his line of vision” (115). Jay’s outright dismissal of music and dance ritual calls into question the notion that African Americans can maintain diasporic connection to a global Black community while at the same time pursuing Western, capitalist ideals. Avey asks this question as she reflects on her marriage to Jay in her hotel room:

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[319] Keith A Sandiford, “Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow:* The Reluctant Heiress or Whose Life is it Anyway?,” *Black American Literature Forum* 20.4 (Winter 1986): 383.
[320] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 134.

> Would it have been possible to have done both? That is, to have wrested, as they had done over all those years, the means needed to rescue them from Halsey Street and to see the children through, while preserving, safeguarding, treasuring those things that had come down to them over the generations, which had defined them in a particular way. The most vivid, the most valuable part of themselves! (139)

Barbara Christian points out that Marshall "is able to maintain a tension between black peoples' need to survive and develop in America, and their even more important need to sustain themselves."[321] Jay and Avey clearly sacrifice the latter for the former, but the novel intimates that it doesn't have to be this way, and Avey is given the opportunity to make different, diaspora-affirming choices in her older years through her recognition that "she and Jay could have managed both" (139).

During this period in Avey's hotel room in which she goes back in time and place to her marriage to Jay, the spirits of her ancestors are no longer outwardly present (she stops dreaming of Aunt Cuney), but the essence of their teachings about historical lineage and connection remain both potent and persistent. Avey realizes that in order for her and Jay to have moved up in socioeconomic class and simultaneously maintain their connection to their Black community, "it would have called for an awareness of the worth of what they possessed" (139). Avey's possession by her ancestors and her awakening in this second section of the novel usher her into this awareness in the same kind of way that Jay is escorted into consciousness by Erzulie, Oya, and Yemoja when he and Avey make love. Even though Jay and Avey's domestic dance ritual "had protected them and put them in possession of a kind of power," because it "join[ed] them to the vast unknown lineage that had made their being possible," it only marginally connected them to a larger (and unknown) diasporic community, and was therefore never sustainable (137). Avey's possession and eventual connection to her people on Carriacou make this lineage known and join her with community.

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[321] Christian, "Ritualistic Process and the Structure of Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," in *Black Feminist Criticism*, 153.

Jay and Avey's rigid separation of domestic and communal spheres is problematic, and underscores Marshall's contention that Africanist embodiment practices like dance take on greater power and meaning when done in community. As I argued in my first chapter about Selina in *Brown Girls*, and as Eugenia Collier remarks about all of Marshall's works, "the individual is made whole only by awareness and acceptance of this massive community [of] Black people worldwide."[322] Yes, Jay and Avey's domestic dance ritual connects them to other African Americans and their enslaved ancestors, but this connection is temporary, as evidenced by their seemingly swift abandonment of dance, Jay's physical and ideological changes, and Avey's disconnection from the wisdom of her body. Avey laments the fact that she and Jay often lived separately from their Black community, "avoiding the headline pictures on the front pages of the newspapers" about the Civil Rights Movement, of which she refused to be a part, because she either couldn't or refused to see the connection between "the tanks and Stoner guns in the streets of Detroit," the "half-crazed woman from Halsey Street" who was her neighbor, and her daughter Marion alongside thousands of others at "the Poor People's March in Washington" (140). Keeping within their domestic space, even when engaged in dance ritual, the Johnsons effectively cut themselves off from the outside Black world. Avey repeats this same mistake aboard the cruise ship by locking herself in her cabin to the point of ignorance of the racism—and from her own friends—that exists outside of her doors.

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[322] Eugenia Collier, "The Closing of the Circle: Movement from Division to Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Edition*, ed. Mari Evans, (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 296.

This separation of private, domestic space from communal space is reminiscent of Aunt Cuney's disavowal of the Ring Shout when Avey was a young girl. Just as *Praisesong* condemns Aunt Cuney for abandoning communal dance ritual in favor of personal ambitions and feelings, so, too, does the novel condemn Avey and Jay for essentially living in an insulated bubble and participating in a somewhat vacuous dance ritual that bears only abstract meaning to them in regards to their place within a larger African diaspora. At first, neither Aunt Cuney nor Avey recognize the thread between the Ring Shout and preserving African diasporic identity; and neither Jay nor Avey recognize the thread between their domestic dance ritual and belonging to an African diasporic community. The consciousness of these threads is what the narrative seeks to bring about in its characters.

With the help of Aunt Cuney's spirit leading her through the Caribbean, Avey has the opportunity to develop this diasporic consciousness and make amends. Joyce Pettis contends that "black cultural expressions—jazz, blues, poetry, dance—are valued for their stabilizing qualities in the psychological space of one's home. Dance, in particular, plays a major role in Avatara's psychic reintegration, years after Halsey Street."[323] While her observation about the "stabilizing qualities" of African American art, music, and dance are valid, Pettis disregards the fact that Avey's "psychic reintegration" occurs during a communal dance ritual, which is quite different from the domestic dance ritual in her living room that she and Jay used to enact every Sunday by themselves. The narrative repeatedly hints at the fact that Avey is unaware of her body and embodied ritual as important ancestral links. When she witnesses the Ring Shout from afar as a young girl, she intuitively desires to join in, but never follows through with her intuitions. When she makes love with Jay, only *he* senses the African deities that live within her flesh. When she dances with Jay in their living room, she fails, at least initially, to realize that their ritual has the potential to connect them to a larger Black community. And when Avey, guided by her ancestors, awakens to her disembodiment and sees "a woman whose face, reflected in a window or a mirror" who "she sometimes failed to recognize," she lashes out at the world by screaming "*Too much!*" over and over in her hotel room (141). Choosing materialism over her own unique heritage has resulted in Avey denying her ancestral lineage, her given name ("The names 'Avey' and 'Avatara were those of someone who was no longer present"), and her connection to the African diaspora ("But had she been any better [than Jay]?") (140, 141). Avey's repeated decree that her past choices have become too much to bear signals her awakening for which the second section of *Praisesong* is named ("Sleeper's Wake"). Her decree also bears resemblance to the "shrieks or involuntary utterances" common during a *Vodou* possession,[324] as her enraged repetition of it causes her to "collapse onto the bed" (145). They signal the success of the possession in getting Avey to view her life from a new perspective. With the help of her ancestors' disturbance of her bodily functions, she at last comes to recognize her body as a potential site of ancestral wisdom, historical connection, and, as Susan Rogers argues, "cultural expression and memory."[325]

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[323] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*, 124.

Rebirth and Dahomey Warrior Women

While *Praisesong* advocates for African diasporic wholeness, it also highlights Avey's remaking of herself as one of its central features. In her interview with Sylvia Baer, Marshall claims that Avey "takes a journey back over her life to see where she has, in her feverish climb up the ladder, disowned and rejected aspects of herself that would make her a more interesting and a more vital person. She's able to recapture that sense of self, that sense of history, which then permits her to move to another level in her life."[326] Numerous *Vodou* scholars hint at the potential for possession to remake, awaken, or revive the possessed. For example, Joan Dayan argues that *Vodou* possession constitutes "a kind of double movement of attenuation and expansion."[327] We see this in Avey's initial resistance to her possession, and then in her dramatic surrender to it, giving herself over to the growth it imbues. Kenaz Filan characterizes *Vodou* possession as bringing about a "sheer conscious-rending rush of power" in which the possessed is forced to alter her point of view, literally seeing through the eyes of the lwa, and therefore change her perspective.[328] Both Dayan and Filan mention the communal significance of *Vodou* possession. Dayan claims that, "the possessed gives herself up to become an instrument in a social and collective drama."[329] Filan notes that in *Vodou* belief, "'the individual' is actually a collective."[330]

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[324] Kenaz Filan, *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2007), 62.

[325] Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory," 77.

We can then understand Avey's rebirth or remaking of her sense of self and connection to diasporic history through the body (as brought about by possession) as significant beyond her own personal identity. In an interview with Sandi Russell, Marshall makes this clear: "it's not enough for my women characters to be caught up in a search for self. What I try to do at the same time is to *suggest* that their search is linked to this larger quest which has to do with the liberation of us as a people" (emphasis, hers).[331] As Joyce Pettis contends, Avey's "journey to Carriacou is among the most important [of her journeys], because it restores her to herself and to her community."[332] I would complicate Pettis's claim about restoration and argue instead that

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[326] Baer, "Holding onto the Vision," 119.
[327] Joan Dayan, "Vodoun, or The Voice of the Gods," in *Sacred Possessions*, 19.
[328] Filan, *The Haitian Voodoo Handbook, 64*.
[329] Dayan, "Vodoun, or The Voice of the Gods," 19.
[330] Filan, 64.
[331] Sandi Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 82.
[332] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness, 125*.

Avey is formally initiated into African diasporic community for the first time in her life when she travels to the Caribbean. Even though she used to tell the Ibo Landing tale with the same gusto as her aunt and participate in domestic dance ritual with Jay, Avey always existed marginally as a member of a larger Black community. Even though Avey is described as having been connected through navel threads to others in the diaspora, she only ever vaguely expresses awareness of what her participation in those rituals meant for her communal membership; that is until her bodily possession by her ancestors Aunt Cuney and Avatara brings about her rebirth.

One of the primary ways in which Avey remakes herself and is therefore initiated into her diasporic community, outside of the Big Drum Ritual and the Beg Pardon that come later in the novel, is through her subtle embodiment of the Dahomey warrior women. The novel only makes one direct reference to these 18th and 19th century warrior women of West Africa, but imagery that invokes them is repeated as a way to reconnect Avey to these women whose "main purpose in life was to make war."[333] Instead of waging a literal war, Avey comes to wage a symbolic war against Euro-American racist and oppressive ideology by reinventing herself in the likeness of the Dahomey warrior women. Eugenia DeLamotte makes a compelling point when she claims, "It is crucial to remember that it is not only Avey's connection with Africa with which she has lost touch; it is her 'rage' at white injustice and violence."[334] The novel reveals that Avey's connection back to Africa reignites this rage. The Dahomey warrior women continued a tradition of African "warrior queens" dating back to the 1st century, as they fearlessly fought alongside men to defend their kingdom.[335] According to Stanley Alpern, Dahomey warrior women were skilled at "hunting, dancing and instrumental music."[336] In first-hand accounts of these warriors, they have been described as "brave, courageous, valorous, valiant, fearless, intrepid, [...] fierce, ferocious, furious, [...] disciplined, [and] devoted."[337] These are all qualities Avey must harness for her rebirth.

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[333] Stanley B. Alpern, *Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey* (New York: New York University Press, 1998). 11.
[334] Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom: The Fiction of Paule Marshall* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 199), 96.
[335] Alpern, *Amazons of Black Sparta*, 1.

The novel alludes to these fearless warrior women in the midst of Avey's awakening, and reveals that their guttural cries live within her: "A hint of the angry, deep-throated cry she might have uttered as she rushed forth slashing and slaying like some Dahomey woman warrior of old could suddenly be heard on the balcony of the hotel room. But it was only a hint; the full, terrible sound was quickly suppressed" (130). In this moment, Avey is attempting to recover language of resistance in the spirit of the Dahomey warrior women who "learned to imitate the cries of birds as part of a secret language that was used to give orders during combat that their enemies could not understand."[338] As bell hooks argues, "The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves—to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action—a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle."[339] Avey is navigating her awakening through an attempt to create language that is representative of her bodily experiences. bell hooks contends about this creation of language:

> The most important of our work—the work of liberation—demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice.
>
> Fundamentally, the oppressed person who was moved from object to subject speaks to us

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[336] Ibid, 11.
[337] Ibid, 161.
[338] Robert B. Edgerton, *Warrior Women: The Amazons of Dahomey and the Nature of War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 28.
[339] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (*Boston, MA: Southend Press, 1989), 28.

> in a new way. This speech, this liberatory voice, emerges only when the oppressed experience self-recovery.[340]

In the context of the novel, Avey's "self-recovery," or, as bell hooks defines it, her "expression of [her] awakening to critical consciousness," and her rebirth are one and the same.[341] As hooks suggests, Avey must become an active participant in her rebirth. Avey must, as Marshall asserts, "use language as a means, as a kind of weapon."[342] Both her real and surrogate ancestors, including the Dahomey warrior women, can only guide her so far. She must embody their qualities of fearlessness, determination, and perseverance in order to fashion a new voice that will serve to reconnect her to the African diaspora.

We again see Avey's attempt at language creation at Jay's funeral when she lunges at his dead body. As her "gloved hand" turns into a fist, "the first note of a colossal cry could be heard forming in her throat" (133). She cannot quite express what she wants, and her cry is stifled by another funeral goer who guides her away from Jay's body. Years later, in her hotel room in the Caribbean, Avey can finally let out the cry that has been hidden inside her all along. Her cry, which at first begins with "wild sobbing," abruptly grows into her battle decree of "*Too much!*" (135, 142). In the spirit of a Dahomey warrior woman, Avey goes to battle with the image of herself she no longer recognizes:

> Suddenly, with a cry that again startled the darkness holding the wake with her on the balcony, Avey Johnson was lunging out. It was the same abrupt and threatening movement that had sent her surging forward over Jerome Johnson's bier that day in the church. This time, though, there was no one to restrain her, so that the moment she sprang forward still seated on the edge of the recliner, her gloved fist came up, and she struck the

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[340] Ibid, 29.
[341] Ibid, 30.
[342] Elam, "To be in the World," 153.

> wall of air just in front of her. Over and over, in rage of tears, she assaulted the dark and empty air, trying with each blow to get at the derisive face she saw projected there. Her own face was tear-streaked and distorted in the light reaching it from the surrounding balconies, and she could be heard uttering [a] murderous, growl-like sound. (142)

This scene is reminiscent of the climactic scene in *Brown Girl* in which Selina strikes out against her image in the mirror as part of her process of Black identity formation. Eugenia DeLamotte suggests, "The form of speech Avey recovers in her outburst, described as a 'litany,' heralds her move closer to one of the most powerful springs of collective speech in her heritage, the world of the African-American church."[343] Not only does Avey's outcry provide her a cathartic release that helps her mourn the loss of her husband and herself, it connects her spiritually to those who came before her, who, in an effort to resist oppression, created their own new forms of language that manifested as dance ritual, ring shout, praisesong, and *Vodou* and other Afro-Caribbean religions.[344] At the end of the novel, Avey, like the Dahomey warrior women, is armed with the knowledge of her ancestral lineage. She goes forth into a battle of rewriting the history of her people by disseminating the truth she has come to learn on her journey.

The Dahomey warrior woman cry that takes up residence in Avey's body until she is ready to let it out was there, too, when she gave birth to her daughter Marion, a symbolic birth that indirectly moors Avey's body to African diasporic consciousness long before her awareness of it. She recalls her difficult labor:

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[343] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 97.

[344] *Vodou* beliefs and practices can be traced back to Dahomey religious beliefs and practices, as a large number of Haitian slaves originated from the Dahomey kingdom. This connection proves to be significant for Avey, because Marshall's allusion to the Dahomey warrior women further tie Avey to *Vodou* and other forms of Afro-Caribbean and African American rituals and practices that have as their basic intent a desire to maintain and celebrate Africanist principles. For more information about the history of *Vodou*, see Andre J. Louis, *Voodoo in Haiti: Catholicism, Protestantism, & A Model of Effective Ministry in the Context of Voodoo in Haiti* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2007).

> Then, her arms already bound at her sides, she had been left to lie for hours screaming up into the antiseptic lights of the labor room. From time to time the nurse had appeared to feel the high mound of her stomach and chide her about the noise. And the doctor the few times he came simply repeated after examining her that she wasn't ready yet. (101)

If we recall the African deities inhabiting Avey's birth canal, a significant reading of this scene emerges. From Avey's culturally and historically infused vagina, she births a culturally and historically connected daughter. In other words, Avey births African diasporic consciousness. The narration of Avey's intense labor signifies the difficulty in birthing this consciousness. Her nurse and doctor, authority figures who we might rightfully assume are white (after all, the novel reveals that "it would be years before they started hiring colored" salesgirls), collude to suppress Avey's outcries, which the novel suggests to be bodily expressions of resistance. Many scholars have rightly noted that Marion is the socially active and politically conscious woman that Avey never was, but none have specifically discussed her birthing scene.[345] The fact that Avey gives birth to a daughter like Marion in an arguably hostile and repressive environment is significant, because it underscores one of the novel's most hopeful messages that, despite the difficulties of creating and spreading African diasporic consciousness, the potential of this consciousness is as fertile as Avey's womb. The conditions surrounding Marion's birth are parallel to the conditions surrounding the Ibo slaves who refused to stay in America. Gay Wilentz asserts, "The legend of the Africans [...] is part of an orature which affirms strength and positive action in the midst of oppression."[346] Marion's birth can therefore be read as not only an affirmation of, but a continuation of, the Ibo Landing legend.

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[345] Moira Ferguson, for example, argues that Marion is "in tune with her roots and ancestry," which is why she supports the Black Power Movement and visits Africa (65). Moira Ferguson, *A Human Necklace: The African Diaspora and Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2013). Anthea Morrison characterizes Marion as "outrageous" and "subversive" in her criticism of Avey's cruise with her white friends (42). Anthea Morrison, "From Africa to 'The Islands': New World Voyages in the Fiction of Maryse Condé and Paule Marshall," in *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian hinterland*, ed. Judith A. Byfield, LaRay Denzer, and Anthea Morrison (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010). Gay Wilentz asserts that Marion "understood the importance of their African heritage despite her parents' rejection" (114). Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*.

Marion's mere existence is made even more miraculous by the fact that Avey tried everything from swallowing the entire "unmarked packet of small brown pills [from] the drugstore" to "douch[ing] one day until it seemed her entire insides had been flushed down the bathtub drain" to "hurl[ing] her body down the steep steps and then up again" in an attempt to abort her (90). Baby Marion has the same resilient and life-affirming qualities as her Ibo ancestors. Avey's understanding of her role as a mother is transformed during the course of her journey. Her spiritual connections back to Africa and her ancestors, as felt through her body, serve to remind Avey of the potential of motherhood to be an integral force in the transmission of history. Patricia Hill Collins asserts that "motherhood can serve as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a belief in Black women's empowerment."[347] When Avey returns to the United States, she enlists the help of Marion to "spread the word" about the African diaspora and its complex history (255). Instead of seeing Marion as a foreign body needing ejection from her body, Avey comes to see Marion as both a rooted part of herself and as an embodiment of the African diaspora. At the end of the novel, Avey assumes a communal mother role, as she plans to create a summer camp for children to learn about the legend of Ibo Landing. By embracing her role as a mother, Avey becomes the activist she never could be when she was younger. Patricia Hill Collins notes, "Motherhood—whether bloodmother, othermother, or community othermother—can be invoked as a symbol of power by African-American women engaged in Black women's community work."[348] Avey's subtle embodiment of Erzulie and the Dahomey warrior women sets up the work Marshall does in *Daughters,* in which all of the lead female characters embody the historical figure of Queen Nanny in significant ways.[349]

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[346] Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*, 103.

[347] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 176.

When the third section of *Praisesong*, "Lave Tete," opens, Avey is both mother and baby. Her maternal instincts draw her from her sleep toward "a baby [who] needed changing," only to realize that she is the baby who needs changing (149). Eugenia DeLamotte suggests that the infantile imagery of Avey in this section serves as a reminder that Avey's "spiritual rebirth must be the return to her sense of herself as a body."[350] In order to appease this demand, Avey must temporarily break from the space of her mind. With her pocketbook emptied of its contents, so, too, is Avey's mind emptied, "a *tabula rasa* upon which a whole new history could be written" (151). Responding to the implications of this moment in the novel, Susan Rogers questions the viability of Avey's emptied mind. Rogers states, "Avey's emotional and physical rebirth, while raising important questions about the cultural identity of African and Caribbean Americans, is disconcerting in terms of the suggestion that it is possible to return to an unmediated state of being, to a *tabula rasa* of mind and body."[351] Indeed, this would be problematic if the novel were suggesting a literal erasure, but Avey's possession is what precipitates this omniscient rendering. As we learn shortly thereafter in the opening of "Lave Tete," Avey still does not exert full ownership over her body or mind. In fact, her possession seems to have intensified since her dream-like remembrances of Jay and their past life on Halsey Street. She has difficulty getting dressed and moves "slow[ly] and clumsily] as a two-year-old just learning how to undress itself," her mind takes much longer than usual to register a hotel clerk repeatedly calling her name, and she stumbles along the beach's shore in a fugue-like state until exhaustion takes over and she is forced to stop at Lebert Joseph's rum shop (151).

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[348] Ibid, 192.

[349] Motherhood as a site of community and, I would add, political work and activism is a theme Marshall becomes even more invested in when she writes *Daughters*. I explore this fully in Chapter Three.

[350] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 100.

[351] Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory," 77.

In light of her possession, the blankness of Avey's mind takes on new meaning. Her blank mind is not symbolic of some kind of erasure of her past experiences as a middle-class American who has rejected her African heritage, as Susan Rogers suggests. Instead, we can read the references to Avey's blank mind as symbolic of her new willingness to reinterpret her past experiences in light of their potential connections to her African heritage. Catherine John notes that, "'Lave Tete' literally implies clearing the head of negative spirits in order to ready up for spirit consciousness."[352] Avey's mind must be "cleared" in order to follow through with the *Vodou* ritual in which she is a participant. In no way does this clearing imply total erasure of past self or memory. Further, during *Vodou* possession, the possessed often becomes a receptacle for the lwa's intentions and traits, and the possessed's actions and words are often guided by the lwa's desires.[353] Avey's sense of having a blank mind when she wakes up from her dreams of the past, then, might also be symbolic of Aunt Cuney's desire to rewrite history from the grave. Avey's blank mind likewise signifies her readiness to continue her Caribbean journey; this readiness and blind following of her body's movements, as initiated by her lwa, lead her to Lebert Joseph, an important character in Avey's journey toward embodiment and historical reconnection.

Papa Legba: The Male Gaze as Trickery

Lebert Joseph first appears to Avey as a "stoop-shouldered old man with one leg shorter than the other [who] limped from behind the screen of leaves" (160). He "reaches out and dr[aws

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[352] John, *Clear Word*, 192-193.
[353] Filan, *The Haitian Voodoo Handbook.*

Avey] in" to his rum shop in an attempt to draw her into his magnetic web of power (157). Lebert Joseph's physical description as an old, somewhat disabled man who owns a rum shop, his deep cultural and ancestral wisdom, and the novel's third section epigraph that asks Papa Legba to open the barrier or gate all connect Lebert Joseph to the *Vodou* spirit Papa Legba. Legba is a *Vodou* lwa who is often invoked at the start of song and dance ritual.[354] According to Sekhmet Ra Em Kht Maat, Legba is "*the* medium for [...] sacred gathering of renewal, rebirth, and redirection."[355] He is "the guardian of crossroads" who facilitates communication between living and spirit worlds.[356] Lebert Joseph, acting in the spirit of Papa Legba, appears during Avey's spiritual journey at a time when she could use additional guidance beyond that of her Tatem ancestors. His knowledge of the Big Drum Ritual and the Beg Pardon facilitate Avey's journey to Carriacou to participate in these rituals. Papa Legba is also the gatekeeper in and of the *Vodou* belief system, so Lebert Joseph also becomes somewhat of an obstacle that Avey must navigate in her transformation. This doubleness of Papa Legba has often been overlooked by scholars.

Many scholars who comment on Lebert Joseph's role in Avey's journey argue that his work is a continuation of the work Aunt Cuney began while Avey was still aboard the cruise ship. For example, Gay Wilentz asserts that Lebert Joseph "visibly becomes the spirit of Cuney as he guides Avey into acknowledging her duty to future generations."[357] Both Barbara Christian and Dorothy Hamer Denniston contend that, while Aunt Cuney functions as Avey's spiritual mother, Lebert Joseph functions as Avey's spiritual father.[358] Joyce Pettis characterizes both Aunt Cuney and Lebert Joseph as "mythical, timeless, sage, androgynous, and futuristic visionaries," joining them together as performing the same function in Avey's life.[359] At various times over the course of Lebert Joseph's meeting with Avey, his intentions do seem to coincide with those of Aunt Cuney: to reunite Avey with her ancestral past through bodily association. In fact, Lebert Joseph appears to have the same ability as Aunt Cuney to control Avey's body in order to accentuate her awakening.

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[354] Sekhmet Ra Em Kht Maat, *"Legba,"* in *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, Vol. 1. ed. Carole Boyce Davies (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 625.

[355] Ibid.

[356] David Leeming and Jake Page, *God: Myths of the Male Divine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41.

[357] Gay Wilentz, *Binding Cultures, 111*.

[358] Christian, "Ritualistic Process," 154 and Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall,* 139.

When Avey first lands in his rum shop, before she even sees Lebert Joseph, the coolness of the shop's air, which is in stark contrast to the oppressive heat outside, becomes "like a soothing hand on her head, and it remained there, gently drawing away the heat and slowing down both her pulse and the whirling ring of harsh light behind her closed eyes" (159). According to Gerdès Fleurant, Papa Legba "knows how to take his children out of the hot sun," which is symbolic of the long journey people of the African diaspora must take to go home.[360] Papa Legba accompanies them on their long, arduous journeys, and protects them from the heat of the sun as they make their way across the globe.[361] When Avey is in the rum shop, Lebert Joseph temporarily appeases her physical ailments by giving her rum and coconut water, which serve to symbolically connect her to both Papa Legba and the Caribbean. The rum and coconut water cocktail cools Avey from the inside out and awakens her body from the vertigo and confusion she had been experiencing: "Before she had finished half the glass, it had reached out to her dulled nerves, rousing and at the same time soothing them; and it was even causing the pall over her mind to lift again" (174). This scene harkens back to the scene in *Brown Girl,* in which Selina drinks the rum Suggie offers her; the effects of the Caribbean drink are immediate and sensual. Both Selina and Avey prepare their physical bodies for transformation and awakening by consuming Caribbean culture and ritual through the body. We again see Avey's body responding positively to her choices to reconnect with her African diasporic heritage when she agrees to go with Lebert Joseph to Carriacou for the Big Drum Ritual: "Finally—and as she said the words she realized that the strange discomfort in her stomach was gone and her head had stopped aching" (184). The narrative rewards Avey with bodily ease for her choices that please her ancestors, both real and surrogate, supporting *Vodou* and West African beliefs systems where "the elderly are revered" and the ancestors are honored.[362] Both Aunt Cuney and Lebert Joseph serve to remind Avey of the ancestors' importance; they remind her by taking control over Avey's body and mind. Avey's continual movement toward Carriacou suggests that possession by the ancestors is working.

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[359] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness,* 118.
[360] Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits,* 78.
[361] Ibid.

These readings of Lebert Joseph and Aunt Cuney as two versions of the same ancestor or spirit become problematic, however, when we consider the fact that Papa Legba is, at his most basic functional level, a trickster figure. Robert Pelton asserts that, "Legba is at once an agent of disruption and an agent of reconciliation."[363] He goes on to note that Legba "'enjoys' causing trouble," in the midst of carrying out his reconciliatory role.[364] David Leeming and Jake Page contend that the African trickster figure is most notably a "troublemaker" above any other role.[365] So even though Lebert Joseph plays a pivotal role in Avey's journey toward "reconciliation of the conflicting aspects of her African-American personality,"[366] he also disrupts her journey in significant ways, fulfilling his role as Papa Legba, the trickster. If we, as scholars, are willing to make the claim that Lebert Joseph is an avatar of Papa Legba, then we must also be willing to investigate the complexity of this manifestation in the novel, and what that complexity means for Avey. Over the course of his short visit with Avey in the rum shop,

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[362] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*, 117.
[363] Robert D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 75.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Leeming and Page, *God, 43*.
[366] Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*, 111.

Lebert Joseph's appearance changes from masculine to feminine, from a "diminutive figure in a worn shirt" to "tall enough to reach up and easily touch the thatch overhead" (171, 179). Lebert Joseph tricks Avey into confessing her ailments: "It was the place: the special light that filled it and the silence, as well as the bowed figure across the table who didn't appear to be listening. They were drawing the words from her, forcing them out one by one" (170). Karen Keim contends that, because Lebert Joseph's trickery "jolt[s Avey] into a new appreciation of a former life," his antics are well-intentioned and worthwhile.[367] However, Lebert Joseph's sudden changes in appearance and temperament confuse Avey to the point of acting and speaking out of character. She plainly does not know how to act in front of this dynamic, powerful figure. His intense gaze (his method of trickery), rather than his words, is what causes Avey to change her mind about visiting Carriacou.

While the spirits of Aunt Cuney and ancestor Avatara possess Avey's body in order to realign her with matrilineal heritage, Lebert Joseph uses the male gaze and his trickster qualities in order to both intervene in and control this realignment. Lebert Joseph's gaze becomes his method of trickery. Karen Keim connects trickery with the physical disorder Avey feels since her dream of Aunt Cuney, yet only points to Lebert Joseph as a trickster figure in the novel.[368] Lebert Joseph's trickery is much more direct, and manifests in the form of gazing. The following brief excerpts capture Lebert Joseph's gaze:

> And why had he looked at her like that just now? (168)

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[367] Karen R. Keim, "Revelation Through Trickery: Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la* médaille and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,"* in *Tongue and Mother Tongue: African Literature and the Perpetual Quest for Identity*, ed. Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith and Daniel P. Kunene (Trenton, NY: Africa World Press, 2002), *189.*
[368] Ibid.

> From the moment she started recounting the dream his head had come up, his eyes had opened and he had begun quietly studying her from beneath his lowered brow. His gaze never left her face. (171)
>
> "You know," he said, "I watched you good last night at the fete [...]" (252)

Each time Lebert Joseph gazes at her, Avey feels uncomfortable, as if she's being scrutinized, objectified, and her body assessed for its fleshy worth. Lebert Joseph determines if Avey is worthy of being invited to Carriacou to participate in the Big Drum Ritual. Laura Mulvey, in her seminal essay on gaze theory, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," asserts that the male gaze relies upon the "active/looking, passive/looked-at" dichotomy that helps to define "the ideology of the patriarchal order."[369] Lebert Joseph seeks to maintain this patriarchal order by always making Avey the passive object of his gaze and himself the active onlooker. As bell hooks points out in "The Oppositional Gaze," this dichotomy and "represent[ations of] women […] as the object of a phallocentric gaze" are problematic."[370] *Praisesong* later challenges these representations by destabilizing the power of Lebert Joseph's gaze. Even further, in "Selling Hot Pussy," hooks argues that sexualized, objectified, and truncated representations of Black women's bodies in popular culture expressions through film, music videos, and song lyrics, harken back to "a racist past when the bodies of black women were commodity."[371] Lebert Joseph's male gaze serves to remind us of the history of how Black female bodies have been both represented and gazed upon in an attempt to uphold patriarchal and racist ideology.

Lebert Joseph's gaze assists him in maintaining patriarchal order, as his notions of family conform to a patriarchal hierarchy of sorts. Lebert Joseph clearly values patrilineal heritage, as he proclaims to Avey that he is the "father or uncle or grandfather, granduncle or great-grand-father" to all the Josephs on the island (163). When he visits Carriacou, Lebert Joseph stays in a different house than his daughter and the other women of his family and doesn't participate in "women's work," maintaining distinct gender spheres. Papa Legba, too, is associated with patriarchal order. According to Robert Pelton, Papa Legba is representative of the phallic and patriarchal order, as he can exert his power to have sex with any woman he wants.[372] Papa Legba is also associated with phallic dancing and having intercourse with multiple women, many instances of which are violent in nature and rely on trickery.[373] It is easy to overlook Papa Legba's association with phallic imagery and symbolism, but Lebert Joseph explicitly connects himself to this association when he reveals to Avey that men visit Carriacou to "fete—dance, drink rum, run 'bout after women" (164). The narrative indicates that Lebert Joseph said this "with a roguish smile that revealed the few broken teeth he had left," implying his complicity in the practice of chasing after women (165). Robert Pelton notes that, "even as the Fon know that Legba is not the prince of darkness, they are aware of his daimonic explosiveness."[374] There is a dark side to Papa Legba. Although I am not making a case for a reading of Lebert Joseph as wielding this same dark power in the novel, I am suggesting that Marshall is aware of Papa Legba's multivarious layers when she crafts Lebert Joseph as a guide for Avey. He is not as one-dimensional as some scholars have made him out to be; he is not *only* a gatekeeper.

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[369] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

[370] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: Southend Press, 1992), 126.

[371] bell hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace" in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 114.

Marshall's allusion to the manipulative and trickster figure of Papa Legba serves as a reminder that Black female bodies can at once be sites of historical connection, ancestral wisdom, and cultural heritage; *and* sites on which dominant patriarchal ideology is inscribed. As a feminist writer with a feminist agenda, Marshall is keenly aware of the tension between these forces. She directs our awareness to this complex reality through Lebert Joseph's gaze, which becomes both his method of guidance *and* trickery when it comes to Avey's transformation. Scholars have noted positively Lebert Joseph's connection to *li gain connaissance*, which is a "way of seeing," according to the novel, that "went beyond mere sight and ways of knowing that oustripped ordinary intelligence" (172).[375] However, the narrative reveals that, even though Lebert Joseph "had passed on to [his daughter Rosalie] his special powers of seeing and knowing," the gaze is reserved solely for him (218). There is no place in the narrative in which Rosalie (or her female relatives for that matter) gazes upon Avey and her body in the way that Lebert Joseph does, even though she has ample opportunity to do so as she prepares Avey's body for the dance ritual. When considering Laura Mulvey's and bell hooks's work on gaze theory, these places in the novel in which Lebert Joseph exerts a male gaze over Avey reveal themselves to be not only reflections of his ancestral knowledge and kinship with the all-knowing Ibos, but also representations of Avey's body as a readable, inscribable site on which Lebert Joseph attempts to reinforce his place as patriarch of the island.

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[372] Pelton, *The Trickster*, 88.
[373] Ibid, 86.
[374] Ibid, 88.

Marshall's texts have varied layers of meaning, and *Praisesong* is certainly no exception. By invoking Papa Legba, a trickster spirit associated with the phallus, through the character of Lebert Joseph, Marshall questions any practice or belief system that undermines the female community and matrilineal heritage that Aunt Cuney and ancestor Avatara embody. As Marshall notes in her memoir, *Triangular Road,* the Big Drum Ritual and Nation Dance are only performed by women,[376] and it is from and within this community of women that Avey "recovers something of her true-true self."[377] Missy Kubitschek notes that "the call and Avey's final goal are embodied in the female," and that Avey's guiding forces throughout her journey to cultural and historical embodiment are all women.[378] It becomes problematic that Avey must ask permission of Lebert Joseph, or Papa Legba, to open the bars of her body.[379] Kubitschek contends that Lebert Joseph, by embodying female dance qualities when he dances the Juba, "becomes female during the dance."[380] Dancing in the form of a woman might be yet another way in which Lebert Joseph, channeling the qualities of Papa Legba, attempts to insert himself into this female community. Instead, by joining in community with the women of the island, Avey gathers her power from them and returns Lebert Joseph's gaze through dance. Marshall often inspires messages of hope in her novels, but she also frequently warns her diasporic community against practices and ideologies that either purposefully or inadvertently rupture healthy relationships between Black men and women and, at their core, devalue women.

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[375] For example, Dorothy Hamer Denniston connects Lebert Joseph to the Ibos and refers to him as Avey's "spiritual father" (139). Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall.* Joyce Pettis notes this passage about Lebert Joseph's way of seeing to support her claim that he "becomes Avey's primary director in both her literal and spiritual journeys" (121). Pettis, *Toward Wholeness.* Barbara Christian connects Lebert Joseph to the "elders in Africa" who could "interpret dreams" (155). Christian, "Ritualistic Process." Missy Kubitschek claims that Lebert Joseph's *li gain connaissance* can be attributed to the fact that he is associated with Papa Legba (88). Missy Dehn Kubitschek, *Claiming the Heritage: African-American Women's Novels and History* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991). Paulette Brown-Hinds argues that Lebert Joseph is "the central 'ancestor' figure in the text" who helps Avey on her journey toward wholeness (114). Brown-Hinds, "In the Spirit." Karen Keim attributes Lebert Joseph's mystical ways of knowing to his status as a trickster figure, which is more in line with my reading of him here, but she is the exception, and her analysis isn't as forceful or explicit as mine. Keim, "Revelation Through Trickery."

The Middle Passage and Embodied Historical Memory

Before Avey can participate in the Big Drum Ritual on the island of Carriacou, she must first journey across the sea in a boat, a journey that viscerally connects Avey to her African ancestors who endured The Middle Passage through embodied historical memory. By recalling The Middle Passage through Avey's body, *Praisesong* contends that embodied connection to the

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[376] In her ethnographic research of the Big Drum Ritual, Lorna Daniel also confirms that the dance is "controlled by mature women," even when men are present or participating (23). See Lorna McDaniel, *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou: Praisesongs in Rememory of Flight* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998).
[377] Marshall, *Triangular Road*, 147.
[378] Missy Kubitschek, "Paule Marshall's Women on Quest," *Black African Literature Forum* 21.1/2 (Spring-Summer 1987): 51.
[379] One epigraph of section 3 of the novel comes from Randall Jarrell's poem, "The Woman at Washington Zoo," in which a female onlooker at the zoo calls out, "Oh bars of my own body, open, open, open!" so that her real self can be seen.
[380] Kubitschek, "Paule Marshall's Women on Quest," 52.

African diaspora is not only possible through embodied practices like dance ritual, but also through embodied memory. In her work on the African diaspora, Hershini Bhana Young attempts to redefine the diaspora to stretch beyond the geographic places where Africans ended up after either enslavement or migration. According to Young, “This is a flesh and blood diaspora, closer to home, embedded in the dense structures of memory,” and we should “redefine the black body and move toward theorizations of it as a *collective*, remembering body.”[381] In her ethnographic study of the Cultural Wellness Center (CWC) in Minneapolis, Minnesota—a center that seeks to maintain strong ties to Africa—Jacqueline Copeland-Carson discovered this same insistence on memory.[382] In her interview with Akbar, a CWC “African Leader and Elder,” he contends, “Africans have gone through a total erasure. But the memory cannot be erased. This is difficult to understand because it’s almost totally outside the European paradigm and conception of ‘history.’ There is a consciousness that is there that cannot be erased. It’s more than Africans’ combined history and culture—it’s their memory of it. Part of the CWC’s work is to activate this memory.”[383] This activation happens through “activities [that] were designed to cultivate and introduce [...] African bodily practices as primary tools for reactivating dormant, embodied Africanness.”[384] In *Praisesong*, Marshall does the work that Young and the CWC call for, as she reminds us that the diaspora, and particularly the history of it, exists deep within the flesh and bones of its members. Avey’s literal body stands in for the figurative collective black diasporic body. As Young notes, “collective memory is therefore not an artifact of the past but an ongoing critical interventionist force that enables us to address the thorny problems of present-day society, where black bodies function not only as individuals but also as metonyms for larger historical forces that constitute social bodies."[385] Avey's journey across the sea to Carriacou is a pivotal moment in the awakening of her diasporic consciousness, which was initiated by her ancestors' possession of her body.

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[381] Hershini Bhana Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text, and the Black Diasporic Body* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 1-2.
[382] Jacqueline Copeland-Carson, *Creating Africa in America: Translocal Identity in an Emerging World City* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
[383] Quoted in Copeland-Carson, *Creating Africa*, 146-147.
[384] Copeland-Carson, *Creating Africa*, 147.

When Avey journeys aboard the *Emanuel C*, she is reminded of childhood memories that, though they didn't at the time, now reveal her connection to the diaspora. First, she remembers her family's annual boat trip up the Hudson River in which they gathered and danced together like "the elderly folk inside perform[ing] the Ring Shout" in Tatem (190). Avey first connects her existence as having come from the coded language, "the cut-eyes and the private smiles" of her parents (190). This imagery of rooted connection thickens, as Avey comes to "feel what seemed to be hundreds of slender threads streaming out from her navel and from the place where her heart was to enter those around her. And the threads went out not only to people she recognized from the neighborhood but to those she didn't know as well, such as the roomers just up from the South and the small group of West Indians whose odd accent called to mind Gullah talk" (190). Avey feels physically tied to the people of her diaspora through the grounding centers of her navel and her heart. Hortense Spillers attests to the fact that slaves "developed, time and time again, certain ethical and sentimental features that tied her and him, *across* the landscape to others, [...] of the same and different blood in a common fabric of memory and inspiration."[386] In retrospect, these childhood boat journeys were all rehearsals for Avey's present journey to Carriacou where, like her family and the other Hudson River goers of her past, she journeys "to lay claim" to her own body and the body of the diaspora (192). Avey's next memory is of when she was a little girl attending church. Reverend Morrissey's sermon about spiritual bereftness now takes on a new meaning for Avey. The call and response format of the sermon again connects Avey to the Ring Shout back in Tatem. Avey's final individual memory of when she overate at the Coney Island zoo as a young girl and suffered diarrhea as a result reminds Avey of her overindulgences, beginning with when she was just seven or eight years old. These overindulgences eventually sever those silken threads that connect Avey to other people, her people, in the diaspora through her navel and heart. Avey learns, however, that those threads were not severed; she had merely lost sensation of their existence. Her physically demanding trip aboard the boat to Carriacou reconnects her to these sensations and the significance of the diasporic threads.

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[385] Young, *Haunting Capital*, 89.
[386] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer 1987): 75.

Avey's individual and familial memories of her childhood transmogrify into historical, collective memory of The Middle Passage as she journeys to Carriacou. Hershini Bhana Young contends that Avey's individual memories exist alongside collective memory of The Middle Passage; however, the narrative makes a clear segue from these individual memories to collective memory; the two types of memories are distinct and separate.[387] Courtney Thorsson productively intervenes when she asserts that, "having found what she needed in her individual past, Avey is ready to access a collective past."[388] This segue, or transmogrification, is catalyzed by Avey's physical reaction to the boat passage, in which she is afflicted with nearly unbearable vomiting and diarrhea. Avey's intense corporeal experience aboard the *Emanuel C* serves to galvanize her connection with her enslaved ancestors. Avey's body becomes the site on which the historical memory of The Middle Passage is both remembered and performed. In his seminal work about embodied memory, Paul Connerton asserts that, "in habitual memory, the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body."[389] Further, he argues that "we can also preserve the past deliberately without explicitly re-presenting it in words and images. Our bodies, which in commemorations stylistically re-enact an image of the past."[390] Avey's experience on board is expressed in the narrative as experienced through her senses. Her bodily sensations force Avey to recall the diasporic past and her connection to it. This passage to Carriacou is what finally rids Avey of the "mass of overly rich, indigestible food that had lodged itself like an alien organ beneath her heart" (207). Young's diagnostic is that Avey "physically expels hegemonic whiteness with its devaluing of black community, metonymically signaled by food."[391] Avey also expels the excessive materiality associated with the middle-class lifestyle supporting hegemonic whiteness that devalues Black community. Avey's purging of materiality, which is also evidenced by her gradual ridding of excessive clothing items as she moves from the cruise ship to the islands, creates space in her body for the dance ritual that is to soon come, and her purging of individual memories creates space in her mind for the collective history she is to experience through this dance ritual.

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[387] Young, *Haunting Capital*, 89.

[388] Courtney Thorsson, "Dancing up a Nation: Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," *Callaloo* 30.2 (2007): 646.

[389] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72.

During Avey's passage aboard the *Emanuel C*, she transitions from what Toni Morrison refers to as "bumping into a rememory" to what Marianne Hirsch refers to as postmemory, as she moves from a space of trauma to a space of connection by way of embodied historical memory.[392] Once Avey physically feels what her enslaved ancestors might have felt aboard slave ships in the Caribbean, she is able to begin working through the collective memory of The Middle Passage, slavery, and the diaspora's genesis; and her connection and relationship to that collective memory. Kimberly Rae Connor notes, "As Marshall suggests by weaving antebellum legends into her contemporary tale, slavery must be confronted and retrieved for individuals to affirm their selves."[393] Avey's confrontation with slavery happens through rememory. Morrison's concept of rememory emerged in her 1987 novel *Beloved* when Sethe tells Denver that memories remain for others to experience later. In effect, they never die. Sethe says:

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[390] Ibid.

[391] Young, *Haunting Capital*, 92.

[392] "Bumping into a rememory" refers to Sethe's explanation to Denver in *Beloved* about how memories are experienced again by people who never had the memory in the first place. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

> Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you.[394]

Avey bumps into the rememory of her enslaved ancestors when she's put in the dark, hot deckhouse aboard the boat. She experiences exactly what Sethe refers to (and warns about) in the above passage:

> [T]he pall over Avey Johnson's mind lifted momentarily and she became dimly conscious. She was alone in the deckhouse. That much she was certain of. Yet she had the impression as her mind flickered on briefly of other bodies lying crowded in with her in the hot, airless dark. A multitude it felt like lay packed around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moans, rising and falling with each rise and plunge of the schooner, enlarged upon the one filling her head. Their suffering—the depth of it, the weight of it in the cramped space—made hers of no consequence. (209)

Avey finally recognizes the significance of and *what* she's feeling for once, as opposed to her repeated confusion and feelings of being haunted that characterize the earlier sections of the novel. Marianne Hirsch defines a rememory as "a memory, communicated through bodily symptoms, [that] becomes a form of repetition and reenactment."[395] Avey's rememories, or, as Sethe suggests, memories she thought she had suppressed or even forgotten, occur throughout the narrative when she recalls her childhood and earlier adult life (which happens first when Aunt Cuney visits and possesses her, second when she dreams of her life with Jay, and third when she's aboard the *Emanuel C* on the way to Carriacou). As Hirsch notes, these memories are repetitive and felt through the body. They are also traumatic for Avey, as she often finds herself disoriented and in pain as a result of her rememories. When she is in the deckhouse on her way to Carriacou, she bumps into the rememories that belong to her ancestors. Both Morrison and Hirsch suggest that a "rememory is the same for the one who is there and the one who was never there."[396] Because of this sameness, Avey experiences firsthand the physical symptoms of her ancestors who endured The Middle Passage, and, as a result, her own personal memories fall away to usher in a collective and more affective memory of the diasporic past.

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[393] Kimberly Rae Connor, *Conversions and Visions in the Writings of African-American Women* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 235.

[394] Morrison, *Beloved*, 43-44.

Avey's transition from individual memory to collective memory as a result of bumping into her ancestors' rememories is significant, because it underscores *Praisesong*'s contention that connection to the diaspora can be and *is* felt through the body. Summarizing the CWC's African-centered beliefs, Jacqueline Copeland-Carson notes, "the body was understood as a sort of vessel that carried ancestral energy, perpetuating what was seen as core African cultural principles and practices over geographical space (place) and time (history). The body was an active agent in the retention of Africanness. This embodied ancestral energy was the foundation of African community."[397] The novel supports this same understanding of the body as a vessel of ancestral knowledge and energy. Until Avey makes sense of her people's history within the space of her own body, she remains haunted and disoriented by her own rememories. By embodying the felt experiences of The Middle Passage, Avey is able to "transition from disavowal to acceptance" of her heritage, as Susan Rogers argues.[398] This acceptance is what Marianne Hirsch refers to as postmemory, which she defines as "a form of heteropathic memory in which the self and the other are more closely connected through familial or group relation—through an understanding of what it means to be Jewish or of African descent, for example."[399] SJ Carrie suggests that, "the desire to re-imagine and/or revise the narrative which surrounds The Middle Passage highlights the ways in which black subjects often return to the traumas of the past as a way to re-assert their cultural ties to Africa."[400] This reassertion is an important feature of postmemory. Hirsch points out that there is always a risk of sliding back into the traumas of rememory, and that postmemory enables the transmission of historical bodily trauma to subsequent generations without re-traumatization.[401] When Avey returns to the United States, and particularly to Tatem, where her entry into the African diasporic community first began, she is tasked with this transmission of bodily knowledge and experience that is deeply connected to the diaspora's history to subsequent generations. As Paulette Brown-Hinds argues, and as Hirsch's concept of postmemory implies, this transmission "must be repeated by each generation in an endless cycle of reconnection."[402]

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[395] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Memory after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 81.

[396] Ibid, 82.

[397] Copeland-Carson, *Creating Africa*, 139.

Avey's awakening aboard the *Emanuel C* is buttressed by a female community, which underscores the novel's insistence that female kinfolk, whether real or imagined, are central to the process of coming into diasporic consciousness, a process which is often healing in nature.

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[398] Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory," 86.

[399] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 86.

[400] SJ Carrie, "The Ancestral Diaspora," in *Crossing Borders in African Literatures*, ed. Chin Ce and Charles Smith (Oxford: African Books Collective, 2015), 80.

[401] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*.

[402] Brown-Hinds, "In the Spirit," 116.

Gay Wilentz likewise points out the novel's contention that "maintain[ing] cultural continuity and wholeness is the function of women, both female characters and Marshall herself."[403] While Avey is racked with vomiting and diarrhea, the "old women" on board use their bodies to moor Avey to both the boat and her cultural and historical revelations brought about by her journey to Carriacou:

> They held her. Hedging her around with their bodies—one stout and solid, the other lean, almost fleshless but with a wiry strength—they tried cushioning her as much as possible from the repeated shocks of the turbulence. [...] Their lips close to her ears they spoke to her, soothing, low-pitched words which only sought to comfort and reassure her, but which from their tone even seemed to approve of what was happening. "*Bon*," they murmured as the gouts of churned-up, liquefied food erupted repeatedly… (205)

The old women's repetition of "*Bon*" as Avey purges her past life transforms this moment into an embodied healing ritual of sorts. Hershini Bhana Young argues that the Black body, as a collective body, "is a body that bears the brunt of history, a body in need of redress."[404] The old women aboard the boat participate in the redress of Avey's body, which stands in metonymically for the collective Black body. Avey's newly found female kinfolk not only aid in the healing of her body, but also in her remaking of self as it relates to cultural community. Hortense Spillers argues that slaves who experienced The Middle Passage were, in a way, "culturally 'unmade.'"[405] Avey begins the process of being culturally remade while she is aboard the *Emanuel C* on her way to Carriacou and the Big Drum Ritual, which will complete the process. As the female community on board guides and supports Avey through this process, Lebert Joseph looks on from the outside, "hovering anxiously behind them at the railing" (206). Only

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[403] Wilentz, *Binding Cultures*, 100.
[404] Young, *Haunting Capital*, 2.
[405] Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 72.

Avey's female kinfolk are allowed to participate in her transformation from this point forward. Instead of Lebert Joseph taking the place of Aunt Cuney, the old women aboard the boat; Rosalie Parvay, Lebert Joseph's daughter; and her maid Milda stand in for Avey's female kinfolk back in Tatem.

"A Laying on of Hands"

On the island of Carriacou, Rosalie Parvay continues the healing work that Aunt Cuney, ancestor Avatara, and the old women on the boat started by initiating "a laying on of hands" ritual, which prepares Avey's body and spirit for the Big Drum Ritual dance. Rosalie Parvay bathes, kneads, and anoints Avey's body with oil. Marshall connects Rosalie Parvay to Aunt Cuney through description and imagery. Rosalie Parvay, caring for Avey at her bedside, reminds Avey of "her great-aunt beckoning her in the dream" (217). As Rosalie Parvay bathes Avey, she is viscerally reminded of how her Aunt Cuney used to "rigorously administer the weekly scrubbing" when she was a young girl (221). Aunt Cuney passes the torch, so to speak, on to Rosalie Parvay rather than Lebert Joseph, as some scholars have argued. Lebert Joseph, instead, is notably absent during this healing ritual that involves Avey's body. Rosalie Parvay becomes Avey's second or surrogate spiritual mother since Aunt Cuney's spirit doesn't seem to accompany Avey to Carriacou. Aunt Cuney, instead, like the Africans who walked on water back to their homelands, becomes immortalized in the geographic and historical space of Tatem. Joanne Gabbin suggests that Rosalie Parvay is "the channel for Avey's spiritual rebirth."[406] She also becomes a channel for Avey's bodily reawakening, as she tends specifically to Avey's body during their intimate encounter.

During Avey's bath, she is again infantilized, and Rosalie Parvay must act like a mother to clean her up. She is not only cleaning up Avey; she is also turning Avey's "motionless, flat, numb" body back on so that Avey can more intensely feel the connection to her people through her heart and navel:

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[406] Gabbin, "A Laying on of Hands," 248.

> Avey Johnson became aware of a faint stinging as happens in a limb that's fallen asleep once it's roused, and a warmth that could be felt as if the blood there had been at a standstill, but was now tentatively getting under way again. [...] The warmth, the stinging sensation that was both pleasure and pain passed up through the emptiness at her center. Until finally they reached her heart. And as they encircled her heart and it responded, there was the sense of a chord being struck. All the tendons, nerves and muscles which strung her together had been struck a powerful chord, and the reverberation could be heard in the remotest corners of her body. (223-224)

Just like Avey's experience on board the *Emanuel C*, memories of her childhood bubble up as Rosalie Parvay cleans her, and Avey reinterprets them within a new diasporic context. Aunt Cuney's weekly bathing of Avey is now understood as ritual, and food Aunt Cuney had prepared for an old man's funeral is understood as an offering to the ancestors. Susan Rogers argues, "The theme of the body as a site of memory is elaborated here, for it is through Rosalie's touching of Avey's body, while helping her to bathe, that her sedimented memory is shifted, stirred up, and rises to the surface."[407] Avey's childhood memories shift from mere remembrance and nostalgia to representations of her connection to the diaspora. The new knowledge that Avey has been endowed with, as transmitted to her through the body, enables Avey to interpret those memories in a new way. With the help of her Aunt Cuney and Rosalie Parvay, Avey now understands that she had been connected to the diaspora, through her flesh and bones (most notably in the spaces of her navel and heart), all along. According to Joanne Gabbin, "a laying on of hands" is a "transmission of a miraculous power that heals, restores, and transforms all that it touches.

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[407] Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory," 88.

However mystical the practice appears, the existence of such powers is readily accepted by initiates who have experienced a laying on of hands."[408] Avey is gifted *li gain connaissance*, as she can now see in new ways.

Marshall devotes an entire chapter to this "laying on of hands" scene, which points to its significance in Avey's remaking of self. This remaking of self is made possible by Avey's female community. Rosalie Parvay's maid Milda assists during the bathing and anointing ritual, the spirit of Avey's ancestor Avatara assists the spirit of her Aunt Cuney during her possession that awakens her to her body, and the old women on the boat across to Carriacou work together to help Avey during her journey across the Caribbean Sea. Marshall participates in a tradition among African American and Caribbean women writers of emphasizing female community and the power of embodied healing ritual within this community. *Praisesong* suggests that *li gain connaissance* is transmitted between women through embodied healing ritual. The novel emphasizes that the body must be tended to and healed if the spirit is to be healed, which supports the "African concept that the body and spirit are one."[409] Joanne Gabbin suggests that the "laying on of hands" reinforces this concept by so closely connecting body and spirit as part of healing ritual.[410] Other African American and Caribbean women writers who have portrayed a "laying on of hands" scene in their texts are Toni Cade Bambara, Jamaica Kincaid, and Edwidge Danticat. In Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1970), Minnie Ransom, with the help of Old Wife, heals Velma's troubled psyche by reconnecting her body to her mind. When Annie John, in the eponymous novel by Jamaica Kincaid (1985) has a mental breakdown, her grandmother Ma Chess holds her body as a way to heal her psychological trauma and pain. Embodied healing ritual is less direct in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), but Sophie's all-female therapy group frequently participates in ritual that re-affirms the value of the female body. These novels' "laying on of hands" scenes, like the one in *Praisesong*, serve to reconnect the body and the spirit. This reconnection happens within female community and with female kinfolk. As Avey proclaims to Lebert Joseph after her bath, "Your daughter has been putting me back together again" (229).

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[408] Gabbin, "A Laying on of Hands," 247.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Ibid.

The Big Drum Ritual and The Beg Pardon

Before the "laying on of hands," Avey awakens to a body that is "flat, numb, emptied out" just as her mind had been the previous day (214). As I mentioned (and challenged) earlier, Susan Rogers discusses the problematic nature of the implications of a blank body and mind or *tabula rasa*, because, according to her, they imply a type of African essentialism.[411] I have argued that Avey's blank body and mind, as referenced here in the opening of the fourth section of the novel, "The Beg Pardon," are instead symbolic of Avey's new consciousness and willingness to interpret her past experiences in light of her current awakening within the diaspora. Ethnographer Sally Ann Ness's article on gesture and dance, "The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance," sheds some light on what else might be symbolized by Avey's emptiness preceding the Big Drum Ritual by which Avey reconnects with her ancestors through the body via Africanist dance. Ness seeks to identify dance forms that prioritize the "*in*ward moving tendencies of dance gesturing" by considering "the mark they leave not upon the space surrounding their actions or the eyes watching them but *upon the bodies that are their medium*" (emphasis, hers).[412] In other words, dance and its gestures have the possibility to inscribe meaning upon the bodies performing them. Ness contends that, "the dancer's body can be seen to form the 'host material,' a living tissue, for dance's gestural inscriptions."[413] Ness's hypotheses suggest the possibility of a rewriting or a remaking of Avey's bodily inscriptions—of a capitalist, racist ethic—through dance. Avey's feelings of emptiness can be read as signaling a palimpsest rather than an erasure. Through the reverse Middle Passage aboard the *Emanuel C*, she has effectively rid her body of the oppressive imprints of these inscriptions, but residue will always remain.

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[411] Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory," 77.

[412] Sally Ann Ness, "The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance," in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 6.

The Africanist dance(s) that Rosalie Parvay and Milda prepare Avey for through bathing and anointing her body offer Avey the possibility of re-inscription. As Ness suggests, Avey's body, through Africanist dance, becomes both the medium of inscription and the repository for the inscription of an African diasporic consciousness that overwrites the *"Too much!*" narrative that had dominated Avey's life up until this point. Deidre Sklar notes, "Perceptual testing has shown, for example, that in general, African cultures emphasize auditory and proprioceptive values rather than visual ones."[414] As opposed to Western cultures that privilege only the outward aesthetics of a dance, African cultures also value the sounds and *feelings* of a dance. Even though Ness identifies Balinese dance as fulfilling the guidelines of inscriptive dance, it might also be argued that Africanist dance does so, too. According to Ness, "dance gestures that mold, carve, and otherwise impress their way into ligaments, muscles, and even bones, so as to bring about a transformation that is (ideally) not a weakening of the functional structures but a rendering of them as meaningful" are inscriptive.[415] We see this happening when Avey dances the dance of the Tatem Ring Shout like she did when she was a young girl, her body never having forgotten its gestures. When Avey is finally able to connect this dance to the greater

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[413] Ibid.
[414] Deidre Sklar, "Remembering Kinesthesia: An Inquiry into Embodied Cultural Knowledge," in *Migrations of Gesture*, 88.
[415] Ness, "The Inscription," 6.

African diaspora and feel “the threads, that myriad of shiny, silken, brightly colored threads” of connection, not only the dance, but her body doing the dance, becomes inscribed with new meaning (249).

The new meaning that Avey’s body is inscribed with is the diversity, vastness, and connectedness of the African diaspora. Not only is Avey’s body put back together after her bath, but the diaspora is reassembled in her consciousness, and this reconnection is felt through her body. On the island, Avey “felt to be dwelling in any number of places at once and in a score of different time frames” (232). These various places and time frames start to coalesce when she enters the yard to join the Big Drum Ritual. The dancing Avey witnesses, however, is not any purist form of Africanist dance. Rather, “it was the essence of something rather than the thing itself she was witnessing” (240). Still, Avey desires that essence:

> Those present—the old ones—understood this. All that was left were a few names of what they called nations which they could no longer even pronounce properly, the fragments of a dozen or so songs, the shadowy forms of long-ago dances and rum-kegs for drums. The bare bones. The burnt-out ends. And they clung to them with a tenacity she suddenly loved in them and longed for in herself. Thoughts—new thoughts—vague and half-formed slowly beginning to fill emptiness. (240)

Rather than chastising the African diasporic community for its mutated version of Africanist dance, *Praisesong* instead celebrates its syncretism. In her discussion of the Big Drum Ritual, Annette Macdonald notes that it is “a synthesis of many African and a few European traditions,” and that it directly links the people of Carriacou to Africa through ritual.[416] Paulette Brown-Hinds indicates that the dance rituals associated with the Big Drum Ritual are “derivations of the sacred West African Circle Dance," and that they "bind blacks together throughout the diaspora."[417] For Marshall, then, what matters more than direct imitation of Africanist dance form is the connection African diasporic dance makes with the history and lineage of the diaspora. Through the Big Drum Ritual, those who came before, including both enslaved Africans and other ancestors within the diaspora, are both remembered and celebrated for their ability to maintain strong ties to Africa while adapting to their new environment. For Avey, the Big Drum Ritual dance becomes both the Ring Shout and the familial and communal dances near the Hudson River when she was a young girl. They are all the same dance, a dance that recognizes the myriad threads of the diaspora. Courtney Thorsson argues that, "The Big Drum Dance is thus a performance of the type of diaspora Marshall envisions in *Praisesong*."[418] This diaspora is inclusive, reverent of the ancestors and familial lineage, and deeply connected to history.

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[416] Annette C. Macdonald, “Big Drum Dance of Carriacou”, in *Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures,* ed. Susanna Sloat, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), 287.

During the dance, Avey's body becomes a vessel for not only containing the vastness of the diaspora, but for expressing it. Before Avey comes into full diasporic consciousness, her body remains "still and composed," her face "expressionless" (247). She begins with "a grave, stiff-joined dance (a non-dance really)—her bare feet scarcely leaving the ground" (237). Once Avey starts to embody the Ring Shout, "doing the flatfooted glide and stamp with aplomb," she finally recognizes its connection to the Big Drum Ritual, and the connection between Tatem and Carriacou (248). Susan Rogers contends that "both Avey's body and memory needed reconstructing, piece by piece," and that "the return of connection with the body is directly linked with the return of memory."[419] When Avey dances the Ring Shout, she is reminded through her body of her deep connection to the people in Tatem and her enslaved ancestors who left Ibo Landing to travel back to Africa. Rogers argues, "As Avey gets in touch with the separate parts of her body—the soles of her feet, the limbs, the stomach—and celebrates their functioning as a whole, so too she reconnects with different elements of her diasporic heritage."[420] Avey's embodiment of the Ring Shout moves beyond reconnection, however. She not only reconnects with her people in Tatem, she, "after all these decades made it across" the street to dance the Ring Shout with them (248). Instead of having to dance "under cover of the darkness," like she did as a young girl, she is finally and fully initiated into the Ring Shout circle, The Big Drum circle, and the circle of the diaspora (248). She not only reconnects with her community, but she becomes a fully participant member. Courtney Thorsson suggests that "the dance is powerful because it relies on the individual history of each dancer and the collective history of this ritual performance, which unites the dancers in a shared diasporic culture."[421] Individual and community, body and spirit are made one during the Big Drum Ritual, and Avey's history becomes indelibly tied to the history of her people.

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[417] Brown-Hinds, "In the Spirit," 107.
[418] Thorsson, "Dancing Up a Nation," 650.
[419] Rogers, "Embodying Cultural Memory," 88.

The Beg Pardon, a ritual in which the people of Carriacou ask forgiveness of the ancestors during the Big Drum Ritual, plays an instrumental role in manifesting the theme of reconnection and remaking that Marshall underscores in *Praisesong*. Paulette Brown-Hinds argues that "participation in the circle dance is an important step for Avey because it allows her to petition her ancestors, among them aunt Cuney, for forgiveness for her spiritual and cultural transgressions."[422] We must remember, however, that the novel also condemns Aunt Cuney for her own spiritual and cultural transgressions by dismissing the Ring Shout ritual in Tatem so long ago. The Beg Pardon, then, serves not only as a way for Avey to ask Aunt Cuney for forgiveness, but also as a way for her to ask forgiveness of her other diasporic ancestors, some known and many unknown to her personally, for the transgressions committed by both she and her Aunt Cuney. In *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou*, Lorna McDaniel says about the people of Carriacou during the Beg Pardon that “they no longer recall specific ancestors but instead relate a rich, tenacious legacy of a collective African past.”[423] When Avey, after returning to Tatem, embodies her Aunt Cuney by retelling the Ibo Landing tale, she also embodies all of her ancestors who once told the histories of their people in the hopes of transmitting that history to future generations. Avey’s Beg Pardon is about more than making things right with Aunt Cuney; it is about revising history. Venetria K. Patton contends that, “although *Praisesong for the Widow* is not directly about slavery, it is very much about its legacy and in fact, an attempt to rewrite this legacy.”[424] Avey begs pardon of the ancestors for participating in the fracture and disruption of the diaspora that white hegemonic forces initiated during colonialism and slavery. In an interview, Marshall pinpoints “the horrendous severing that took place, the separation from the motherland, the source” as one of the most damaging aftermaths of colonialism and slavery.[425] *Praisesong* is an attempt at historical reconnection, which is made possible through embodied ritual that is influenced and inspired by Africanist practices and beliefs.

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[420] Ibid, 90.
[421] Thorsson, "Dancing up a Nation," 644.
[422] Brown-Hinds, "In the Spirit," 113.

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[423] McDaniel, *The Big Drum Ritual*, 18.

[424] Patton, *The Grasp*, 65.

[425] ‘Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, “Re-creating Ourselves All Over the World: A Conversation with Paule Marshall,” in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 37.

Chapter Three

“Always getting on like she’s a Congo Jane”: Diasporic Daughterhood through Embodying Queen Nanny in *Daughters*

Queen Nanny’s Diasporic Influence

In the late 17th century, a powerful and free woman of what is now present day Ghana left the shores of her homeland and journeyed across the Atlantic, eventually landing in the Caribbean.[426] A land patent reports that “a certain Negro woman called Nanny and her people now residing with her have transported themselves and their servants and slaves into our Island in Pursuance of a Proclamation for their better encouragement to become our planters there.”[427] Nackaa Cush, a present day Jamaican, claims that Nanny “put herself on a boat to the New World to come free her people.”[428] Major Charles Aarons intimates that, “the majority of the Maroon population was derived from Africans who jumped ship near Jamaica, who left within 24 hours of their arrival to the plantation, or who by other ingenious means quickly escaped the horrors of slavery.”[429] The story that Major Aarons weaves is reminiscent of the mythical Ibo Landing tale that Marshall retells in *Praisesong for the Widow,* in which enslaved and enchained Africans, immediately upon landing on the shores of South Carolina, turned around and walked on water back to Africa. The stories parallel each other in that both tell of enslaved Africans who resisted slavery by either returning to Africa or creating free communities that existed outside the laws and bounds of slave society. In contrast to the Ibo Landing tale in which Africans returned to Africa, Nanny and her people, under Nanny's formidable rule, stayed in the Caribbean and incited massive acts of resistance in order to free other enslaved Africans.

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[426] Karla Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All: A History of Queen Nanny, Leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000).

[427] Land patent quoted in Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*. Gottlieb found this land patent cited in Barbara Kopytoff’s 1973 dissertation work on the subject.

[428] Quoted in Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 70.

[429] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 68.

This subversive woman from Ghana went on to become the leader of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica, and was known as Nanny, Granny Nanny, Grandy Nanny, and, in present day references to her, Queen Nanny. Stories of her prowess as a military leader, *obeah* woman, and figurative mother—for she had no children of her own—to all of the Windward Maroons can be found in old British legal documents, personal accounts, and official reports, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the oral folk tales of present day Jamaicans and Caribbean folks. For example, Queen Nanny is known to have crafted a boiling pot, known as Nanny's Pot, which would both trap and kill British soldiers once they looked into it.[430] To create this pot, Nanny made use of her knowledge of the Jamaican landscape and set up her defensive camp near "a basin [that] formed the confluence of the Macungo River flowing over a precipice of over some nine hundred feet, into the swift-running waters of the Stony River," over which many British soldiers fell to their deaths after getting too close to her camp.[431] In another beloved folk tale about Queen Nanny, she is said to have been such a formidable opponent in battle, that she could catch bullets with various parts of her body.[432] Official archived documents likewise capture her grandeur. For example, a captured Maroon reported witnessing Nanny kill three "white male prisoners" in January of either 1734 or 1735.[433] Philip Thicknesse, a British soldier who fought against the Maroons in Jamaica, remarked that an "old Hagg," who historians have often understood to be Nanny of the Maroons, wore "a girdle round the waste and (I speak within compass) nine or ten different knives hanging in sheaths to it, many of which I have no doubt, had been plunged in human flesh and blood."[434] Nanny was a valiant adversary feared by many of her British foes. She fought fiercely to protect her people and their land.

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[430] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 49. Nanny's Pot is mentioned in other discussions about Queen Nanny as well. See Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1988) and Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe, and the Struggle for People's Liberation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Agency for Public Information, 1976).

[431] Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, 51.

[432] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All* and Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe*.

[433] Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, 171.

On August 5, 1740, British governor of the colony of Jamaica, Edward Trelawny, signed a land grant which authorized "a certain Negro woman called Nanny [to take possession of] a certain parcel of Land containing five hundred acres," on which Nanny and her people would own everything, including "Edifices Trees woods underwoods ways waterways rents profits [and] commodities."[435] The land signed over to Queen Nanny and her people swiftly became New Nanny Town and replaced the original Nanny Town, which was destroyed by the British in a 1733 attack on the Windward Maroons of Jamaica.[436] There is evidence that the original Nanny Town, which later became Moore Town, eventually merged with New Nanny Town.[437] Despite the fact that Queen Nanny was known for her adamant refusal to participate in the legal system of the British government, this merger suggests that she used this land grant with Governor Trelawny to reclaim the land that she had previously lost in battle in order to ensure the continuation of her people and their mission after her death shortly thereafter. Moore Town still exists in Jamaica today, and its inhabitants have tried repeatedly to petition the Jamaican government to rename it Queen Nanny Town as a way to honor her great legacy as the leader of the Windward Maroons who fought valiantly against the British during the time of slavery.[438]

These stories serve to highlight Queen Nanny's enduring legacy, not just in Jamaica, but also throughout the Caribbean and the larger diaspora. As a historical figure, she exists more prominently in the minds of Maroon descendants than she does in historical documents. Some of Queen Nanny's stories are contested. For example, some argue that she was brought over to Jamaica as a slave herself rather than of her own volition as a free woman.[439] A 1733 entry in the Journal of the Assembly of Jamaica indicates that William Cuffee, a Black man who fought on the side of the British against the Maroons, killed Queen Nanny and was heavily rewarded for it.[440] If this were the case, there is no way Queen Nanny could have been alive to sign a land grant in 1740. Mavis Campbell notes that it is impossible to decipher some of the historical documents as assuredly referring to a single Queen Nanny figure.[441] Instead, Campbell suggests a reading of Queen Nanny as an amalgamation of many women known as Nanny, all of whom played an important leadership role in Maroon society.[442]

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[434] Quoted in Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, 123.
[435] Land grant quoted in Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica,* 175. The original document made no use of commas.
[436] Walter C. Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture, and Power* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 221.
[437] Ibid, 180.
[438] Greg Wiggan, Lakia Scott, Marcia Watson, and Richard Reynolds, *Unshackled: Education for Freedom, Student Achievement, and Personal Emancipation* (Boston, MA: Sense Publishers, 2014), 20.

The adaptation of these stories within communities in the diaspora, in an effort to foster positive relationships and perpetuate a sustainable diaspora, is what inspired Marshall to write her 1991 novel *Daughters* in the shadow of Queen Nanny's legacy. In her interview with Melody Graulich and Lisa Sisco, Marshall discusses this inspiration:

> We're seldom made aware of the role women played in the resistance to enslavement. For example, my Congo Jane is based largely on Nanny of the Maroons, one of the great slave heroines of the West Indies. I also learned an important fact about the relationship between bondsmen and women. Because slave women were subjected to the same—if not worse—treatment as the men, being forced to work in the fields, the beatings, rapes, etc., it is said that there

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[439] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All* and Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*.
[440] Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, 177.
[441] Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*.
[442] Ibid, 176. In Rucker's *Gold Coast Diasporas*, he also suggests a reading of Nanny as multiple women.

> developed a great sense of cooperation, closeness, and equality between black men and women. There was a greater ability to resist together.[443]

Marshall's own language—naming Queen Nanny as "of the West Indies" rather than of Jamaica—suggests her understanding of this historical figure's importance as extending throughout the diaspora.

Marshall participates in her own re-telling of Queen Nanny's story in *Daughters* by exploring how the women in the novel become daughters of the diaspora committed to preserving African-derived practices that both empower and value women. They do this by embodying the varied aspects of Queen Nanny. In this chapter, I explore how Marshall uses Queen Nanny as a model for women within the diaspora because the Maroon community to which she belonged not only gave women power over their own bodies and reproductive choices, but valued women as important—and sometimes dominant—participants in the political and social functions of the community. *Daughters* strives to reposition women within the diaspora in this way. By crafting all of the women to embody Queen Nanny, they become indelibly linked across geographic, racial, and socioeconomic boundaries. Their embodiment of Queen Nanny unifies them as diasporic daughters. *Daughters* expands the conversation about embodiment that Marshall began in *Brown Girl* and continued in *Praisesong* by directly linking embodiment to political participation and power.

Congo Jane: A New Archetype and Mother of the Diaspora

Instead of directly referencing Queen Nanny in *Daughters*, Marshall invents the character of Congo Jane, a fictional historic figure who embodies the qualities of Queen Nanny as both

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[443] Melody Graulich and Lisa Sisco, "Meditations on Language and the Self: A Conversation with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, ed. James C. Hall and Heather Hathaway (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010): 136.

"priestess [and] queen mother."[444] Gottlieb contends that the legend of Queen Nanny "has preserved African culture and tradition," and that "Queen Nanny's role as universal mother contributes to the Maroons' survival as independent people with strong African ties."[445] Instead of mother of the Maroons, Marshall's Congo Jane is mother of the African diaspora, and *Daughters* explores the ways in which Congo Jane has inspired her daughters of the diaspora to follow in her footsteps.

Congo Jane's story historically frames the novel and becomes the background to the narrative plot. Ursa Mackenzie, the primary daughter in the novel, frequently recalls the time when she was a young girl and her mother, Estelle, encouraged her to "*reach all the way up* [to the Congo Jane statue] *and touch her toes!"*[446] This memory remains at the forefront of her mind as she moves through life as a non-profit researcher, a graduate student, and a political analyst cum budding activist in both New York and New Jersey, remembering always both her biological mother Estelle and her diasporic mother Congo Jane. The image of Congo Jane likewise connects the other daughters in the novel across geographic, socioeconomic, and spiritual spaces as they all embody Congo Jane in their own way. Viney Daniels, Ursa's "sister/friend" in New York, originally from Petersburg, Virginia, often serves as a moral and empowering sounding board for Ursa when she needs to make difficult decisions about her personal and professional life (354). Viney becomes embroiled in both the gentrification of her house and its "inner city neighborhood" and the false arrest of her young son Robeson who was accused of attempting to break into cars when he was in fact only reading their odometers as part of his juvenile "odometer game" (69, 322). Mae Ryland is a passionate community activist who, after helping run his campaign for election, split with politician Sandy Lawson when he chose capitalist gains over community goals. Alongside Ursa's mother, Mae Ryland becomes for Ursa a model of ethical, social, and political activism.

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[444] Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe*, 17.

[445] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 78.

[446] Paule Marshall, *Daughters* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 13. Each subsequent quotation from this text will come from this edition and will be noted in parenthetical citation.

On the fictional Caribbean island of Triunion, Estelle, Astral, and Malvern complete the circle of daughters who descend from Congo Jane's lineage. Estelle Mackenzie, an American schoolteacher, married Ursa's father, Primus Mackenzie (PM), a West Indian politician whose romantic ideals about rebuilding Triunion after decolonization seduced Estelle at the beginning of their relationship. Estelle quietly hopes to transfer her political acumen and desire to do good to her daughter Ursa. Astral Forde is a multiracial lower class woman who works for the Mackenzies as a manager of their hotel. She has a long-term romantic affair with Primus and hopes that her intimate connection with him will advance her social and material position in society. Malvern is Astral's closest friend whose lengthy advice about Astral's personal life and choices frequently haunt Astral's thoughts. Malvern lives in low-income housing, has seemingly countless children who she half-heartedly tends to, and seems to possess deep spiritual knowledge that can potentially be traced back to African beliefs and practices.

The basic plot of the novel follows the political efforts of Primus to get reelected into parliament in Triunion, but at the heart of the novel lies an important discussion about daughterhood and motherhood in relation to the African diaspora. As Marshall notes in her interview with Sylvia Baer, "the characters are all daughters who are in some way connected one with the other, back to the slave woman who figures as a symbol in the novel."[447] Edward Kamau Brathwaite contends that this slave woman to whom Marshall refers, Queen Nanny, is a complex historical figure who is symbolic of the preservation of African tradition: "But Nanny was not only a political leader and warrior. She was, as in African tradition, a total person, an atomic complex of forces, and was in essence a priestess (what the British called an *obeah* woman), responsible for the physical, spiritual and psychological welfare of her community."[448] Karla Gottlieb connects this complexity to African belief: "Contrary to Western conceptualization, African cosmology tends to understand the world as a whole, not compartmentalizing religion separately from philosophy, separately from poetry, separately from medicine, etc. As such, it is necessary to understand Queen Nanny as a complete entity encompassing the roles of Queen Mother, warrior, priestess or *obeah* woman, chieftaness, herbal healer, and revolutionary."[449] The historical figure Marshall chose to model Congo Jane after not only preserved African traditions and practices, but also fiercely protected her people like a mother.

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[447] Sylvia Baer, "Holding onto the Vision: Sylvia Baer Interviews Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall,* 121.

Queen Nanny has served as inspiration for other diasporic writers as well. In 1984, Jamaican-American author Michelle Cliff published *Abeng*, a novel that characterizes Queen Nanny as a Jamaican mother of resistance and subversion. Both Cliff and Marshall take a revisionist approach to their narratives, as they attempt to capture the perspectives and voices that were left out of narrations of colonization in the West Indies. Cliff captures the nationalist aspect of Queen Nanny's character, as *Abeng* is deeply invested in crafting a Jamaican ethos that honors its Maroon heritage rather than one that relies on neocolonial models of identity and power.[450] Marshall, on the other hand, captures Queen Nanny's diasporic appeal, as *Daughters* positions her as a mother of the diaspora without national allegiances. Cynthia James contends that, "Marshall's concerns go beyond autobiographical and gender issues into political problems of domination that the disempowered descendants of the enslaved share, regardless of nationality and migrations that set them on different territories in the hemisphere."[451] Marshall's characterization of Queen Nanny as diasporic rather than Jamaican honors Marshall's vision for a unified Caribbean, in which "the islands of the Caribbean—English, French, Dutch—will come together in some kind of federation or European-style political and economic entity."[452] For Marshall, "it is the only way [... these Caribbean islands] will be able to come out from under the shadow of Big Brother to the north, be able to achieve real strength and thus be taken seriously in the councils of the world."[453] By creating the fictional place of Triunion, which alludes to the union of the English, French, and Spanish, and the fictional character of Congo Jane, Marshall is able to creatively envision, as an artist, what this Caribbean and diasporic union might look like.

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[448] Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe*, 15.

[449] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 55.

[450] For an extended discussion about Cliff's use of Jamaican Maroon ethos in *Abeng*, see Barbara Lalla, *Defining Jamaican Fiction: Marronage and the Discourse of Survival* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1996) and Cynthia James, *The Maroon Narrative: Caribbean Literature in English Across Boundaries, Ethnicities, and Centuries* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

Marshall's choice to model Congo Jane after Queen Nanny affirms her diasporic aims as a writer, because Congo Jane, like Queen Nanny, connects her children back to Africa. According to Brathwaite, Queen Nanny "helped make it possible for African culture itself to survive in a hostile slave and materialist environment in such a way that that culture, instead of being eradicated, was able to survive and subterraneously contribute to what is emerging as the complex and unique 'creole' culture of our time."[454] We can understand this "creole" culture to be the syncretic Afro-Caribbean and African American culture that characterizes the diaspora in the Caribbean and the United States. Marshall has often claimed that these cultures are not distinct at all, but rather together participate in a communal revitalization of African beliefs and practices.[455] Congo Jane connects African American and Caribbean cultures as a symbol of the diaspora. When Ursa takes Viney to visit the statue of Congo Jane in Triunion, she encourages her to touch its feet like Ursa did when she was a young girl. This gesture is symbolic of the merging of African American and Caribbean cultural expressions into a unified diasporic expression. Both Congo Jane's statue and her historical spirit repeatedly remind the daughters of their African roots.

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[451] James, *The Maroon Narrative*, 108.
[452] Daryl Cumber Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 100.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe*, 17-18.
[455] For example, in her interview with 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Marshall claims that she has "no patience with black American writers who feel that the Caribbean is exotic and curious and different. To me it's all part of the same thing. There may be differences of expression, but at the base it's the same cultural expression" (37). 'Molara

Marshall's aim in both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong* is to connect her feminist and diasporic perspectives in order to carve out spaces in which daughters of the diaspora can engage with their ancestral, historical, and cultural pasts in self-affirming ways. In *Daughters*, the character of Congo Jane fully embodies this vision. While writing *Daughters*, Marshall heavily relied on Lucille Mathurin Mair's work on the Maroons, which revealed to Marshall the central position of power that female Maroons occupied despite the fact that their stories have been, for the most part, left out of the history books. In *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica*, Mair suggests that one of the key African systems of practice that Queen Nanny helped to preserve was the important role of women in "public affairs" and in "the communal life of Maroon villages."[456] Essentially, Ashanti women had more political power than men. In effect, Maroon women staged their own war against the oppressive systems of power that assaulted their physical and cultural bodies. According to Mair, these women "constituted a political strategy that took different forms at different times but at all times expressed the conscious resolve of the African enslaved to confront the New World plantation's assault on their person and their culture."[457] Mair poignantly remarks, "The passion and persistence of their heroic acts of self-affirmation and rebellion rescued them from silence and invisibility, and embedded the meaning

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Ogundipe-Leslie, "Re-creating Ourselves All Over the World: A Conversation with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall.*

[456] Lucille Mathurin Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2006), 63, 65.

[457] Ibid, 327.

of those acts in a people's memory."[458] By crafting the character of Congo Jane, Marshall makes visible these historical feminist efforts of diasporic women that might otherwise go untold.[459]

Queen Nanny was both mother to her people and daughter of Africa, and *Daughters* captures this duality in its female characters. Both Campbell and Mair propose that Queen Nanny either directly descends from or embodies various African queens, which suggests a powerful lineage of African mothers and daughters that migrated to the Caribbean and beyond as a result of the slave trade.[460] Gottlieb points out that, "The Maroons of Jamaica preserved many aspects of the language and culture of the Akan and Ashanti peoples of the Gold Coast. They also retained many of the matrilineal and matrifocal aspects of these cultures, as kinship was passed down through the mother's side of the family."[461] Marshall re-generates this matrilineage through Congo Jane and her daughters.

Ursa, Viney, Mae Ryland, Estelle, Astral, and Malvern all embody Queen Nanny's various aspects as daughters of the diaspora and mothers of the next generation. Marshall's use of narrative embodiment to re-tell Queen Nanny's story through the configuration of Congo Jane is a contemporary expression of Queen Nanny's intersecting layers. This expression both functions within the confines of Western systems of dualistic belief and challenges them by revealing how spirituality and motherhood have the potential to intersect with affirming diasporic politics and policies that strive to care for all peoples within the diaspora. *Daughters* seeks to understand what it means to be a daughter of the African diaspora and what obligations diasporic daughters have to their communities as both daughters of the diaspora and mothers of children and political and cultural ideas. In all of her novels, Marshall is concerned with addressing the needs of the diaspora to become a unified and sustainable community that honors its past and women's role in diasporic history. Elliott P. Skinner argues that, for people within this diasporic community, "it is necessary that we delve into the African past and our own existence for ideas and processes for paradigms to effect our renaissance."[462] For Marshall, Queen Nanny and the Ashanti paradigm of female participation in community and politics are the past she delves into, and her creation of Congo Jane is her re-envisioning this past within the context of the contemporary diaspora.

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[458] Ibid.

[459] Mair notes, "Many Caribbean women writers today, also engaged in their acts of conscious self-affirmation, explore history, myth and memory, seeking cultural continuities. Refusing to pursue futility, they seldom lament the absence of ruins. On the contrary, they celebrate their presence, not the presence of fragmented desolate remnants that signify nothing, but valued monuments, human artefacts, ready to receive vibrant new forms through the genius of those pens which are today busily creating praise songs for Caribbean women" (328). Marshall is an example of one such writer. Mair, *A Historical Study*.

[460] Campbell notes that Queen Nanny was "reminiscent of the great African queen, Nzinga (c. 1580-1663)" (51). Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*. Mair remarks, "Nanny had her Jamaican precursor in the Coromantee Queen of 1683, and her successor in Cubah of the 1760 slave uprisings," alluding to the continuation of this matrilineage (63). Mair, *A Historical Study*.

[461] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 10.

The daughters' collective embodiment of Queen Nanny/Congo Jane not only serves to explore communal obligation, but it also serves to dismantle Western archetypal depictions of Black women in literature that often fail to consider the more nuanced aspects of character. These depictions wrongfully capture Black women as one-dimensional, as either hypersexualized or asexual, dominant or submissive. Gottlieb contends that, "It is important to retain the African conceptualization of Queen Nanny as a summation of her various roles when dealing with each of them. Her personas overlap and intertwine, each influencing each other."[463] Congo Jane is Marshall's creation of an alternative and positive model archetype for diasporic daughters. Through the character of Congo Jane, Marshall affirms that Black women of the diaspora have complex identities that are tied to their diasporic origins. About *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* Marshall claims,

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[462] Elliott P. Skinner, "The Restoration of African Identity for a New Millennium," in *The African Diaspora:Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 39.

[463] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 55.

> One of the reasons I wanted to write the story of Selina Boyce was to give an answer to the prevailing image, to say that she was not a topsy, she was not any of the other characters which you found in *Gone with the Wind*, or any of the other stereotypes. These all had to do with white America's hangups. I wanted Selina to be a departure from all of that, this is why *Maud Martha* is important, because she is a dark woman as is Selina—you get away from this whole Nella Larsen theme, you get to a type of Black woman who truthfully reflects the reality of most Black women.[464]

One of Marshall's responses to these flattened depictions of Black women is her creation of Congo Jane in *Daughters*. bell hooks asserts that, "many people have difficulty appreciating black women as we are because of eagerness to impose an identity upon us based on any number of negative stereotypes. Widespread efforts to continue devaluation of black womanhood make it extremely difficult and oftentimes impossible for the black female to develop a positive self-concept."[465] Patricia Hill Collins argues, "Portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mammas helps justify U.S. Black women's oppression. Challenging these controlling images has long been a core theme in Black feminist thought."[466] *Daughters* contributes in important ways to this feminist task of subverting negative stereotypes by fashioning new archetypal models for Black women.

By returning to the time of slavery for inspiration in the creation of Congo Jane as a new archetypal model, Marshall connects the past to the present and rewrites the oft-told negative versions of history in which West Indians are "monkey chasers and African-Americans [are] mammies [and] black people [are] denigrated at every turn."[467] In "Shaping the World of my Art," Marshall contends that in order "for black people to define ourselves on our own terms we must consciously engage our past."[468] She calls for a "psychological and spiritual return back to our history, which I am convinced Black people in this part of the world must undertake if we are to have a sense of our total experience and to mold for ourselves a more truthful identity."[469] Marshall's inspiration for writing *Daughters* came to her when she was watching an Alvin Ailey dance company performance. In the show's program, she found this epigraph—which becomes the epigraph to Book I of *Daughters*—to one of the dance performances: "Little girl of all the daughters, you ain' no more slave, you's a woman now."[470] Marshall's engagement with the past in *Daughters* through Queen Nanny's legacy enables her to trace the progression of Black daughters of the diaspora from slaves to women, or, from "contemporary forms of bondage: familial, social, personal" to "overcom[ing] those kinds of dependencies and domination and achiev[ing] a truly independent self."[471]

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[464] Sabine Bröck, "Talk as a Form of Action: An Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 71.

[465] bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 86.

[466] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69.

The negative stereotypes of Black women to which Marshall is responding also came about during the time of slavery. According to Marilyn Yarbrough, these stereotypes "reaffirm society's belief that African American women are less individualistic than white women."[472] As we saw in *Brown Girl*, Marshall's narratives insist that female individuality must not be sacrificed for the well-being of the community and vice versa, and they question models that either disturb or destroy this delicate balance. This questioning is part of Marshall's feminist work. Werner Zips identifies the move within feminist literature to reinterpret Queen Nanny in the context of present day liberation movements: “The Maroons trace their own identity in part to the historical singularity of their ‘mother of mothers.’ By contrast, in modern feminist literature, Nanny embodies an African-Caribbean female model whose distinguishing traits are evident precisely in the manifold past and present struggles for black women’s liberation.”[473] Rewriting and retelling history has a tangible effect on women in the diaspora today.

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[467] Dance, "An Interview," 100.
[468] Paule Marshall, "Shaping the World of my Art," in *New Letters* 40.1 (1973): 106.
[469] Ibid, 107.
[470] Epigraph quoted in Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language," 137.
[471] Ibid. This engagement continues the work Marshall began in *Praisesong* in which she investigates the physical and psychological effects of the Middle Passage on these same daughters.
[472] Marilyn Yarbrough and Crystal Bennett, "Cassandra and the 'Sistahs': the Peculiar Treatment of African American Women in the Myth of Women as Liars," *The Journal of Gender, Race, & Justice* (Spring 2000): 639.

Even further, by positioning the daughters of the novel to all embody Congo Jane, Marshall is able to construct a model of mediation and negotiation between daughters of different class, race, and geographic spaces within the diaspora. The universalization of Queen Nanny into Congo Jane enables connections to be made between daughters in the United States and daughters in the Caribbean, between daughters of lower social class and daughters of higher social class, and between daughters of different racial makeup. Werner Zips also suggests that Queen Nanny’s legacy stretches far beyond the borders of Jamaica. According to Zips, Queen Nanny’s “symbolic force covers a broader target group and reaches into social spheres that are directly linked to the confrontation between black and white. As a personified antithesis to subjugation and reaction to repression, she inspires not only the insubordination of black people against the roles assigned to them in the western hemisphere, but also stimulates the potential for resistance of black women against their assigned roles within their group.”[474] Congo Jane and her daughters become a symbol of resistance and diasporic connection in the novel.

Abortion, Reproductive Rights, and the Black Female Body

Marshall’s invocation of Congo Jane enables her to broach the feminist topics of abortion, reproductive rights, and the Black female body. She expands on her depiction of generative reproduction in Marion’s birth scene in *Praisesong* by further considering the implications of a child being born from a Black womb in the contemporary African diaspora. In *Praisesong*, Avey's attempts at aborting her daughter are only briefly alluded to, but Marshall's narration of the abortions—voluntary and accidental—of Ursa, Astral, and Estelle in *Daughters* is rich and complete. Although the multiple and varied abortions in the novel can be read on a symbolic level, Marshall's insistence on narrating the physicality of these abortions expands an ever-changing feminist framework for considering the Black female body. Marshall's body-centered narration in *Daughters*, which she also uses in both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong*, is a taut reminder that conversations about the abstract symbolic nature of the Black female body as it relates to diasporic communities and identity must be preceded by considerations of how Black women's physical bodies are controlled, silenced, and judged, and how they bear witness to racial and gendered oppressions.

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[473] Werner Zips, *Black Rebels: African-Caribbean Freedom Fighters in Jamaica* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 156.
[474] Ibid, 154.

Similar to how we meet Selina and Avey, Ursa, Astral, and Estelle are all introduced to readers through narration of their bodies. More specifically, narrative introductions of these women are centered on female reproduction. The novel opens as Ursa is about to leave a well-appointed abortion clinic in New York that feels to her more like a "beauty parlor" than a medical facility (4). We learn that Ursa "feels well enough to walk home" after a multi-hour medical procedure, and that an overwhelming un-feeling of numbness overcomes her after the procedure as she waits "for something, anything to make itself felt" (4-8). This procedure, her second abortion, produces "hardly a stain," and Ursa worries that something has gone wrong inside her body (16). When we first meet Estelle, she is "distract[ing] her[self] from the pair of hands kneading bread dough inside her," from the bodily sensations of her miscarriage (23). The narrative reveals shortly thereafter that Estelle is plagued with these miscarriages, or "slides," until she miraculously gives birth to Ursa after multiple visits to various specialists in New York.

Astral’s story doesn’t begin until Book II of the novel, but she is also presented to readers for the first time through narration of her abortion in a hidden room in a yard behind a pharmacy, a clear reference to the back-door abortions that killed mostly Black and Puerto Rican women before abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973 and the back-door abortions that continue to kill women in Caribbean countries where abortion remains illegal or restricted.[475] After Astral’s abortion, she experiences “blinding” pain and feels as if “*the idiot went and left the wire thing inside me*” (126). In complete contrast to Ursa’s experience after which she feels nothing, Astral acutely feels the effects of her abortion, signaling the disembodying effects of capitalistic materialism that are foregrounded in *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong*.

These varying abortion scenes clearly reflect the different experiences of reproduction and reproductive rights among daughters of the diaspora across geographic and socioeconomic borders. Moira Ferguson argues, “The women’s different experiences underscore comparative living conditions and the deleterious effect of race and gender bigotry.”[476] Astral, not having access to a safe, legal abortion, is forced to pay double after the first set of tablets the doctor gave her didn’t work. When she looks at another woman in the waiting room, who is outwardly poor, Astral thinks: “I know one thing: if her money ain’t sufficient he’s not gon touch her” (118). Abortion is a for-profit business in Triunion with no regard for a woman’s health, and the novel condemns the ways in which capitalistic business approaches have infiltrated the health industry at the risk of women’s lives. Based on the description of the upscale abortion clinic Ursa visits in New York, we can assume that it was a relatively expensive procedure, and shortly thereafter, Ursa becomes distraught over the waiting process hearing about a job she’s applied for with the

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[475] According to Angela Davis, “some 80 percent of the deaths caused by illegal abortions involved Black and Puerto Rican women” (204). Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983). Abortion laws throughout the Caribbean vary, but many countries do not allow women, by choice outside of medical necessity, to seek an abortion.

[476] Moira Ferguson, “Of Bears & Bearings: Paule Marshall’s Diverse Daughters,” *MELUS* 24.1 (Spring 1999): 179.

Meade Rogers Foundation because she desperately needs the money. On the other end of the spectrum, the Mackenzies, of higher class status in Triunion, have enough disposable income to seek fertility treatment. After Estelle has numerous miscarriages, she garners the help of Roy, her friend and doctor who prescribes her "vitamins and [an] array of pills" plus "injections" to help with fertility (34). Her husband, Primus, spends a lot of money sending Estelle to various gynecology specialists in New York, but to no avail. Instead of worrying about cost, however, Estelle mostly concerns herself with how her middle/upper class community might view her as abnormal or less of a woman, which suggests that even within higher class diasporic communities, there exist damaging narratives about women and motherhood. So despite her upper class status, Estelle still suffers under a politics of femininity that only value women for their reproductive capacity. *Daughters* points out that, even though women's experiences of reproduction and their ability to exercise their reproductive rights might vary among women of socioeconomic class, diasporic women are made to feel shame, anxiety, and insecurity—both financial and emotional—when it comes to reproduction.

Daughters highlights the financial stress of reproduction within the African diaspora. It is a financial burden to either conceive and carry a child to term or to abort a pregnancy, frequently making both motherhood and anti-motherhood financial transactions that neglect the health of both mother and baby. Often, the financial burden lies with the woman, because she bears the physical mark of pregnancy. Astral, being of lower class status than both Ursa and Estelle, literally risks her life to abort her pregnancy, and "borrow[s] against her salary for the next month" in order to pay the doctor (117). The place where she is examined is unsanitary—there are no windows and the rubber sheet she lies on isn't washed in between patients—and after Astral takes the first set of tablets the doctor prescribes her, she has "a feeling worse than death itself each time she took one" (120). The side effects of the dangerous tablets include heart palpitations, ringing in her ears, and a slowing down of her heart rate to the point of feeling like she "was gon faint away" (120). Laws and policies that regulate and oppress women's reproductive rights encourage the mistreatment of female bodies, as Marshall demonstrates through disturbing narration of Astral's abortion experience. Even after Ursa's seemingly sanitary and professional abortion, she feels as if the procedure wasn't done correctly and that "whatever it is, is still there" (85). Ursa's reaction implies that even legal abortion can still be made safer and more transparent for women. Further, because of the cultural stigma attached to abortion, Ursa experiences anxiety and neglects the primary needs of her body, not feeding or caring for herself for over a week once she learns that she's pregnant. Unwanted pregnancy becomes a crisis of the body and mind that women are often forced to endure and solve on their own. Because of the taboo nature of abortion and abortion clinics and providers, access and resources for women in need are often limited.[477]

When political powers follow through on anti-feminist policies and agendas, female citizens are denied full citizenship under the law.[478] Astral's quavering and weakening body bears witness to this inequality and she is made to physically bear the burden of these policies all the while her doctor chastises her for seeking an abortion, even though her pregnancy was the result of rape. Eugenia DeLamotte points out that the damaging consequences of Astral's illegal abortion demonstrate "the ways in which the criminalizing of abortion, which purports to be about sustaining life and the promise of future generations, is actually about *undermining* women's power to give birth."[479] Indeed, Astral's experience highlights the need for healthcare policy that not only affords women access to basic gynecological and obstetric care, but that engenders female agency in regards to healthcare decisions. Speaking from a feminist perspective, Angela Davis proclaims, "Birth control—individual choice, safe contraceptive methods, as well as abortions when necessary—is a fundamental prerequisite for the emancipation of women."[480] *Daughters* expands this feminist perspective by suggesting that when women choose to abort a pregnancy, they should be able to do so safely and with no threat to their overall health, reproductive ability, or community reputation.

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[477] Ursa locates this abortion clinic in the phonebook. She doesn't know the doctors there and wasn't recommended to the clinic by anyone in her community, so she is forced to take a risk in choosing it. The clinic she randomly chooses in the phonebook may or may not be safe.

[478] Primus seems to have a general sense of these oppressive reproductive right laws, but he never follows through on any changes that align with his more socialist, feminist vision. About the market ladies, he says, "They were born the wrong color, the wrong sex, the wrong class and everything else on a little two-by-four island that doesn't offer anybody any real scope" (143).

The novel argues that, despite class status, all diasporic women should have access to reproductive healthcare that is safe and confidential. It is easy for middle and upper class daughters of the diaspora who have ready access to birth control and fertility treatments to deny the existence of their lower class sisters' often brutal and risky experiences.[481] *Daughters* intersects and puts into conversation the experiences of Ursa, Estelle, and Astral in order to draw attention to class differences within the diaspora. The novel makes abortion—an often concealed and hushed female experience, especially when it is illegal and unsafe—visible. Simone Alexander notes the connection between individual and community health: "One's health, that is, the personal well-being of the individual, determines the welfare of the community, the black diaspora. Alternatively, an unhealthy body further engenders patterns of oppression."[482] Astral's fractured body as a result of her abortion—she not only feels as if the doctor has left "the damn wire thing up inside" her, but that she might have been inadvertently sterilized in the process—is a symbol and symptom of a diseased African diaspora (182).[483] Marshall's work consistently points out the ways in which the diaspora needs reparation and reconnection. How women's bodies are ill-treated and devalued because of race and class status is one of these ways. Astral's injured body, because she is denied safe healthcare, is symbolic of an injured diaspora in need of healing. Marshall implores her diaspora to care for its daughters' physical and psychological bodies and to preserve female agency.

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[479] Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom: The Fiction of Paule Marshall* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 161.

[480] Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 202.

[481] Angela Davis notes that, "White women—feminists included—have revealed a historical reluctance to acknowledge the struggles of household workers" (96). In the same ways that white middle and upper class women have ignored the struggles of their household workers, white and middle class women of the diaspora have also ignored the struggles of their lower class sisters. This is yet another way in which Marshall condemns the diasporic community's participation in white paradigms of power. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*.

[482] Simone A. James Alexander, *African Diasporic Women's Narratives: Politics of Resistance, Survival, and Citizenship* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), 40.

Despite class status, daughters of the diaspora are frequently made to silence their bodies. Ursa, Estelle, and Astral are all made to feel bodily shame because of their abortions and are forced to suffer alone. The abortion scenes in the novel highlight the effects of the cultural shaming of women's bodies, as all three women attempt to conceal both the act of abortion and its residue. All three women feel ashamed to discuss their bodies with others, including their closest loved ones. Ursa doesn't communicate with Viney, her "sister/friend," her closest confidante, despite the fact that Viney calls her repeatedly offering help and consolation. The narrative implies that, because of the cultural shaming of women's bodies, women must not only silence their bodies but also their voices. Ursa desires to talk to someone about her abortion, but she can't: "If Ursa could have talked to anyone, sought out anyone as a counselor [...]" (18). Estelle, too, is forced to suffer in silence. When she physically feels her miscarriage on the way to the hospital, she is too ashamed to tell her husband: "Estelle almost turned to the stonefaced man beside her on the front seat, almost reached over and touched him, almost said, What's the point, Primus? It's already over" (23). Estelle feels as if she has failed to fulfill her role as a wife and future mother. Even though Astral has her close friend Malvern to confide in, she visits the doctor alone and is made to "feel so shame" by onlookers (116).

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[483] Another example in the novel of the ill treatment of women in regards to their health comes when Malvern falls sick and doctors can't figure out what is ailing her. Even though this is not an abortion example, it still draws attention to the mistreatment of Black female bodies in the diaspora. Malvern becomes "barely recognizable [...] nothing more now than a near skeleton with dull, lifeless eyes, and ashen skin, a body bag of bones" (309). She reveals that she has been visiting a government hospital, but the doctors there keep "cutting and cutting" with no positive results (309). She is explicit in her denunciation of government healthcare and its inefficiency.

The novel soberingly reveals that abortion is a solitary act of bodily disconnection and intimates that the diasporic community has an obligation to support its daughters rather than judge them. However, the narrative is replete with judgment and devaluation of Black female bodies, which only cause fracture within the diasporic community. As Carla Peterson points out, "the body [...] is never simply matter, for it is never divorced from perception and interpretation."[484] Indeed, the body holds meaning beyond its fleshy exterior, and, by consequence, will be perceived and interpreted by its onlookers. Marshall does not deny or condemn this, but demonstrates the potentiality for these perceptions and interpretations to be repressive and oppressive to Black women if they function within racist and sexist frameworks. For example, abortion and unwanted pregnancy are associated with deviancy and criminality within the communities depicted in the novel. When Ursa reflects on her first unwanted pregnancy, she equates it with an illegal or immoral act, noting that she "got caught" and was forced into hiding for a month while she sought an abortion (85). When Ursa is in the waiting room before her second abortion, two white women give her a look that she can only characterize as "that look" (17). Afterwards, Ursa chooses to walk home from the clinic because she would have to "do battle with some cabbie who'll swear she's headed for Harlem and will try locking his door on her" (6). The racist, oppressive perceptions of her Black body are more painful to endure than walking home after a sensitive medical procedure.

The novel lamentingly demonstrates that the same oppressive judgment of Black female bodies that come from outside Black communities also exists within them. When Astral searches for the abortion clinic in Triunion, a male cobbler of presumably her same socioeconomic class inappropriately gazes at her and all the other women who go around to the back of the pharmacy looking for the abortion doctor. When Astral meets with the doctor, he accuses her and "all the rest of you that come in here" of lying about how many far along she is in her pregnancy, as if he knows more about her body than she does (120). This accusation reflects the tendency to solely blame the woman for an unwanted pregnancy and absolve the man of his responsibility. Marshall's texts seek to call out the African diaspora for the ways in which it has objectified and silenced Black female bodies that only serve to diminish Black women's visibility and power and dismantle their bodily knowledge and ownership.

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[484] Carla L. Peterson, "Forward: Eccentric Bodies," in *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African-American Women*, ed. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), ix.

Estelle's particular experiences with natural abortion, or miscarriage, reinforce the idea that anti- or non-motherhood, in any form, is perceived as abnormal and deviant. So even when a woman does not choose to abort her pregnancy and it naturally occurs as a result of physiological conditions, she is still held accountable and perceived as abnormal. Adrienne Rich underscores this damaging paradox: "Mothering and nonmothering have been such charged concepts for us, precisely because *whichever we did has been turned against us*."[485] Estelle refers to her inability to have a child as a "problem" and intimates her deviant status by noting that she does not have "the usual organs" that non-aberrant women have (33-34).[486] When Primus discovers that Estelle is having yet another miscarriage, he essentially blames her, repeating over and over again, "I begged you, Estelle" (23). Her monstrous body, despite its life-giving potential, is perceived as abnormal and deviant.

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[485] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976): 253.

[486] However, as Rosi Braidotti argues, the very fact that a "woman's body can change shape in pregnancy and childbearing" makes her "morphologically dubious" and a "monstrosity." As a result, all women and women's bodies are perceived as monstrous within epistemes that position female as an aberration of male. The novel points this out through Malvern, for example, because she is seen not as fulfilling her duties as a woman to have children, but rather as someone who has grotesquely reproduced. This reinforces the novel's feminist claim that all women within the diaspora suffer under expectations of women that are nearly impossible to uphold.

Even the way in which the Triunion community linguistically connotes natural abortion is troubling. “Slide,” the Triunion word for miscarriage, suggests accountability and intention. Whether or not you seek out an abortion clinic in the act of terminating a pregnancy, you are judged as having a say in the matter. Estelle tells Roy that she heard “women in the district saying ‘So-and-so just had a slide, you know’ or ‘What’s wrong with that woman—every time you look she has another slide’” (33).[487] This community gossip and judgment instills within Estelle feelings of inadequacy and aberrance. In her discussion of motherhood and African American communities, Patricia Hill Collins points out that, “Strong pronatalist values in African-American communities often vest adult status on women who become biological mothers. For many, becoming a biological mother is often seen as a significant first step toward womanhood.”[488] The same is certainly true of the Triunion community.[489] Motherhood is perceived as akin to womanhood, and so without bearing children, a Black woman essentially loses her chance at securing the status of womanhood within her community. Collins rightfully notes that, “Black community expectations are clearly problematic for Black women.”[490] Feeling pressures from her husband and her community, Estelle becomes desperate to have a child despite the fact that the fertility treatments she undergoes are severe and render her "like an invalid" while she lies in bed for weeks and months at a time (34). In effect, she risks her health, and arguably her life, to become a mother, whereas Astral risks her life to become a non-mother. This parallel, or "double exposure" as the novel would call it, exposes "motherhood's contradictory nature" within Black communities as both attempts at motherhood and non-motherhood are stigmatized in damaging ways.[491]

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[487] Astral capitalizes on Estelle’s inability to have a child in order to advance her affair with Primus. She tells Malvern, “And she’s one these women can’t make a child all they try” (178). Malvern calls Estelle “some spoil-up something that can’t make a child,” and tells Astral that Primus might force Estelle to stay home in the U.S. if she can’t birth a child, which would give Astral a chance to perhaps move into “the big house on Garrison Row” (179).

[488] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 196.

[489] Even though Triunion is not an African American community, Patricia Hill Collins’s work is still relevant because she connects the treatment of Black women in the United States to the treatment of Black women in “Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, and other places where Black women now live” (3). Collins also notes that, “Black feminist thought’s identity as a ‘critical’ social theory lies in its commitment to justice, both for U.S. Black women as a collectivity and for that of other similarly oppressed groups” (9). We can understand her theoretical discussion about African American women as a model for how we might also discuss Caribbean women in the diaspora. Collins specifically states that, “Placing African American women’s experiences, thought, and practice in a transnational, Black diasporic context reveals these and other commonalities of women of African descent” (29). Both *Daughters* and this dissertation attempt to achieve this same comparative goal. In specific regards to motherhood and how Black communities value mothering, Collins notes that, “people of the African descent place [a high value] on mothering” (181). The community values within African American communities that Collins discusses, and that I reference in this dissertation, are grounded in African-derived beliefs and practices that are prevalent across the diaspora, including in the United States and the Caribbean. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.* Further, *Daughters* itself draws numerous parallels between African American and Caribbean communities and how they treat Black women.

[490] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 195.

Judgment, silencing, and repression of Black female bodies within the diaspora become even more apparent and painful in the novel when they occur within female communities. Estelle is deeply affected by the ways in which the women of her community talk about her and other women who miscarry regularly, and Ursa hides both of her abortions from her best friend in order to avoid judgment. Ursa's best friend, Viney, chastises Ursa for "keep[ing her] business to [her]self," yet criticizes her for having an abortion (86). After Ursa tells her about it, Viney "sway[s] lightly from side to side" in a "wave of outrage" (83-84). Viney reminds Ursa about her first abortion and how she hid from Viney "what [she] had really been up to" (85). It is clear that Viney does not approve of Ursa's abortions, which make them even more traumatic for Ursa. Collins asserts that, "Black community values claiming that good Black women always want their children" often put women who desire to end their pregnancies in a difficult situation.[492] The sharply judgmental voice of Celestine, Primus's childhood caretaker and a grandmother figure in Ursa's life, emerges in both Ursa's head and the text as an anti-abortion and pro-motherhood advocate. Her imagined voice repeats to Ursa, "You should have had it, *oui*, and sent it down for me to raise!" (105). Celestine's chastisement of Ursa's decision to have an abortion reveals that the choice of non-motherhood results in familial and communal consequences. Ursa does not have a newborn to care for, but "Celestine has given her no peace" (105). This language alludes to the sleeplessness of new motherhood and serves to intentionally conflate motherhood and non-motherhood in order to assert that the diasporic community needs to seek out new definitions that don't alienate, repress, or chastise women for deciding to become mothers or not.

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[491] Ibid. In the novel, Ursa explains to Viney that she has "a sense of her life being a series of double exposures[,...] everything superimposed on everything else" (332-333). These double exposures and how Marshall uses them will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[492] Ibid.

As one of the daughters in the novel, Astral's overt participation in the judgment of the women in the abortion clinic waiting room demonstrates the need for daughterly connection as a way to counteract the damaging effects of devaluing Black women. When Astral sees an older woman "close to fifty" in the waiting room, she wonders, "What man would want to have anything to do with somebody that old?" (118). Astral's comments reference the competition among lower class women to find suitable mates. The ability to find a mate is in direct correlation to a woman's bodily appearance. As Malvern tells Astral, "somebody looking like you, with that color you got and that Spanish Bay hair long down your back, could easy find somebody that's in a position to help you" (121). Because of Astral's lighter skin and non-Black features that conform more to white beauty standards, she has a better chance of finding a man who will love her and provide for her. Patricia Hill Collins notes that, within Black communities, there exists a "deep-seated but largely unstated reliance on motherhood in the absence of committed love relationships with Black men."[493] Astral's decision to abort her pregnancy even though she isn't in a committed, loving relationship with a man, rejects this reliance on motherhood as a substitute for romantic love. Instead, Astral relies on her friend Malvern for emotional support and love, and sisterhood becomes a viable alternative to motherhood.

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[493] Ibid, 196.

Marianne Hirsch notes that, “the paradigm of sisterhood has the advantage of freeing women from the biological function of giving birth.”[494]Outside of her friendship with Malvern, however, Astral is suspicious of other women in her community, which stifles her ability to make meaningful connections with them.[495] In fact, community judgment and class differences are what drive Astral’s decision to abort her pregnancy. Essentially, Astral chooses sisterhood over motherhood out of necessity, which reinforces the need for sustainable female connections within the diaspora. As a result, Astral becomes both complicit in the shaming of Black female bodies and a victim of this shaming, and she experiences firsthand the damaging effects of it: psychological instability and alienation from her community.

The psychological effects of silencing and shaming Black women and their bodies are perhaps greater and more painful than the physical ones. Ursa, Estelle, and Astral all use doubling as a strategy to cope with physical trauma.[496] This strategy temporarily separates the body from the mind so that these women can cope with bodily trauma. As Ursa waits at the abortion clinic, she goes “in her head down to Triunion and the beach there that’s her favorite in all the world,” because she is forced to silence “her own scream [...] that’s been building in her for days” (17, 19). When Estelle experiences another miscarriage, she “returned in her thoughts to meeting [Primus] that first time in Connecticut” (33). Astral’s doubling isn’t as obvious, but when she’s raped by the football player at a dance, her mind temporarily drifts off to the lyrics of the song that was playing when he had first asked her to dance (125). The strategy of doubling, even though it enables them to temporarily cope with bodily trauma, forces these women into a state of disembodiment, which frays the ties that bind them to the diaspora and diasporic sisterhood. These instances of doubling in the novel also parallel the novel's double narration of the women's abortions and Ursa's repeated sense of feeling like she's in two places at once, experiencing double exposures. The women and Marshall's readers are forced to doubly endure the psychological trauma of their abortions and Astral's rape.

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[494] Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 164.

[495] For example, when Astral sees a woman in the waiting room with accessories that indicate she has money, Astral comments, “You would think she and rest like her would know some of everything to do so as to not be sitting up here with the ignoramuses like myself” (119). She automatically assumes a lack of sisterhood because of perceived class distinctions.

[496] As I discussed in Chapter Two, doubling was a strategy used by slave women to cope with physical abuse, assault, and rape.

The Commodification and Objectification of Black Female Bodies

Despite the shaming, silencing, and devaluation of women's bodies, women are often only viewed as bodies. They are treated as commodities, accessories, and reproductive machines. Women are expected to make their bodies and their bodily cycles, fluids, and desires invisible while at the same time operate within the narrative that women are only as valuable as their bodies' physical capacities. The depiction of the abortion clinic as a transactional space in which Ursa is given "the bottles containing the capsules [in] a mini shopping bag—like the kind used for cosmetics in a department store" alludes to the commodification of Black female bodies (3). When Estelle attends political functions with her husband Primus, Estelle's body becomes a receptacle for the sexual desires of Primus's political supporters. In one particular instance, "an elderly coffee grower from the mountains had swept her in close, held her against him with a rock-hard arm, rolled the muscles of his stomach like a belly dancer's against her, and breathed white rum in her face" (25). In his opinion, having access like this to Estelle's body is a form of payment for his political support of Primus, which suggests that female bodies are used as currency.

Even more disturbing is the fact that Primus also participates in the commodification of Estelle's body. In writing *Daughters*, Marshall was interested in capturing "more contemporary forms of bondage," including "familial" bondage.[497] The power that Primus exerts over his wife Estelle can be classified in this way. When she tells him about this particular man, he jokingly offers to accost him and demands that Estelle finish dancing with him. He fails to protect her body because the use of it as a commodity by his political supporters will help ensure his win. Further, when Primus blames Estelle for her miscarriage, he indicates that he values her body only for its reproductive potential. Estelle's miscarriage "carries with it the connotation of a productive system that has failed to produce" and signifies "production gone awry, making products of no use, not to specification, unsalable, wasted, scrap."[498] Of course, these connotations of useless production are ironic because Primus is an ineffectual politician whose ideas are repeatedly aborted or fail to be completed, or produced.[499] Heather Hathaway argues that Primus's objectification of Estelle's body hinders her ability to participate in politics: "Her interest and participation in island politics is as great as her husband's, yet he seeks to deny her the right to involvement by restricting her to her procreative obligation to him."[500] She has the potential and desire to facilitate positive change in Triunion, but because her husband and her community only value her for her capacity to give birth, her political ambitions are, for the moment, crushed under the weight of the commodification of her body.[501]

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[497] Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language," 137.

[498] Emily Martin, "Medical Metaphors of Women's Bodies: Menstruation and Menopause," in *Writing on the Body*, 29. Martin refers to menstruation here, but because biologically the same basic conditions exist during both menstruation and miscarriage, the link becomes apparent.

[499] I will explore Primus's political abortions later in this chapter. They parallel Sandy Lawson's production of a bridge in New Jersey that his community views as wasteful and pandering to white, capitalist interests.

[500] Heather Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 129. When Estelle has her miscarriage, she was out on the campaign trail with Primus even though he had requested that she stay home. Again, this is another instance in which men in the novel claim to know more about a woman's body than she herself knows. Because the miscarriage happens when she's campaigning with (and for) him, he blames her for it.

[501] Rucker also comments that, within certain Ashanti communities on the Gold Coast, women's "valuation [was] judged as a combination of their productive and reproductive capabilities, [which] made them more attractive for Gold Coast slave markets" (210). Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*. In other words, the devaluation of women and female bodies as a result of participation in the slave trade literally enslaved African women.

Primus occupies a dominant place within his family structure, which only serves to perpetuate the commodification and objectification of Black female bodies. The novel points out that this dominance over women starts at home. Primus not only dominates his wife Estele, but also his daughter Ursa. According to Marshall, Primus is "the polestar, and symbol of domination and emotional seduction."[502] In a way, Ursa is enslaved by her father because she can't seem to come out from under his grasp; his desires dictate her actions. Marshall contends that Ursa's abortion is "largely symbolic" and that "it's meant to suggest her attempt to cut away the subtle seduction and domination that has long characterized her relationship with her father."[503] It is also her attempt to reclaim ownership over her body. The patriarchal dominance that Primus represents is a symptom of the inability of Black men and women of the diaspora to create loving, sustainable relationships that don't rely on dominant/submissive power structures. For Marshall, this is one of the greatest issues facing the diaspora today, and addressing it demands that the Black female body be de-commodified.

The commodification of the Black female body and the power structure that perpetuates it can be traced back to slavery when female slaves were purchased for their reproductive potential to become slave breeders and "profitable labor-units."[504] As Carla Peterson points out, "the black body was made to perform as a laboring body, as a working machine dissociated from the mind that invents or operates the machine."[505] About slave women, Peterson notes that they "not only carried out the physical labor demanded by plantation economy, [they] also performed the sex work that satisfied the slaveholder's lust as well as the reproductive labor of breeding that ensured the replenishment of his slave stock."[506] The slave woman was only valuable for her body as commodity and was treated as such. Angela Davis's article, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," greatly influenced Marshall as she prepared to write *Daughters*.[507] In this article, Davis seeks to dismantle the myth of the Black matriarch, because matriarchy implies power, and of which female slaves had none. Davis asserts that the characterization of female slave mothers as matriarchs is "cruel because it ignores the profound traumas the black woman must have experienced when she had to surrender her child-bearing to alien and predatory economic interests."[508] This surrender complicated bodily expression for slave women, because motherhood was one of their only options for embodiment. In *Women, Race & Class,* Davis refutes the stereotype of the Black Mammy by recovering stories of female slaves as field workers rather than mothers. In fact, when slave women were used as mothers, they were treated instead as "breeders," and were stripped of the potential of embodying motherhood.[509]

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[502] Ibid, 138.
[503] Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall," 105.
[504] Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 5.
[505] Peterson, "Forward: Eccentric Bodies," x.

Marshall's condemnation of this objectification of women and their bodies is a criticism of its racist, sexist, and capitalistic motives that emerged during the time of slavery and that continue to reverberate today. As a diasporic feminist writer, Marshall is committed to exposing the paradoxes of living in a Black female body within the African diaspora. In *Brown Girl,* she depicts the paradox of immigrants who are forced to perpetuate the narrative of women as machines in order to create financial stability for their families. In *Praisesong*, she expands this paradox further by suggesting that middle and upper class women, because of their focus on material gains, move further away from their African roots through disembodiment. In *Daughters*, Black women and potentially diasporic-affirming female communities are fractured because of the double and paradoxical narrative of Black female bodies as valuable and valueless, as visible and invisible.

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[506] Ibid, x-xi.

[507] Marshall references this article numerous times in interviews. This inspiration is also evident in the fact that, when Ursa writes her master's thesis proposal that investigates slave men and women, she cites Davis's article as one of her sources

[508] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Massachusetts Review* 13.1/2 (Winter-Spring 1972), 84.

[509] Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 7.

Queen Nanny as an Alternative Model

At this point, the novel reinvokes Queen Nanny as a symbolic, alternative model for how diasporic daughters might escape or exist outside of these bodily paradoxes. As a Maroon leader, Queen Nanny exists outside of the Western dichotomy of choices for women as it pertains to motherhood, reproduction, and the body. The very existence of Maroon communities signals a counter-culture of gender and body perception. In the novel, Congo Jane is depicted as having "one small nub of a breast [...] gone" as a result of "the nine knotted tails on the whip" of her master (139). With part of her breast missing, Congo Jane's body challenges traditional notions of gender and memorializes the brutalizing of slave women's bodies. European soldiers were terrified to fight Queen Nanny, because she was known as "executioner of white captives or visitors."[510] Even more frightening to them, perhaps, was that her physical body, as a soldier warrior, was unreadable and, by consequence, ungazeable and therefore resistant to commodification. When the only option for female slaves was to embody motherhood, or breederhood, the sight of an African female soldier who could catch bullets with her body parts must have been terrifying to her European adversaries. In the novel, Congo Jane fights, "doubly armed," side by side with her lover Will Cudjoe against slaveholders in a brutal uprising (138). Queen Nanny and Congo Jane both defy Eurocentric notions of womanhood and femininity, but as Angela Davis points out, slave women were frequently involved in violent, militaristic uprisings and revolts as well as more cunning acts of resistance that involved "feigned illness and studied indolence."[511] In other words, women like Congo Jane are not an anomaly in diasporic history. Diasporic daughters must look to and recover these past slave women as models in order to figuratively and literally abort the false representations of slave history and the slave woman's passive and complicit role that are rendered in Eurocentric retellings.[512] Marshall's invocation of Queen Nanny through the character of Congo Jane is a reminder to her daughters that there have always existed possibilities of embodiment that operate outside of Western dichotomies and narratives about the Black female body.

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[510] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 216.

Queen Nanny's fierce preservation of African practices serves as a roadmap of sorts for diasporic daughters. The traditional African belief of unity between body and spirit challenges the slaveholder's commodification of the slave woman's body. Carla Peterson contends that, "The African concept of the unity of body and spirit was ruptured, but not destroyed, by the experiences of the Middle Passage."[513] She asserts that the "writings developed by enslaved Africans and their descendants bear witness to African Americans' ongoing struggle to reconnect the body and spirit."[514] *Daughters* participates in this collective reconnection of body to spirit by casting Congo Jane in the likeness of Queen Nanny, a defender of body/spirit connection, and by suggesting through the characters of Ursa, Estelle, and Astral that there exists a strong longing for this connection within daughters of the diaspora. They all want their bodily sensations to align with their spiritual expressions. Gottlieb argues that, because Queen Nanny lived in a Maroon community and thus existed outside of common plantation slave communities, "she and her people retained these aspects of traditional African religions and customs much more than their counterparts who remained slaves on the plantations."[515] The connection between body and spirit lent Queen Nanny more military and political power, as she was able to use her spiritual practices in all spheres of her life.

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[511] Davis, "Reflections," 86. Mair also notes that, "Women had the power and the will to destabilize the plantation's labour productivity through a variety of single or collective acts, some blatant, some devious, but all ultimately damaging to the economic enterprise" (323). Mair, *A Historical Study*.

[512] In her interview with Daryl Dance, Marshall proclaims, "I realized that the history taught me, the *little bit* of history taught me about black people, was far from the truth. I sensed that early on. Somebody was lying through their teeth to me, trying to undermine my spirit and my sense of self" (100). Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall."

[513] Peterson, "Forward: Eccentric Bodies," x.

[514] Ibid.

One of the most significant ways that Queen Nanny advantageously practiced traditional African spirituality was in regards to reproduction. Walter Rucker provides evidence that Maroon and enslaved women used their knowledge of plants and herbs to encourage, prevent, or abort pregnancy when it was advantageous to them personally and to their communities.[516] Rucker argues that, "the ability to produce abortifacients [...] represented the potential of gynecological resistance and means of achieving contraception, reduced fertility, and even fertility."[517] For Maroon communities in particular, Rucker notes that, "the controlling or deterring reproductive capacity was, in and of itself, a political act and a potential source of political power."[518] The fact that Queen Nanny never had any biological children might be evidence of this control and political power within the female community of the Maroons. Control over reproduction within Maroon communities, and often within enslaved communities, was held solely by "*obeah*-women, midwives, and healers."[519] These women "covertly used contraceptives and abortions to resist slavery [and] often employed African folk knowledge to do so."[520] Mair indicates that even when slave women had their babies rather than aborting them with the help of midwives, they used slave laws to their advantage by "nursing their infants for as long as they could and too often for the estate's liking, often for as long as two years."[521] This feminist model of reproductive control and corporal autonomy is hinted at in the novel. When Astral gets the abortion tablets from the doctor, she recalls that it looks similar to "the bush tea her mother used to boil and give her when she was sick" (125). This "transgenerational [...] female knowledge" of healing and reproduction, however, has been muted and even lost over the years.[522] The result of this loss is Astral's traumatic and life-threatening abortion.

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[515] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, 56.
[516] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 219. Even though she doesn't directly tie the use of herbs to abortion or prenatal care, Gottlieb also notes the "vast body of knowledge of curative herbs" among the Maroons of Jamaica (50).
[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid.
[519] Ibid.
[520] Loretta J. Ross, "African-American Women and Abortion," in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. Rickie Solinger (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998): 167.

Daughters clearly advocates for diasporic communities in which female members are afforded agency and power when it comes to making decisions about their bodies. Its vision is radically feminist and its rhetoric is similar to the "Reproductive Justice" movement that was formed around the same time that Marshall published *Daughters.* Loretta Ross, co-founder of the movement, advocates for more involvement of African American women in the reproductive and abortion rights movement. She claims, "Every Black woman must believe she has a right to control her body simply because she is human. This belief does not deny her femaleness or her Blackness but rests upon a fundamentally solid acceptance of her own uniqueness and sense of self-esteem-a belief in her *human rights* and right to bodily self-determination."[523] The novel supports Ross's claims, as both Ursa's and Astral's abortions, despite community disapproval, are narrated as necessary in preserving their power as Black women. Heather Hathaway contends that, "each woman responds to her maternal and filial responsibilities differently, signifying Marshall's commitment to portraying women's freedom to accept or deny the dependency that can result from procreative potential."[524] Not only does a diasporic woman's right to choose grant her power and control over her own body, it also helps to ensure the permanent erasure of the systems of oppression that regulated slave women's reproductive choices. According to Ross, "The early African-American activists understood the complex nature of Black womanhood and believed that fertility control was an essential part of the movement to rise from the brutal legacy of slavery."[525] By recovering Maroon women who operated counter to Eurocentric control of reproduction, the novel stands as an activist model of choice. *Daughters* is unashamedly pro-choice.

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[521] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 324.
[522] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 219.
[523] Ross, "African-American Women and Abortion," 164.
[524] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 121-122.

Marshall's pro-choice politics extend beyond the issue of abortion in that the novel also advocates for sexual choice and autonomy. The "free zone" between Ursa and her lover Lowell is representative of positive male/female sexual relationships that were often corrupted during slavery. Angela Davis contends that the rape of slave women by their masters was often motivated by a desire to repress communal resistance movements; rape became a "sexual contest."[526] Even though many sources indicate that Cudjoe and Nanny were siblings rather than lovers, *Daughters* constructs the characters of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe as "coleaders, coconspirators, lovers, consorts, friends," in order to provide a historical model of sexual autonomy and equality within the diaspora (138). Sexual intercourse becomes a potential site of cooperation rather than hegemonic control, free sexual expression rather than codified production of future enslaved beings.

As Queen Nanny and her followers knew all too well, the choice to abort a pregnancy or birth a baby has personal, political, and communal implications within the diaspora. Ursa, Astral, and Estelle consider these implications responsibly before, during, and after their abortions. The residue from slavery of women having to choose between death and freedom for their children persists. The false arrest of Viney's young son Robeson and the novel's allusion to the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till demonstrate the perpetual threat to the Black community and the risk Black mothers take when they birth children under this threat. When Estelle keeps miscarrying, she considers this risk: "to tell you the truth, ever since last week, I've been asking myself whether I really want to bring another child this color into the world …" (171) Angela Davis argues, "When Black [...] women resort to abortions in such large numbers, the stories they tell are not so much about their desire to be free of their pregnancy, but rather about the miserable social conditions which dissuade them from bringing new lives into the world."[527]

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[525] Ross, "African-American Women and Abortion," 162.

[526] Davis, "Reflections," 98.

On the other hand, the obligation to reproduce children who will participate in the resistance to these social conditions also persists for Black women. Here, Marshall unveils another paradox within the diaspora that women must navigate. Birthing a child of the diaspora can be negative in that Black children are born at a racial disadvantage, but it can also be positive in that they have the potential to continue the lineage of resistance to these disadvantages. Rucker observes this paradox within Maroon communities in the Caribbean, claiming that they "commanded a seemingly paradoxical range of life-giving generative powers and destructive forces, which further augmented their political power."[528] The women of these communities determined when it was advantageous to give birth and when it was advantageous to abort. Maroon women, and particularly "*obeah*-women, midwives, and healers," should, according to Rucker, "be understood as political agents who protected, regenerated, and sustained the 'body politic' of maroon enclaves and plantation communities."[529] Estelle ultimately decides to have a baby to fulfill this regenerative role for her community, and she indoctrinates Ursa into the activist world to which both she and her brother Grady, a civil rights activist who was crippled as a result of his work on “the front line,” belong (229). The novel intimates that one day Ursa will also be ready to birth a baby within the diaspora with the same activist intentions as her mother.

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[527] Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 204.
[528] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 218.
[529] Ibid, 219.

Diasporic women are tasked with balancing the personal with the communal when it comes to their reproductive choices, and *Daughters* privileges this balance rather than models in which women are forced to choose between the two. As both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong* also reveal, Marshall’s envisioned feminist diaspora is one in which women foster individualistic identities and undergo intensely personal journeys of self-discovery and embodiment. At the same time, though, their identities and journeys must be linked to community so that the “individual struggle” is reflective of and in “the struggle of communities.”[530] Adam Miller rightfully notes that, “In Marshall we never find the hero or heroine overcoming all odds alone, the self-made man or woman divorced from the relations that spawn and sustain them.”[531] Queen Nanny and her Maroon community provide a model for this balance. As female Maroons imitating Ashanti models of power, they had sole reproductive agency within their communities. The language of abortion and reproduction becomes integral to discussions of daughterhood and mothering that are woven throughout the novel. The abortion scenes that offer opening characterizations of Ursa, Estelle, and Astral as subjects desiring agency foreground these conversations. Even when the novel’s focus shifts to discussing political agency, Marshall’s language remains female- and body-centered. Daughterhood, mothering, and politics become intertwined in significant ways through the daughters’ collective embodiment of Queen Nanny and Congo Jane.

Double Exposures: Diasporic Daughterhood and Alternative Mothering

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[530] Angela Elam, “To Be in the World: An Interview with Paule Marshall,” in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 155.

[531] Adam Miller, “Women and Power, the Confounding of Gender, Race, and Class,” *Black Scholar* 22.4 (Fall 1992): 48.

Daughters turns mothers into daughters and daughters into mothers in an effort to resurrect the subversive spirit of Maroon communities in regards to family structure and relationships.[532] The daughters'—and mothers'—embodiment of Queen Nanny initiates a reconsideration of mother/daughter roles within the diaspora. Mavis Campbell makes note that Maroon communities "were autonomous communities existing outside the purlieus of the territorial units of the slave plantations," and that, "these communities were the most vexing to the authorities, because they stood not only as bad examples to estate slaves, but were also a constant reminder of the slaves' rejection of the life-style the masters had designed for them."[533] Similarly, *Daughters* positions the daughters and mothers of the narrative as agents of change and transmission. Like Avey in *Praisesong*, the women in *Daughters* are certainly storytellers and diasporic griots. Ursa and Estelle both make great effort to tell the story of Congo Jane through writing (Ursa's master's thesis) and embodiment (Estelle's modeling the spirit of Jane's cooperation and resistance through her political work with Primus).

Since Marshall envisions a diaspora in which women are active participants in the preservation of African rituals, practices, and beliefs—Queen Nanny's work—the daughters have more agency than their narrative foremothers in *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong* in building and shaping their diasporic communities through their spiritual practices, political acumen, and alternative forms of mothering. Simone Alexander asserts that, since Marshall lives predominantly in the United States, she is "situated in the 'master's house'" and is therefore poised to write "against the 'master' narrative."[534] The mere existence of Maroon communities relied upon this resistance to the "master" narrative about slaves, and in particular about slave women and families as passively complicit supporters of the institution of slavery.[535] Maroons suffered under *and* resisted the system of colonial power which continually attempted to enslave and dominate them. They enacted their defiance of this system by creating and maintaining strong communities that continually challenged slavery and negative depictions of Africans and African Americans. In the spirit of the Maroons, the daughters and mothers of Marshall's novel specifically resist rigid and oppressive depictions of Black women. Mary Helen Washington characterizes Marshall as a political writer and points to the fact that her "fiction disrupts those patterns that lock women into conventional female stories" as evidence.[536] Marshall gives her daughters access to identities and subjectivities that challenge myopic constructions of gender and race. Dorothy Hamer Denniston suggests that Marshall "call[s] for the creation of a new, transformative identity, which, while culturally focused, is self-defined and ever-evolving."[537] Denniston continues, "Marshall inscribes female authority by virtue of female subjectivity. Women, in the final analysis, become active agents who can be enablers, clearing a space for liberation across culture and gender."[538] As active agents within the diaspora, Marshall's daughters challenge Eurocentric narratives about Black women by demonstrating the fluid, subversive aspects of Black female identity. By embodying both daughter and mother identities at once, the women in *Daughters*, like Queen Nanny, occupy robust positions of power and agency within the diaspora.

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[532] In her very short description of the novel, Barbara Fister notes that, "the resemblances between mother and daughter [...] become suddenly linked together" through Marshall's use of double exposures (79). Barbara Fister, *Third World Women's Literature: A Dictionary and Guide to Materials in English* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995). This section, then, can be understood as my explanation and expansion of Fister's idea that mothers and daughters in the novel become one and the same.

[533] Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, 1.

[534] Simone Alexander, *The Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* (Columbia,

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MO: University of Missouri Press, 200), 2.

[535] Angela Davis refutes this narrative about slave women and families, which she claims was codified into myth in the Moynihan Report in 1965. See Davis, "Reflections."

[536] Mary Helen Washington, "Declaring (Ambiguous) Liberty: Paule Marshall's Middle-Class Women," in *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, ed. Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 213.

[537] Dorothy Hamer Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 148.

[538] Ibid.

Marshall makes striking contributions to Afro-Caribbean and African American narrative depictions of mother/daughter relationships by moving away from traditional representations that focus on ambiguity. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory argues that, "the mother-daughter dyad experiences a love/hate relationship, often because the mother tries painstakingly to convey knowledge about how to survive in a racist, sexist, and classist world while the daughter rejects her mother's experiences as invalid in changing social times."[539] According to Alexander, the mother/daughter relationship in the works of Caribbean writers is markedly noted for its "ambivalence" and the emergence of matrophobia.[540] In Jamaica Kincaid's novels, *Annie John* (1985) and *Lucy* (1990), for example, both eponymous characters craft their identities in relation to the ambivalence they feel toward their domineering yet distant mothers. In Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes Memory* (1994), Sophie's inability to function within a loving romantic relationship with her husband Joseph is a direct result of the vexed relationship she has with her mother Martine. Sethe, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), carries on a haunting and spiritually and physically disturbing relationship with her murdered daughter. As a result of this relationship, her affection for her live daughter Denver is strained.

Marshall's novels depart from these mother/daughter models in significant ways. In Marshall's first novel *Brown Girl*, we see features of the ambivalent mother/daughter relationship, as Selina struggles mightily to reject her mother's acceptance of materialism and forge a unique identity for herself. In *Praisesong*, misunderstandings exist between Avey and Marion before Avey's transformation and recognition of her place within the African diaspora. *Daughters* likewise depicts a daughter's desire to be different from her mother, as Ursa frequently attempts to hide the parts of her body that resemble her mother Estelle. Unlike the other examples I’ve noted here, though, trauma inflicted on the daughter by the mother does not exist in Marshall’s novels. She explains this departure in her interview with Sabine Bröck:

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[539] Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1996), 2.

[540] Alexander, *Mother Imagery*, 45, 25.

> I’m not going to use the kind of themes that are fashionable because they would sell, I’m not going to suggest that Black life is in such disarray, that our unity is so disintegrated that we don’t constitute any kind of force in this country, I’m not going to portray Black women as the eternal victims, I’m not going to give the impression that the whole thing that one reads in so much of literature of rape, of incest, and so on is a pattern in the Black community.[541]

For Marshall, the individual is always symbolic of the communal in her novels. The result of this is her artistic choice to move away from more explicit representations of the mother/daughter dyad. In fact, Marshall’s invocation of Queen Nanny through Congo Jane collapses this dyad as mothers become daughters and daughters become mothers on a microscopic level within family and on a macroscopic level within diaspora. The clear distinction between these roles is ruptured in order to expand notions of daughterhood and mothering. Whereas in the aforementioned novels by Kincaid, Danticat, and Morrison, where the mother figures are always clearly playing the role of mother, *Daughters* pays homage to Queen Nanny’s liminal position as both mother of the diaspora and daughter of Africa by blurring the lines between these two roles.

The series of double exposures in *Daughters* literally exposes the doubleness or liminality of the daughters as they move between spaces of daughterhood and mothering. They are the embodiment of mothers *and* daughters at once. Adrienne Rich argues that this doubleness is always at play: “We are, none of us, ‘either’ mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both.”[542] Perhaps this idea of double exposures came about as a result of Marshall's own doubleness growing up as a West Indian and an African American. In an interview with Sally Lodge long before she published *Daughters*, Marshall reveals that, "as a child [she] moved with the utmost ease between these cultures."[543] She refers to this easeful movement between cultures, to her dual identity, as a "double exposure."[544] At times, certainly, she was of both worlds at once, but at other times, she was caught between the two, her identity characterized by both doubleness and liminality. It is clear that Marshall, because of her own double identity, is invested in exploring how multiple identity positions affect people's lives and their access to power. *Daughters* clearly captures this double exposure within its characters; for example, Ursa and Estelle straddle the United States and Triunion, Astral straddles the lower and middle/upper class, and Mae Ryland straddles the political and social spheres.

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[541] Bröck, “Talk as a Form of Action,” 67.
[542] Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 253.

Similarly, the Maroons existed within liminal spaces, as they were neither members of the free Black community—and could therefore never expect to receive the same, albeit limited, protection under the law—nor members of the enslaved population of Africans on plantations, but they exhibited identity markers of both groups. Maroon women in particular led liminal lives; they straddled private, public, political, and military spheres with relative ease. Rucker argues that, because of their multiple positions as soldiers, *obeah* women, midwives, and political leaders, "Maroon women, in particular, represented a new definition of womanhood."[545] Particularly as *obeah* practitioners and healers, Maroon women "were the natural gatekeepers between the spiritual and material planes."[546] They were of the living and the dead. According to Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *obeah* is

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[543] Sally Lodge, "Paule Marshall," in *Writing for your Life*," ed. Sybil Steinberg (Wainscott, NY: Puschcart Press, 1992), 330.

[544] Ibid.

[545] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 223.

> a secretive medicine art that involves a range of religious practices, activities, and beliefs designed to help persons in distress deal with crisis response to tragedy, battle psychological and physical illness, withstand or protect themselves against human abuse, and fight for survival. In this Afro-Caribbean religious tradition, believers use herbal remedies and mystical or unnatural means to address their physical, social, and emotional needs. Practitioners blend their practice knowledge of pharmacopeia with beliefs in divine powers and psychological conditioning as a means of securing physical well-being and social justice.[547]

Murrell argues that the *obeah* woman "must see in front and behind, in the future and in the past."[548] The confluence of these double powers within the context of newly formed Maroon communities assured Maroon women more agency than their sisters who were either left back in Africa or enslaved on Caribbean and North American plantations.

The double exposures that Ursa experiences of witnessing the same political and social corruptions in both New York and Triunion become not just personal moments of déja vu and inspiration to act, but intentional narrative technique. Both Moira Ferguson and Eugenia DeLamotte consider the novel's use of double exposures in this way, but they do not explicitly focus on Queen Nanny and the Maroons as models of double exposure like I do here. Ferguson focuses on these double exposures in her discussion of *Daughters* in her monograph, *A Human Necklace*. Ferguson's contention is that Marshall creates paired characters in order to demonstrate the meaningful intersections of class status and geographic location. Anchoring her argument is the claim that the daughters of the novel all orbit around Primus and that their orbits cross each other frequently in order to reveal how "empire replicates itself."[549] According to Ferguson, Congo Jane represents a separate constellation for the women to join, of which she is the star.[550] Ferguson never considers the possibility that all of the novel's women are both Congo Jane *and* her daughters through their embodiment of her. In DeLamotte's discussion about doubleness and double exposures in *Places of Silence, Journeys of Freedom*, she focuses on the double-voicedness in Marshall's novels. DeLamotte contends that the double exposures in *Daughters* serve to suggest the duality of public and private speech and psychological and political realms.[551] According to DeLamotte, oppressive conversations and speech can also be subversive if looked at from another angle, which, according to her, is a feature of Marshall's feminist writing style. DeLamotte, too, notes Marshall's pairings of characters as a means to highlight these double exposures. Both Ferguson's and DeLamotte's contentions are useful models for considering the significant ways in which doubleness occurs in *Daughters*, but their analyses do not consider Marshall's invocation of Queen Nanny and Maroon communities as insurgent models of both liminality and doubleness.

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[546] Ibid, 218.

[547] Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Obeah: Afro-Caribbean Religious Medicine Art and Healing," in *Caribbean Healing Traditions: Implications for Health and Mental Health*, ed. Patsy Sutherland, Roy Moodley, and Barry Chevannes (New York: Routledge, 2014), 65.

[548] Ibid, 72.

My contention is that, through their embodiment of Queen Nanny, the women in the novel are doubly exposed as both daughters and mothers, cooperative and resistant members of society, and preservers and adoptors of African practices. Marshall creates pairs of characters across geographic and socioeconomic borders that are connected by Queen Nanny's qualities as spiritual *obeah* woman and political leader of her people. Malvern and Viney subtly embody

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[549] Moira Ferguson, *A Human Necklace: The African Diaspora and Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2013), 76.
[550] Ibid, 91.
[551] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 121-122.

Queen Nanny's *obeah* knowledge and powers through their reliance on ritual and spirituality in coping with the stresses and oppressions of living in a racist and classist diaspora. They are the healers of the novel. Estelle and Mae Ryland devote their lives to social and political activism and fiercely advocate for the disenfranchised in the same ways that Queen Nanny did for her people. Astral and Ursa are the most notable daughters of the novel, as they are often the recipients of the spiritual and political lessons of Malvern, Viney, Estelle, and Mae Ryland, and have no biological children. Their pairing, and the fact that they both voluntarily abort their pregnancies, suggest alternative forms of mothering that are neither biological nor dominant. By creating these three pairs, Marshall is able to suggest the possibility of reconciliation among women of different backgrounds within the diaspora. Marshall claims, "I'm a writer of fiction. I don't offer solutions. Rather, I suggest, I imply, the possibility of action."[552] Through her use of double exposures, Marshall suggests the possibility of new or alternative forms of daughterhood and mothering that have the potential to bridge gaps between daughters of the diaspora.

Daughterhood is an important concept and identity to Marshall, and with it comes a set of obligations that demand intentional participation in the maintenance of the African diaspora. Marshall often mentions that she learned how to be a daughter of the diaspora from "the poets in the kitchen," her mother and other female kinfolk who taught her how to preserve traditional African practices and beliefs.[553] In teaching Marshall about these traditions, they were mothers. In preserving them, they were daughters. The novel argues that being a daughter of the diaspora means preserving African values and practices, participating in the creation and maintenance of a sustainable African diaspora, and resisting all forms of oppression that seek to silence or diminish a strong diaspora that is tied to Africa. It positions mothers to do the work of transmitting this knowledge to daughters so that it may be preserved. Simone Alexander insists that, “the daughter is better equipped to respond to” and challenge “the master script” of colonialism and patriarchy, because she “is biologically and discursively nurtured by her mother.”[554] The women in the novel have biological mothers, surrogate or othermothers, and Congo Jane, who is their spiritual, ancestral, and diasporic mother to teach them how to become diasporic daughters. Alexander cites Benna, a ritual of call-and-response and music that was invented in the Black community after the prohibition of slavery to “spread local news across the island” as a “site of resistance” for women.[555]

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[552] Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language," 145.

[553] See Paule Marshall, "From the Poets in the Kitchen." In most of Marshall's interviews over the years, she mentions these diasporic mothers and daughters as her primary influences in becoming a fiction writer that seeks to preserve the diaspora's connection to Africa.

In the novel, African practices and rituals that are either directly replicated or carefully altered also become sites of resistance for diasporic daughters, as through them, the daughters lay claim to methods of resistance that will ensure their continued survival. These practices and rituals include the knowledge and use of herbs for healthcare and reproductive choice, deep reverence for and connection to the ancestors, spirituality, and communal social and political activism. In responding to Marshall’s frequent textual focus on African tradition and ritual, Adam Miller claims, “An appreciation of the best of Africa will enable us to not only survive this god forsaken land but to create in it.”[556] The kitchen poets and Queen Nanny represent for Marshall “the best of Africa,” as their mothering engenders daughters who, like Marshall and the daughters of the novel, “bring to life the stone Monument” of Congo Jane through their “ubiquitous resistance” as “contemporary rebels” within the African diaspora.[557]

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[554] Simone Alexander, “M/Otherly Guise or Guide?: Theorizing Jamaica Kincaid’s ‘Girl,’’ in *Feminist and Critical Perspectives on Caribbean Mothering,* ed. Dorsia Smith and Simone Alexander (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012), 214-215.

[555] Ibid, 213-214.

[556] Miller, “Women and Power,” 49.

[557] Ferguson, “Of Bears & Bearings,” 185.

Daughters is concerned with teasing out the ways in which women in the African diaspora become daughters of the African diaspora. Heather Hathaway argues for a reading of the novel as "a tale about the process of un-becoming a daughter."[558] Certainly, she means the un-becoming of Ursa as a daughter to Primus, claiming that the novel is "about breaking familial ties."[559] *Daughters*, however, is very much about the making of daughters of the diaspora. Indeed, Ursa sheds, or aborts, the patriarchal control of her father by thwarting his political agenda, but in the process of exerting her political agency, she becomes a daughter to Viney, to Astral, to Mae Ryland, to Congo Jane, to herself, and to the gynocentric lineage of the African diaspora that can be traced back to Queen Nanny. The various iterations of daughterhood that permeate the novel are Marshall's offerings to the diasporic community about how to become a daughter of the diaspora. As Shirley M. Jordan proposes, "The concept of 'daughtering,' therefore comes to symbolize the unity that binds us to the lessons and strengths of a shared past and the promise of a future that is lived in the now."[560] Despite their geographic and socioeconomic differences, the daughters of the novel are all the "heirs of Congo Jane" and the symbolic embodiment of her.[561] The ways in which they mother, and simultaneously daughter, each other have felt effects on their own psychological, spiritual, and political lives as well as those of other diasporic members.

As Marshall unveils her vision for diasporic daughterhood, acts of mothering in the novel become acts of daughtering. Born from a lineage of female teachers, Estelle is primed to teach her daughter Ursa an ethic of activism and social justice that spans multiple diasporic spaces. The scars of motherhood that mark Estelle's physical body—"the slight pouch of flesh across her stomach"—parallel Congo Jane's nubbed breast (246). Both women, facing bodily trauma, risked their lives to challenge racist systems of power that oppress and abuse Black communities. The fact that Ursa "had somehow managed to be born" is reminiscent of Marion's miraculous birth in *Praisesong* and likewise echoes the miraculous existence of Maroon communities, despite the hostile environments in which all of these valiant acts of diasporic expansion took place (21). Adrienne Rich observes that, "Daughters have been nullified by silence, but also by infanticide, of which they have everywhere been the primary victims."[562] Estelle's choice to give birth to Ursa, despite her doubts about bringing another Black baby into this unforgiving world, is a subversive act of both mothering and daughtering. As a daughter of the diaspora, Estelle preserves a matrilineage of social and political activists, including Queen Nanny and other slave women who led or participated in revolts. As a mother in the diaspora, Estelle advocates for the valuing of Black female children as integral members of the diasporic community.

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[558] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 127.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Shirley M. Jordan, "Daughters: the Unity that Binds Us," *American Visions* 6.5 (October 1991): 38.
[561] Ferguson, *A Human Necklace*, 84.

Estelle is even further connected to Congo Jane and Queen Nanny through her use of the childhood game Statues,[563] a game in which she poses as a statue, like the statue of Congo Jane in Triunion. She recuperates this game as a method of resistance during an abusive fight with Primus in which he "[flings] her toward the front seat of the car" (245). The result of "her head str[iking] the edge of the door frame" is a vision of "an entire galaxy of stars," of which, as Moira Ferguson argues, Congo Jane is the central star (245).[564] A young Ursa, however, does not understand her mother's brave acts of resistance, and the mother/daughter misunderstanding that characterizes the majority of Ursa's relationship with Estelle develops: "Estelle. A puzzle. She can only love her and hope to understand her someday" (256). Simultaneous mothering and daughtering is not without its consequences. Although Estelle is not representative of other, dominant mothers in Afro-Caribbean literature who demonstrate a strong "need to control" their daughters in order to protect them from society's harshness, a young Ursa does not yet have adequate diasporic literacy to understand her mother's coded language and bodily acts of resistance that bear meaning within the context of Queen Nanny and the Maroons.[565] Once Ursa not only understands, but also feels the contemporary and creative powers of Queen Nanny and Congo Jane, as evidenced by her master's thesis proposal in which she desires to tell Queen Nanny's story, the mother/daughter misunderstanding begins to dissipate. Estelle advocates for the teaching of diasporic literacy in Triunion through community arts by joining the Arts Council board. She dreams of "a play [about] the story of [Congo Jane's] life" to counter the dominant and hegemonic narratives told in British plays by playwrights like Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw (167). Because of the dearth of opportunities to develop diasporic literacy on the island of Triunion, Estelle sends Ursa to the United States to attend Weaver High, where her activist brother Grady is a teacher. According to Estelle, Ursa learns to "walk the walk and talk the talk well enough to get by" (228). Estelle's choice to send Ursa abroad for schooling is not reflective of some kind of disavowal of her duties as a mother, but rather suggests that she participates in what Andrea O'Reilly refers to as "feminist mothering."[566] Estelle understands mothering to "have cultural significance and political purpose."[567]

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[562] Rich, *Of Woman Born,* 226.

[563] In this game, children pose as statues and others guess who they are. As an adult, Estelle uses the game as a method of resistance rather than entertainment. Because of the dominant presence of the statue of Congo Jane in both the fabric of the text and the Triunion community, Estelle's recuperation of this game is directly linked to her embodiment of Congo Jane.

[564] Ferguson, *A Human Necklace*, 91.

Perhaps Estelle's most powerful act of daughtering is her bridging together the people of Triunion and the United States in an effort to create a sustainable, unified diaspora. Her father refers to her as "an eternal optimist," and Estelle is indeed one of the sharpest visionaries of the novel, almost in line with Marshall herself, who sees her work as "a kind of bridge that joins the two great wings of the black diaspora in this part of the world"(224).[568] Estelle recognizes that "there's the same work to be done" in the United States as there is in Triunion (224). The same ills face all people of the diaspora, and Estelle has the prescience to see clearly the strong connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the political and legal changes that need to take place in Triunion in order to ensure equality for all diasporic peoples. By naming Ursa after her mother *and* Primus's mother—Ursa-Bea is her full name—Estelle "claim[s] her for the homefolks as well" (34). Ursa's birth and name represent the union between the United States and Triunion, the potential for cross-geographic connection among members of the diaspora. Estelle's frequent letters to the "homefolks" enable her to maintain this connection in a meaningful way.

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[565] Alexander, *Mother Imagery*, 45.
[566] Andrea O'Reilly, ed. *Feminist Mothering* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 7.
[567] Ibid.

Estelle's participation in politics further engenders potential connections among people of the diaspora. Estelle rejects her role as the prime minister's wife, detesting the "luncheons and teas" where futile gossip runs rampant, and, like Queen Nanny, opts instead for a more politically active role running Primus's office (168). Historical documents and folklore reveal to us that Queen Nanny, despite the fact that she was married to "a man of considerable prestige among the Windward Maroons," played a more significant political, cultural, and military role in the lives of her people.[569] Estelle embodies the spirit of Queen Nanny as an active participant in the political system in Triunion and resists the role of passive accessory to her husband's political affairs.

Estelle's political efforts are gynocentric, and Marshall clearly privileges this approach to politics since it gives voice to female-specific issues. Estelle works tirelessly to install a closed-air market to protect the market women in whom she frequently sees the replication of Congo Jane.[570] Interestingly enough, Rucker argues that, within Maroon communities, "the public market [was a domain] of empowerment, not debasement for women."[571] Estelle's project co-opts the market space as a site of empowerment for women. Although the market—The Ursa Mackenzie Market—is named after Primus's mother, we might also understand its name as symbolic of daughter Ursa, who has yet to be born, and her role in Estelle's unification efforts.[572] In fact, Estelle has a miscarriage while attending the opening of the new market, risking her own life and the life of her baby to ensure political progress in Triunion. Karla Gottlieb contends that Queen Nanny and her heirs are "women who have had to defend their children and their people with their own lives."[573] Marshall clearly connects the language of politics to the language of reproduction in order to capture the fraught nature of Estelle's dual mother/daughter subjectivity. To be a mother and a political and social activist—a daughter of the diaspora—is both a complex and empowered subject position that requires the feminist recognition that the personal is political.[574]

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[568] Dance, "An Interview with Paule Marshall," 109.

[569] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 63. See also Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*. Brathwaite also notes that Queen Nanny's husband, "according to Ashanti tradition, could play no part in the affairs of state" (15). Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe.*

Estelle models Maroon communities in which Audre Lorde's concept of the personal as political was reality. Making the personal political ensured the continued survival and future proliferation of the Maroons. Significantly, this assurance was mostly women's work.[575] According to Audre Lorde, sisterhood—as a means to survive patriarchal, cultural, racist, classist, and gendered oppressions—is forged through the recognition of difference as power.[576] When Estelle develops sympathy for her husband's mistress Astral at the end of the novel, and encourages Ursa to do the same, she has come into the power of sisterhood. Estelle is now triply exposed as a diasporic mother, daughter, *and* sister. Mary Helen Washington rightfully notes that, "Marshall insists that the mother-daughter bond, important as it is for revealing character, for allowing women to be the central characters in their lives, the activists, the centers of power, has significance for black women far greater than their individual lives."[577] Estelle's gynocentric politics, and her involvement of her daughter in those politics, specifically bridge daughters of the diaspora together to ensure their continued survival and access to personal and community power. Estelle's sympathetic connection to Astral at the end of the novel; however, suggests that sisterhood, in addition to strong mother-daughter bonds, is equally as important in helping women to secure power within the diaspora.

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[570] In the novel, the market women are frequently described as Congo Jane; they have "broad Congo Jane feet" and possess her tenacity for economic advancement (142).
[571] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 226.
[572] Marshall claims that she uses Ursa "to bring together, to reconcile, the two great traditions that have gone into making me, the African American and the West Indian" (148). Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language."
[573] Gottlieb, The *Mother of Us All*, 84.
[574] This is Audre Lorde's concept as she lays out in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984).
[575] Mair claims, "The women participated as full partners in this life of liberty and, as the eighteenth century advanced, they demonstrated one of the most vital symptoms of a free existence: the capacity of the race to reproduce itself" (66). Mair, *A Historical Study*. Rucker's discussion about the active political role Maroon women played within their community occupies a considerable amount of space in his text in order to fulfill his intention of "reassess[ing] gender and the roles of women" (212). Rucker, *Gold Coast Diaspora*.

Because of her embodiment of Queen Nanny, Estelle's dual position as mother and daughter is antithetical to depictions of mothers by earlier generations of feminism that were mostly concerned with issues only facing white, middle to upper class women. In *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Marianne Hirsch contends that, apart from "the tradition of black American women writers of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s," feminist discourse has "suffered from [...] the absence of the mother as subject."[578] She counts Marshall as among this tradition of Black female writers, and notes that, along with Alice Walker, Marshall has created a tradition of narrative in which "daughters and mothers can speak *to* each other, recognizing the painful experiences of racist and sexist oppression that they share."[579] Perhaps even more important is Marshall's insistence that women have the potential to be both mothers and diasporic daughters at once. By invoking the figure of Queen Nanny and her female-led Maroon community, *Daughters* reminds readers that Black women have been occupying this subject position of doubleness for centuries and that it is essential to their subversion of patriarchal and racist systems of power that seek to subjugate them.

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[576] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*.
[577] Mary Helen Washington, "I Sign My Mother's Name," in *Mothering the Mind*, ed. Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Browley (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 158.
[578] Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, 176.

In order to affirm the necessity of doubleness within diasporic communities, the novel depicts multiple mother figures as doubly exposed. Mae Ryland is another political mother in the text who models for Ursa the importance of social and political activism. She is what Rosalie Riegle Troester refers to as an "othermother" to both Ursa and her community.[580] She provides Ursa with an alternative role model for community activism and what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as "activist mothering."[581] Because of the corrosive effects of slavery on the family structures of slaves and the influence of "African women's worldview" in which communal motherhood and sisterhood are encouraged, daughters of the diaspora often have multiple mother figures in their lives.[582] Johnetta B. Cole points out that, "many young African-American girls have multiple models of 'mother.'"[583] Queen Nanny is one such mother. Having no biological children of her own, she existed (and still exists) as the spiritual othermother of her people. Similarly, Mae Ryland is known in her community as "Mother Ryland" (281). She is described as “tak[ing] a few brisk Congo Jane steps” as she joins politician Sandy Lawson on stage after his speech (280).

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[579] Ibid, 178.

[580] Rosalie Riegle Troester, "Turbulence and Tenderness: Mothers, Daughters, and 'Othermothers' in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* 1.2 (Fall 1984): 13-16. Troester refers to women who nurture non-biological children and provide alternative models of "Black womanhood" as "othermothers" (13).

[581] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 192. According to Collins, "activist mothering" is when "African-American community othermothers [...], via their socially responsible individualism, engage in Black women's community work" (190).

[582] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 326.

[583] Johnetta B. Cole, Preface to *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers & Daughters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991): xv.

Mae Ryland is linked to Congo Jane in another significant ways as well in order to emphasize her embodiment of Queen Nanny’s political power. Her “lace-trimmed ruffled” blouse is repeatedly referenced in order to connect her to Congo Jane through the image of the “shawl of Alencon lace” that Jane took from her slave master as retribution for her nubbed breast moments before Jane killed her during an organized attack (280, 376). Like Congo Jane, Mae Ryland slowly plots her political revenge after Sandy Lawson betrayed her by building an expressway through Midland City that spawns racial and class segregation and stifles economic prosperity within the affected neighborhoods. Her Congo Jane plan of attack is to secure money from the foundation that hired Ursa and create an appropriately named “Marshall Plan” modeled after the economic plan in Europe after World War II (299-300). Of course, the plan might also be understood as the Paule Marshall Plan, as it would secure prosperity for disadvantaged diasporic communities in New Jersey. Like Estelle, Mae Ryland refers to these efforts as “the real work” (300). Also like Estelle, Mae Ryland’s acts of mothering become simultaneous acts of daughtering. She uses her position as community mother to appropriate power as a means to marshal her daughterly work of creating and maintaining a strong diasporic community. The community that both Mae Ryland and Marshall envision is one that rejects complicity in political and economic agendas that marginalize African Americans and other minority groups under the false pretense of progress.[584]

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[584] As Patricia Hill Collins notes, “Motherhood—whether blood mother, othermother, or community othermother—can be invoked as a symbol of power by African-American women engaged in Black women’s community work” (192). Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.* Because Mae Ryland is viewed as a community mother, she has enough support to “vote [Sandy’s] butt out too, and just keep on till we find us the right one” (299).

The political efforts of the daughters are made more meaningful by their spiritual connection to Africa. In *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction*, Joyce Pettis argues that Marshall's oeuvre moves toward "spiritual wholeness" in order to reclaim the lost connection to Africa as a result of the "traumatic cultural displacement" among peoples of the diaspora.[585] By loosely referencing *obeah* practices in the novel, Marshall not only creates a narrative environment of re-placement and re-connection, but also of spirituality as a political practice. Queen Nanny's political work was buttressed by her *obeah* practice because it enabled her to preserve potent African practices that ensured the survival of her people. Within the new context of Maroon communities in the Caribbean, these practices were often perceived as elusive and mystical by slaveholders and British soldiers, and so they allowed for easier evasion of Queen Nanny's pursuers. Rucker confirms this, "The political power wielded by Nanny found its source in her command over esoteric forces [...] as a ritual specialist" and *obeah* woman.[586] (217). What is perhaps even more powerful is the fact that *obeah* women, even in the contemporary African diaspora, use *obeah* practice subversively "to their own economic and social advantage."[587] Women's use of *obeah* not only enhances their spiritual identity and pharmacopeia knowledge, it offers them greater participation in the social and political aspects of their society.

The novel subtly reconstructs Queen Nanny's *obeah* knowledge and power primarily through the characters of Viney and Malvern. Both women have strong spiritual presence. They are the initiators of ritual. Viney is described as "another Congo Jane who loved pretty things," but her stronger tie to Queen Nanny is through her use of spirituality to ameliorate her political position within the community (382). When her activist participation declines after her breakup with Willis Jenkins, she learns meditation and the mantra “Ke’ram” as a survival strategy and re-initiation back into her community. Viney’s ritual of mantra and bodily movement (swaying) is not an explicit replica of *obeah* ritual, but it does demonstrate that there exists a need within diasporic communities for alternative modes of healing that are rooted in spiritual practices. It is this syncretic ritual that later reconnects Ursa to her body after her abortion and to her diasporic mother, Congo Jane.

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[585] Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 3-4.

[586] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 217. Murrell also notes that the British were more afraid of *obeah* women than they were men, because they, Queen Nanny among them, were known as "the wicked African witch who works dangerous magic with poisons" (71-72).

[587] Murrell, "Obeah," 71.

Although Malvern has never seen Congo Jane’s statue, she embodies her warrior stature: “Around her the little overcrowded room could scarcely contain her—her height, her large bones, her wealth of black wavy hair—as well as her gargantuan shadow on the wall” (179). She, too, is linked to Queen Nanny through her loosely rendered *obeah* practice. She instructs Astral, her closest friend, to “throw down little dirt when you leave the place so the child won’t come back to hag your spirit” (126). Malvern also has knowledge of “bush tea” that can help a child with croup (181). Although her pharmacopeia knowledge is not extensive like an *obeah* woman’s would be, she suggests the potential of untapped wisdom. This potential, however, is stymied by the material allure of neocolonialism. Before she can instruct the family of the child with croup and initiate her role as healer in the community, she gets distracted by *The Woody Wilson*, a luxuriously appointed battleship and overt symbol of colonial power and hegemony. Even so, Malvern’s spiritual power operates in secret, as is true of *obeah* women, and therefore has the potential to be more dangerous. The ritual she teaches Astral, “a minicarnival in the sitting room” that involves enthusiastic dancing, invokes slave and Maroon rituals in which dance was used as a guise for resistance planning (177). Rucker points out that enslaved Africans “used elaborate and expressive dance [...] as opportunities to organize and plan for resistance.”[588] Malvern’s dance ritual enables her to disturb class distinctions and the status quo in Triunion by advising Astral in regards to her potentially beneficial romantic relationships with men of power. So even though Malvern is of low class status and has little to no access to political power like some of the other daughters of the text, her embodiment of Queen Nanny through her access to *obeah* knowledge affords her a modicum of agency when it comes to inciting cultural, social, and political change.

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[588] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 123.

A focus and insistence on cultivating spirituality through *obeah* also enables diasporic daughters to claim and care for their bodies. We know the power of these practices. When Congo Jane loses a nub of her breast to her master's whip, "an old woman from Guinea [... makes] a poultice of cayenne and other herbs in order to save her" (140). The old woman from Guinea is mostly likely an *obeah* healer and, according to the novel, "the only one who might know what to do to save [Jane]" (140). Mae Ryland is able to control her hypoglycemia with dandelion tea and deep knowledge of her body. She need not rely on a Western doctor for her health and well-being. When Ursa returns home to New York at the end of the novel, she plans to "buy a large packet of herbal mineral salts" and "fill the bathtub with water as hot as she can stand it and take a long, delicious soak in chamomile, rosemary or comfrey scented salts" (408). The novel ends with this compelling image of a diasporic daughter treating her physical ailments inside the home. This intimate and personal health treatment, which is reminiscent of *obeah* practice in its reliance on herbs and plants, restores Ursa's connection to and ownership over her body and undoes the disembodying and traumatic effects of her abortion.

As Pettis demonstrates in her analysis of Marshall's novels, when Marshall's characters lose spiritual connection, the result is often physical deterioration. According to Pettis, spirituality is, "in its West African cultural sense[, …] an embodiment of dynamic energy separate from the physical body but essential to its well-being, both physically and emotionally."[589] We see this interdependency when Malvern becomes extremely sick under government hospital care and her body begins to decay. Malvern's stay in the hospital reveals the mistreatment of poor, Black female bodies:

> The groans and outcries of those asleep, the unanswered calls for the nurse from those awake drift in over the curtains that are as patched and dingy as the sheet covering Malvern. The sounds come, along with the smells of unemptied bedpans, unwashed bodies and floors, and the sight of the flaking water-stained ceiling around the dangling light bulb that has been left on over Malvern's bed. (367)

This acrid depiction of Malvern's hospital stay is doubly significant: it not only exposes the failure of government healthcare systems to save Black women because of the ways in which they devalue them, it also pleads for alternative healthcare options for women. Like *obeah* healing, these alternative options might be communal and inclusive and rely on specialized bodily and pharmacopeia knowledge. Joseph Murphy notes that the use of *obeah* in treating medical conditions was often brought about because of lack of alternative options within slave communities. According to Murphy, "The *obeah* practitioner provided medical and jural aid for the plantation workers in a society devoid of these institutions in any other form."[590] Even further, Murphy argues that *obeah* practice was often used in response to "the disintegrative forces of a society under stress."[591] *Obeah* practice as medical treatment exists outside racist and classist medical systems and challenges the oppressions of those systems. In the novel, it serves as a feminist model of healthcare in which women have autonomous control over their bodies and their healthcare choices.

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[589] Pettis, *Toward Wholeness*, 4-5.

[590] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 120.

[591] Ibid.

The consummate daughters of the novel, Ursa and Astral, are poised to become indoctrinated into Queen Nanny's ways of political activism and *obeah* through the lessons of Estelle, Mae Ryland, Viney, and Malvern. Marshall's use of double exposures ensures that Astral and Ursa are not only daughters, though. Through their embodiment of Congo Jane, these daughters suggest alternative forms of non-biological mothering within the African diaspora. Instead, Astral and Ursa participate in what Ruth Perry refers to as "mothering the mind."[592] According to Perry, "mothering the mind" demands that "one person help to create the conditions for another's creativity."[593] Collins notes that, "'mothering the mind' among Black women seeks to move toward the mutuality of a shared sisterhood that binds African-American women as community othermothers."[594] "Mothering the mind" is better suited to reflect the type of mothering Queen Nanny did within the Maroon community. As a woman with no biological children who occupied multiple leadership roles, Queen Nanny's primary maternal contribution was through her community teachings. Patricia Hill Collins argues that, "othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood."[595] Ursa and Astral assist Viney and Malvern in caring for their children and the community in which they live. According to Brathwaite, Queen Nanny acted like a "female king" and her primary duty, as described by Eva Meyerowitz, was to "care for the women, for their welfare, and for everything connected with birth, marriage and family life."[596] This focus on caring for women was partly born from the necessity to protect small female Maroon populations, as many Maroon communities had fewer men than women.[597] It was also rooted in Ashanti community models in which women—biological and non-biological mothers—actively played "vital roles in [...] communal life."[598] Ketu Katrak contends that the preservation of communities in which women held significant and effective power was "potentially [a] powerful cultural weapon during periods of domination such as colonization and the particular colonizing of female bodies."[599] By teaching other women her specialized skills and knowledge, Queen Nanny invited other women into a powerful circle of sisterhood that ensured not only their survival but their flourishing as female leaders.

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[592] Ruth Perry, Introduction to *Mothering the Mind*, 3.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 191.
[595] Ibid, 178.
[596] Eva Meyerowitz, quoted in Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe*, 13.
[597] Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

Because neither Astral nor Ursa have biological children, they are perhaps best suited to foster an iteration of the sisterhood Queen Nanny espoused as a means to destabilize slave system models of community in which women were commodified and relegated to the position of mother-of-slaves and nothing else. We can see residue of this system in their contemporary communities, as I pointed out earlier in this chapter, in the ways in which motherhood and non-motherhood are both challenging roles for women to fill. Ursa and Astral represent alternative mothering that, like Queen Nanny's position in society, circumscribes this dichotomy of choices. Ursa, who is connected to Congo Jane through the "two small nubs on her chest," most notably acts as a mother to Viney (99). When Viney almost drowns in the pool after her breakup with Willis Jenkins, Ursa reassures her of their sisterhood and saves her life. This scene is doubly exposed for Ursa, because, as a young girl, she used to "[dive] to the bottom of the pool and [sit] there to impress, tease and frighten the PM" (79). Where she was once a daughter in this same scenario, she is now a mother *and* a sister, teaching Viney about the power of sisterhood in the face of broken male/female relationships and dominant/submissive, gendered power structures within the Black community. Like her mother, Ursa is triply exposed in the narrative as daughter, mother, and sister. This makes sense considering the fact that Estelle and Ursa hold the most political power in the novel, which underscores the novel's insistence that assuming a subject position of plurality can be a source of agency for women. In contrast, Astral's participation in this sisterhood is nascent. She teaches Malvern about the inner workings of the Triunion government, which better positions Malvern to question her acceptance of neocolonial hegemony and recognize her political position as biological mother to diasporic children. When Ursa visits Astral to make amends at the end of the novel, Astral reluctantly sees their connection as sisters and daughters of the diaspora. Their reconciliation signals the potential for continued resistance to political schemes that strip them of their power.

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[598] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 65.

[599] Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 69.

Alternative mothering and daughtering practices ensure that all daughters of the diaspora work together within an ethic of communal and "perpetually resurgent resistance that unites them all."[600] The work done by the resulting sisterhood is important because it expands notions of what daughterhood and mothering can look like. Adrienne Rich posits, "The most notable fact that culture imprints on women is the sense of our limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities."[601] By creating doubly and triply exposed characters as representations of the plural possibilities of mothering, daughterhood, and sisterhood, Marshall not only depicts this important feminist work in *Daughters*, she also participates in it as a creative artist. She, too, becomes both mother of her people and daughter of her ancestral links to Africa, links that are often maintained through women's work of ritual and transmission. She invites her sisters of the diaspora to also participate. Moira Ferguson somewhat discounts the sisterhood that is crafted in the novel: "The unity of these daughters is not as recognizable as the unity of the slave rebels in their sculptured form. Indeed, far from being a force posed to swing collectively into action, each individual represents a site of resistance when opportunities or risks present themselves."[602] The novel, however, demonstrates that from these individual sites of resistance, a community of resistance—a sisterhood embodied in Queen Nanny's spirit—emerges.

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[600] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 164.
[601] Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 246.

Political Abortion and Reproduction

This sisterhood takes noticeable shape on the political front, as the daughters all play a role—either direct or indirect—in dismantling Primus's "government resort scheme" (313). Unbeknownst to him, the story that Primus tells about Congo Jane and the insurrection against colonial powers that she participated in becomes a metaphor for the female-initiated political insurgency in the novel. The daughters' collaboration is a symbolic embodiment of the Maroon Wars and the countless slave insurgencies in which women were active and powerful participants. In the story Primus tells Estelle, Congo Jane joins forces with other rebels to fight "the Big Three" colonial powers on Triunion (138). This is most likely a retelling of the historical Maroon Wars, in which colonial powers "failed, often disastrously against the Maroons" in their attempts to destroy Maroon settlements.[603] According to Brathwaite, these defeats "inhibit[ed] white settlement" in Jamaica; as a result, white land control was also inhibited.[604] Led by Estelle, the daughters' cooperative resistance likewise prevents the settlement of capitalist international powers on Triunion soil. By undermining the resort scheme, the daughters help to ensure, at least for the time being, that "the white people in this big multimillion-dollar thing" are kept out of Triunion politics (311).

Using their specialized and intimate knowledge of Triunion politics and the men who dominate them, the daughters effectively abort Primus's damaging political agenda. The language of reproduction and mothering again becomes crucial to Marshall's diasporic vision. Estelle fittingly articulated this vision to Ursa years before at Government Lands beach, the same site where the proposed resort is planned to be constructed. She tells Ursa that "everything's just been created" and that "everything and everybody's brand-new" (379-380). Estelle's vision is regenerative, reproductive, and recreative. Instead of ushering in neocolonial models of power and culture that merely replicate oppressive plantation models, like Primus has done with his promises to the P and D Board, Estelle calls for a complete re-imagining of Triunion politics. Her vision also demands the abortion of ill-conceived and oppressive designs and ideas in order to create space for generative production to take place, for the African diaspora to remake itself in self-affirming rather than self-undermining ways. Marshall reveals that she uses abortion as a symbol in the novel to represent the "cutt[ing] away those dependencies that can be so crippling" and that the goal of revisiting the past, of re-embodying the Queen Nannies of history, is to "creat[e …] a more truthful and liberating identity."[605]

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[602] Ferguson, "Of Bears & Bearings," 186.
[603] Brathwaite, *Nanny, Sam Sharpe*, 8.
[604] Ibid.

Creating this identity first involves resisting neocolonial imitations and then creating an entirely new political and cultural paradigm within the diaspora. The novel not only encourages daughterly resistance, but also motherly creation. Moira Ferguson contends that, "As the sole female, Congo Jane represents a paradigmatic model of resistance."[606] In her research about Queen Nanny, Karla Gottlieb confirms this interpretation, claiming that Queen Nanny "provides a unique model for destroying colonial paradigms."[607] Marshall's retelling of the Queen Nanny story, however, extends beyond these acts of resistance and encourages a follow through of reproduction and creation. Eugenia DeLamotte puts it cogently when she argues, "*Daughters* celebrates women's capacity to give birth to a new order."[608] Female members of the Maroon communities in the Caribbean, led by Queen Nanny and other powerful women, were destroyers and creators and honored their roles as both mothers and daughters. So, too, do the daughters of the novel engage in political acts of abortion and reproduction in an attempt to create a self-sustaining diaspora and dismantle any forces that might hinder their progress.

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[605] Baer, "Holding onto the Vision," 121-122.
[606] Ferguson, "Of Bears & Bearings," 179.
[607] Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All*, xix.

Political abortion and reproduction become alternative acts of mothering and daughtering in the novel and expand notions of embodiment that were developed in Marshall's other novels. Both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong* culminate in acts of ritual dance that serve to more deeply connect Selina and Avey to their diasporic identities. The political insurgency that the daughters participate in through their embodiment of Congo Jane/Queen Nanny affords them this same connection. All of the daughters exit the novel feeling a stronger sense of belonging to something larger than themselves. Marshall covers new terrain in *Daughters* and more tightly connects the personal with the political.[609] The novel demonstrates that political activism is a means to transmit diasporic ideals and foster connection to the diaspora. It also re-emphasizes that women are important agents in this work. Referencing early iterations of Black feminism, Loretta Ross posits, "African-American women saw themselves not as breeders or matriarchs but as builders and nurturers of a race, a nation."[610] By embodying the political abortive and reproductive qualities of Queen Nanny and the Maroons, the daughters refashion diasporic female agency and power. The act of aborting Primus's election and calling for a new order is a political act of embodiment in that the daughters fully awaken to the spirit of Queen Nanny that resides within each of them.

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[608] DeLamotte, *Places of Silence*, 161.

[609] Marshall notes that, "the political is always present in the work" (146). Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language." Specifically, she refers to *Daughters*, but implies this of all of her work. She comes close to the political work of *Daughters* in her earlier novel *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), but *Daughters* is her most triumphant political novel.

[610] Ross, "African-American Women," 168.

The daughters' abortion of Primus's resort scheme is significant, because his scheme represents "the ethics of a society that is based on acquiring things," which the novel condemns.[611] It represents a reckless, capitalist desire to build empire. The novel sharply reveals that these types of schemes are detrimental to the growth of an envisioned diaspora that does not rely on external governments and powers to make progress. The road to Government Lands beach, which is dotted with hazardous "pothole[s] the size of a small crater" is symbolic of the corruption and inefficiency of government that results when capitalist rather than socialist agendas are backed (375). As Ursa laments, "All the P and D projects and this road is still as it was before she was born" (378). Of course, the Triunion government's inefficiency and inability to care for its citizens moves beyond damaged roads in need of repair. Malvern languishes to death in an ill-equipped and dirty "government horse-pital," where, as the locals put it, "you's guaranteed not to leave there alive" (367). When Astral visits Malvern in the hospital and sees that Malvern's body, as a result of negligent healthcare, has "*gone down to nothing*," the political is now made personal (311). And of course Astral herself, despite the fact that she's intimately connected to Primus, is not immune to the government's oversights. Estelle points out that if Primus sells Miles Trees, the hotel that Astral manages, in order to buy into the resort scheme, Astral will be without her current job and without the opportunity for a new one. Again *Daughters* exposes the ill effects—on women in particular—of neocolonial government plans that blatantly and unethically ignore the needs of citizens.

Primus's political career is characterized by a string of miscarriages, by his inability to conform to Estelle's vision of Triunion that is generative and creative rather than regressive. Marshall makes the language of abortion and reproduction political in order to lay bare the double standards women are so often made to endure within dominant/submissive relationship models.[612] Not only does Ursa have to come out of the shadows of her father and evade his domination, Estelle faces the same task. When Estelle is unable to bring a baby to full term, she is considered to have failed and is expected to take full responsibility for her miscarriages. In contrast, when Primus's political plans are miscarried—"no experimental farm, [...] no agricultural station[,...] no small farmer's cooperative, [...] no model village, housing scheme or hospital"—he acts with impunity (357). No consequences befall Primus despite the fact that his failed plans result in lost jobs, a depressed economy, and, even worse, lost lives. As a man with political power, he is essentially immune from the blame and judgment that Estelle faces when she miscarries a baby. Despite this, Estelle remains involved in the politics of her husband because of her desire to make Triunion a better place for all people. When Primus proposes plans that could potentially benefit all of the people of Triunion, like his plan for a cannery plant that would provide jobs and cut back on food waste, he needs Estelle to help him present it to his political peers. Their collaborative political work has the potential to be mutually beneficial, but Estelle is overshadowed, forced to "sit over to one side, just out of reach of the one spotlight on the PM" (376). *Daughters* contends that, until women are able to "leave behind the shadowy realm of female passivity in order to assume [their] rightful place beside the insurgent male," gendered oppressions and double standards for women will remain intact.[613]

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[611] Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language," 147.

When regressive political plans that put citizens' lives and livelihoods in danger are brought to bear, there is no community indictment or condemnation either. For example, Sandy Lawson, the once promising politician in Midland City who Mae Ryland used to support, secured funding to build a highway through the center of town so that, effectively, wealthier passersby could easily avoid minority and lower class neighborhoods. Instead of Lawson suffering politically for voting against his own constituents' economic and social well-being, Mae Ryland, a mother figure of the community who advocates fiercely for minority and lower class needs, is relegated to a lower position of power. She now occupies a dingy campaign office with only "a few folding chairs and rusted file cabinets" (288). Moira Ferguson contends, "In tune with Astral's backstreet abortionist, Lawson and Mackenzie respectively abort progress in the South Ward black community and on Armory Hill, where the most impoverished people live."[614] The daughters construe their own political abortion scheme in order to disrupt the gendered double standards that have stripped their power within the community, so that they may come out of the shadows of their male peers. The daughters' collective abortion destabilizes divisive and oppressive narratives about abortion and motherhood that result in schism and mistrust within female communities.

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[612] In her interview with Sandi Russell, Marshall reveals that on both a personal and political level, relationships "where there is this dominant figure and there are those who are subordinate" are not successful or sustainable (83). Sandi Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall.*
[613] Angela Davis, "Reflections," 98.

The daughters' abortion scheme is effectively staged as a Maroon-esque insurrection. Alongside Congo Jane, the daughters take up their weapons against government inefficiency, oppressive systems of power, and gendered double standards that fracture sisterhood and positive male/female relationships. Ferguson contends, "*Daughters* stages a feminist intervention in empire, a charting of black women's agency both in the United States and in [...] Triunion. *Daughters* stages another war of independence."[615] Their scheme is carefully plotted and executed, as was the case with Maroon and slave insurrections. Just as the colonial powers in Congo Jane's uprising were "so busy fighting each other they didn't realize what [she] was up to," Primus and his political henchmen were so busy discussing how rich they'd get after building the resort and casino, they were oblivious to the fact that they no longer had the voting community’s support (138). The Triunion community, under the daughters’ guidance, is able to squash Primus’s capitalist agenda by asserting their voting rights and political agency. Triunionites are able to achieve what the people of Midland City failed to. Marshall’s novels are often about second chances and righting wrongs. In both *Brown Girl* and *Praisesong*, diasporic communities are encouraged to strengthen their connection to the African diaspora through the invocation of ritual dance. In *Daughters*, this connection is made through the embodiment of Maroon communities with particular attention on political agency. In all of her novels, Marshall stages interventions that are meant to re-awaken diasporic communities to the link between embodiment and diasporic identity.

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[614] Ferguson, "Of Bears & Bearings," 185.
[615] Ferguson, *A Human Necklace*, 75.

Before the daughters can intervene and execute their abortion scheme, they must first and meticulously plot. To communicate, they use contemporary expressions of the *abeng* as coded language. The *abeng* was an animal horn used to send messages between Maroons across long distances.[616] Mavis Campbell points out its particularly coded use: “it was capable of transmitting complicated messages, intelligible only to the Maroons.”[617] There are multiple instances of *abeng* use in the novel among the women. Both Mae Ryland and Viney transmit diasporic consciousness to Ursa through their coded language. Mae Ryland tells Ursa that she is “just laying low over here in the jungle for a while” waiting to make her political move (296). Viney uses the same nature imagery to describe the racist state of society: “The woods are on fire” (298). Instead of transmitting tactical knowledge about landscape in battle as the Maroons would have, Mae Ryland and Viney instead use the same type of language but with political overtones. Their coded descriptions of the ways in which the diaspora is in danger propel Ursa to political action. When Ursa summons Astral to Triunion, she uses a more contemporary form of *abeng*: a letter. Estelle's letter is likewise coded; although she directly calls on Ursa to come home—"you have to come right away!"—she only attaches one page of the resort scheme prospectus with her letter (363). Still, Ursa knows what must be done and "silently offer[s] herself for whatever would be required of her" (363). Like Congo Jane, who compelled the "early mass migration of [her] ancestors which led to the founding of the kingdom of the Congo," Estelle compels the migration of Ursa back to Triunion so that they might give birth to a new political order.[618]

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[616] This form of communication was used often by Queen Nanny. According to Mair, “The Maroon horn, the abeng, as well as African talking drums, were her effective means of communication across the mountains and valleys” (64). Mair, *A Historical Study*.

[617] Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, 48.

When Ursa arrives in Triunion, the mother/daughter relationship becomes imbued with political meaning. Ursa and Estelle become an active and collaborative political team plotting the ways in which they can play a role in "the island [...] com[ing] together, really com[ing] together" (361). Mother/daughter, rather than husband/wife, become the propagators of political progress. Ursa and Estelle's political alliance disrupts Afro-Caribbean and African American mother/daughter relationship models that are characterized by ambivalence and stagnation. It also upsets Eurocentric husband/wife models. Lucille Mair comments, "The potentially neurotic exclusiveness of the European husband-wife partnership had limited relevance in that context. The African woman instead existed within a more extended range of familial and extra-familial interdependence, which widened and deepened the base of the foothold on her society."[619] Estelle widens her extended range of family by inviting Astral into the political sisterhood, despite class differences and personal conflict because of her affair with Primus. Ursa becomes the director of Astral's initiation. For the first time in the novel, Astral is linked to Congo Jane through her "lacy handkerchief that might have come from part of Congo Jane's shawl," signaling her potential political agency and participation in future political insurgencies plotted by the daughters (402). As Dorothy Hamer Denniston suggests, the novel "offers another view of relationships between women."[620] Invoking Maroon and African models in which women, especially mother figures, occupied powerful political positions in the community because of their extended female networks, *Daughters* posits that diasporic sisterhood is one path towards re-activating women as political agents of change within diasporic communities.

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[618] Lucille Mathurin Mair, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery* (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica Publications Limited, 1975), 2-3. Mair refers to "'the old mother of the tribe,' Mpenba Nzinga," but I interpret this Congolese tribal mother as Marshall's Congo Jane.

[619] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 53.

This gynocentric model is not the only one *Daughters* puts forth as having the potential to secure women political agency. The novel also recapitulates Marshall's vision of Black men and women working equally together.[621] Ursa frequently articulates this vision: "That slavery, for all its horrors, was a time when black men and women had it together, were together, stood together" (94). About Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe, she repeatedly insists that, "you can't call her name or his [...] without calling or at least thinking of the other" (94). Indeed, the historical descriptions of Congo Jane are often ones in which she fights valiantly alongside Cudjoe, and the consciousness of resistance in Triunion is predicated on this male/female cooperative alliance. Even Estelle's embodiment of Congo Jane is in partnership with Primus; she is "always getting on like she's a Congo Jane marching next to him with a cutlass and a gun" (316). The ways in which the daughters execute their political abortion scheme, however, undermine this vision. They betray the transparency needed for an equal partnership to be successful. First, they undermine Primus's political authority and betray his trust by sending his resort plan, a plan he intended to keep secret from his constituents, to Justin Beaufils, the young politician who promises change and progress. Second, the daughters' insurgency results in the favored election of Beaufils to office, yet he is unaware of their cooperative efforts in winning him the seat. And so he, like Primus, will go into power without the recognition or acknowledgment of the women who helped put him there. No equality is gained. Even though Estelle's political efforts outshine Primus's—symbolized by the fact that "her profile is superimposed on the PM's, [...] the side view of her face and head taking up more than three quarters of his"—she will again take her submissive place next to Beaufils when he enters office (355-356).

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[620] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 164.

[621] In her interview with Sandi Russell, Marshall refers to Black men and women who, under slavery, worked "side by side in the fields, [which] made for a kind of equality" (83). Marshall comments, "If we could go back to that and tap those old relationships, that equality, that working together, then we might have a model that could serve us today" (83). Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall."

The miscarriage of Marshall's vision of equality is not a creative failure on her part, however, but rather a feminist exposure of the difficulty of male/female political cooperation and equality within existing power structures. Beaufils and his wife, who are notably younger versions of Primus and Estelle, have the potential to execute this model of political equality, but it's not borne out in the novel. Heather Hathaway misinterprets Estelle's participation in the daughters' insurgency as an expression of her "profound and redemptive love for [Primus]."[622] Instead, her participation can be read as a resistant act of condemnation of the sexist political system—in which women are political subordinates rather than equals—that Primus openly participates in. Within Maroon communities, and Queen Nanny's in particular, this type of female resistance was fiercely prevalent. Both Campbell and Mair identify the tensions between Queen Nanny's Windward Maroons and Cudjoe's Leeward Maroons.[623] Queen Nanny adamantly opposed any collusion with colonial authorities, and when peace agreements were signed by men within the Maroon community, "the women mainly carried grim symbols of defiance."[624] This gendered resistance makes sense in light of the fact that Eurocentric models of community endowed men with all of the power. If Queen Nanny and other female Maroons signed peace treaties with colonial entities, they would have effectively given up their political power within the community. The same is true for Estelle and the resort scheme. As a result, she is forced to abandon Marshall's vision of equality as a means of political survival.

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[622] Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 131.

[623] Campbell notes the contrasting ways in which Queen Nanny and Cudjoe led their communities. Cudjoe used "iron discipline" and "absolute power" to rule, while Nanny encouraged "more democratic inter- and intragroup relationships" (51-52). Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica*.

The daughters' acting independently of men in plotting and executing their political abortion scheme is an effort to dismantle the "dominant/subordinate relationships" that, both politically and personally, have not only diminished their power but also fractured kinship among women.[625] Denniston contends that, "In *Daughters* [Marshall] unquestionably augurs new roles for modern women—perhaps as stars in the politically and culturally changing universe."[626] The novel certainly seeks to revive Black female agency—"political, ritual, martial, economic, and social"—that was plundered by colonial and slaveholding powers when Maroon communities were captured and destroyed and when African women were commodified and turned into breeding machines.[627] Mair argues that "the militant acts" by Maroon and slave women "constituted a political strategy that took different forms at different times that expressed the conscious resolve of the African enslaved to confront the New World plantation's assault on their person and their culture."[628]

Even though only Estelle and Ursa are directly instrumental in dismantling Primus's resort plan, the other daughters play equally significant political roles in the text. On the American front, Viney's resistant efforts to expose the racist police force that falsely arrested her son play out simultaneously with Ursa and Estelle's efforts to expose Primus and the P and D

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[624] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 65.
[625] Sandi Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," 83.
[626] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 165.
[627] Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas*, 228.
[628] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 327.

Board for misleading their constituents. Malvern's deteriorating body catalyzes Astral to stage her own political attack against Miles Trees in an effort to express her discontent with Triunion politics that ignore the needs of the impoverished. The fractured relationship between Mae Ryland and Sandy Lawson reveals to Ursa that catering to the needs of the upper class threatens political collaboration. These political acts coalesce when Primus loses his political seat. Ferguson argues, "In the end, the collective negotiations of these diverse daughters eclipse Primus Mackenzie's authority."[629] Indeed, the daughters' simultaneous assertions of political agency ensure the success of Estelle and Ursa's political abortion scheme. As Celestine puts it, "Everything happening one time!" (394). The effects of this simultaneity are akin to the effects of Maroon and slave insurrection in which women sought to reclaim their political power. Mair remarks about these women that, "The passion and persistence of their heroic acts of self-affirmation and rebellion rescued them from silence and invisibility."[630] Through the power of their political sisterhood, the daughters all gain visibility.

When Ursa visits the Government Lands beach towards the end of the novel, political reproduction is directly connected to the female body. For the first time since her abortion in New York, Ursa feels pain. Her fall on the beach is directly linked to Primus's loss: "Ti-Ursa fall and near break her hip and the PM lose his seat" (394). Ursa's participation in the political abortion enables her to reconnect with her body in ways her real abortion precluded her from doing. The link is clear: political participation is a means to embodiment and reclamation of a commodified body. Melody Graulich claims that, "it's almost as if [Ursa] gives birth to herself at the end of the novel."[631] Moira Ferguson asserts, "The abortion of [Ursa's] dependency and passivity, those parts of herself she wanted to reject, is complete."[632] So the pain Ursa feels is both a result of abortion *and* reproduction/birth. As is the usual case in Marshall's novels, Ursa does not participate in this political embodiment alone. The other daughters of the novel, her sisters and mothers, were instrumental in bringing Ursa to this final scene and state of embodiment. And the statue of Congo Jane is there with her, too, in the distance, but visible from the beach. Denniston comments that, "together [Ursa's] names announce the re-creation of a larger female identity. For Marshall, this re-creation telescopes back to a communal, specifically woman-centered African source."[633] But it is not just Ursa's names that announce the emergence of a gynocentric sisterhood; the collaboration of all of the daughters in the novel, through their embodiment of Congo Jane and Queen Nanny, connects the personal with the communal and the political. Ursa is and never has been alone. *Brown Girl, Praisesong*, and *Daughters* all encourage diasporic daughters to seek out self-affirming models of embodiment that encourage deep connection to African matrilineage. This feminist vision of the African diaspora encourages sisterhood across geographic and sociopolitical borders, problematizes political systems that either commodify or devalue Black female bodies, and privileges political and social community models, like the Maroons, that make both of these ambitions possible.

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[629] Ferguson, "Of Bears & Bearings," 192.
[630] Mair, *A Historical Study*, 327.
[631] Graulich and Sisco, "Meditations on Language," 138.

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[632] Ferguson, "Of Bears & Bearings," 193.
[633] Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall*, 165.

Epilogue

Marshall's Embodied Oeuvre

Brown Girl, *Praisesong*, and *Daughters* all insist that embodiment is integral to African diasporic identity, meaningful membership in diasporic communities, and Black female power. The implications of these connections are great. Marshall's novels enable a feminist and diasporic intersection that refashions scholarly and cultural conversations about embodiment and the African diaspora in significant ways. In her introduction to the important anthology, *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, Isidore Okpewho considers how the contemporary diaspora might and should be defined. His "key questions" include: "Is derivation from Africa enough to account for the African presence in the New World? How did the Africans manage to create a viable life for themselves after they got here? How were they able to negotiate the social, political, cultural, and other spaces they encountered here?"[634] What follows Okpewho's introduction are over thirty scholarly articles that consider the formation and maintenance of the diaspora and what it looks like and means to participate in such a community.

However, a sustained discussion about embodiment in relationship to this participation is wholly absent from the collection. In Marshall's texts, the implied answers to all of Okpewho's above questions include embodiment. Her novels instruct that African presences and cultural expressions within the diaspora are made possible through African practice and ritual, among which dance and other African-derived embodied acts play important and undeniable roles. It is not enough to simply be of African lineage; one must actively participate in the diasporic community. One of the primary ways in which Africans and their descendants who were born in the diaspora create viable lives for themselves and negotiate their environment is through these

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[634] Isidore Okpewho, Introduction to *The African Diaspora: Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), xi.

African-derived communal practices of embodiment, including *Vodou* and *obeah* rituals; and by embodying historical folktales and seminal African and diasporic ancestors. Embodiment within the African diasporic community, according to Marshall, not only ensures the continuation of a strong diaspora for the future, but also resists the racialized, gendered, and classist oppressions that are the daily lived realities of many diasporic peoples. This resistance also engenders female power and subverts prevailing cultural notions that objectify the Black female body. By insisting that embodiment is a central feature of diasporic identity and community, Marshall's texts have the potential to shift scholarly conversations about the African diaspora in exciting ways.

Marshall's narrative emphasis on embodiment likewise has the potential to shape feminist discussions about the diaspora and the body. Joyce Ann Joyce's article, "African-Centered Womanism: Connecting Africa to the Diaspora," which is included in *The African Diaspora*, acknowledges that, "the African-centered womanist position is to focus on how Africans on the continent and in the diaspora are carriers of cultural memory that demonstrates the connection of the African-centered womanist to her roots and her sisters in the diaspora."[635] However, Joyce never elaborates on what it means to be a "carrier of cultural memory" and how that is enacted through the body. Marshall's novels provide this important elaboration. The connections Joyce makes between feminism, womanism, and the African diaspora do not include embodiment, though the potential exists, especially given the significance of the body as integral to—rather than distinct from—the mind and spirit within traditional African belief systems.

On the other end of the spectrum, Black feminist scholarly conversations that explicitly focus on the body, but do not necessarily or overtly consider embodiment's connection to diasporic identity and female empowerment, might also be informed by Marshall's work. For example, the seminal work by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* exposes the ways in which the Black female body has been objectified and commodified over the past few centuries, dating back to slavery when female bodies were sold on auction blocks to the highest bidder. Collins rightfully notes that, "oppression [of Black women] is not simply understood in the mind—it is felt in the body in myriad ways."[636] Marshall's narratives reveal that oppression also manifests in the form of disembodiment. Collins proposes feminist activism as a way to undo the disembodying, objectifying, and commodifying effects on Black women's bodies that are the result of patriarchal paradigms of power and perception. Marshall's texts significantly add to this conversation by contending that embodiment is another kind of solution, and one that encourages the revitalization of African-derived practices so that diasporic women *and* communities can become empowered.

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[635] Joyce Ann Joyce, "African-Centered Womanism: Connecting Africa to the Diaspora," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins*, 552.

Ketu Katrak's important text, *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*, might serve as a model for how to more directly connect analyses of the body to analyses of identity *and* power. Even though Katrak analyzes postcolonial literature and doesn't exclusively engage with the African diaspora, her argument is compelling and relevant. In the narratives that Katrak analyzes, she argues that the female characters "resist domination and attempt to reconnect with their bodies and communities."[637] She endeavors to know how women use connection to their bodies—what she calls "resistances to bodily exile"—to mature and craft identity, to "take autonomy over [their] own bod[ies]," and to assume and assert agency and power within their communities.[638] According to Katrak, "women exiled from their bodies are looking for a space to re-belong to their bodies. And the communities in which they are placed, or to which they relocate provide sustaining or un-nurturing environments for the bodies to inhabit."[639] Although Katrak does not analyze Marshall's narratives, probably because Marshall is not often classified as a postcolonial writer—despite her many decolonial undertones—we can understand Marshall to be exploring these same issues. Putting Katrak's analytical approach in conversation with Marshall's texts opens the door to a deeper conversation in the fields of both diasporic and feminist studies about how embodiment functions and has value within the African diaspora. As Katrak cogently points out, not all embodied acts of resistance result in fully formed identities, community membership, and/or power; in fact, many of these acts result in further exile or even death. Other feminist diasporic writers who explore the intersection between embodiment and the diaspora, resistance, and female power, and whose work would be fruitful to analyze next to Marshall's in this way, are Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Gayl Jones, and Dionne Brand, to name a few. This kind of intersectional analysis has not yet been done with these writers' work, and the possibilities are promising.

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[636] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 274. As I've pointed out in this dissertation, other scholars also point to oppression felt in the body. These include: bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* and "Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace;" Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* and "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves;" and Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* and "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."

[637] Ketu H. Katrak, *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 2.

By unveiling and analyzing this intersection in Marshall's texts, my dissertation helps to focus scholarly discussions of Marshall's work on some of the more nuanced and sophisticated aspects of her fiction. Marshall scholarship has slowed over the years. In the past decade, few focused and significant discussions of her work have surfaced. Still, new ways of interpreting Marshall's oeuvre continue to challenge and expand our understanding of Marshall's authorial intentions and narrative techniques. For example, Courtney Thorsson's 2007 article "Dancing Up

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[638] Ibid.
[639] Ibid, 7.

A Nation" connects dance to diasporic nation-building in similar ways to how I connect dance to community and focuses the discussion about how Marshall portrays the diaspora. Carissa Turner Smith, in her 2008 article "Women's Spiritual Geographies in the African Diaspora," argues for a reading of spiritual agency and mobility even when geographic mobility is inaccessible to diasporic women.[640] She analyzes *Praisesong* to make her case and does important work recovering Marshall's feminist perspective and considerations, much like my dissertation aims to do. She focuses specifically on how Marshall engages with feminist mobility issues, which is a new approach to Marshall's fiction. Elizabeth McNeil's 2009 article "The Gullah Seeker's Journey" interprets Avey's journey in *Praisesong* as an "ancestral Gullah 'seeker's' initiation rite," which is a unique analysis that grounds the novel historically and geographically to the shores of South Carolina.[641] Michelle Miesen Felix's 2011 dissertation project examines how Marshall's fiction serves as a critique of neo-imperialism within a postcolonial context.[642] She focuses on how Marshall uses travel as a trope to launch this critique. Moira Ferguson's 2013 monograph *A Human Necklace* makes the argument that Marshall's "novels and novellas recite a saga of forced migration, of diasporic experience."[643] Ferguson's work builds on the analysis of earlier scholars who investigated the intersection of African American and Afro-Caribbean aesthetics and themes in Marshall's work. Her monograph adds freshness to this discussion by analyzing Marshall's fiction as an "archive of four-hundred-year history of distinct strands of the African diaspora."[644] Ferguson reveals the historical and archival implications of Marshall's work. This brief review of select Marshall scholarship over the last decade serves to show that Marshall's fiction continues to be analyzed with new focus and in new light. However, analyses of Marshall's oeuvre have waned. This is unfortunate, because her fiction is rife with analytical potential through a variety of critical lenses: feminist, postcolonial, historical, mobility studies, cultural studies, and diasporic studies, to name a few. Like these recent scholars, I hope to re-invigorate conversations about Marshall and her work by demonstrating in this dissertation that her fiction contributes to feminist and diasporic discussions, among others not analyzed here, in significant ways that have not yet been fully explored.

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[640] Carissa Turner Smith, "Women's Spiritual Geographies in the African Diaspora: Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," *African American Review* 42.3/4 (Fall-Winter 2008).
[641] Elizabeth McNeil, "The Gullah Seeker's Journey in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*," *MELUS* 34.1 (Spring 2009), 185.
[642] Michelle Miesen Felix, "Paule Marshall's Critique of Contemporary Neo-Imperialisms Through the Trope of Travel" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2011).
[643] Moira Ferguson, *A Human Necklace: The African Diaspora and Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2013), 1.
[644] Ibid, 5.

Finally, I hope to show in this epilogue that *Brown Girl, Praisesong,* and *Daughters* are merely representative texts in which Marshall engages embodiment as a narrative technique and focus. My final argument of this project is that Marshall has written an embodied oeuvre. In all of her fiction—short stories, novellas, and novels—we can find evidence of body-centered narration and consideration of embodiment and disembodiment; and their consequences and implications in regards to identity, community, and power within the diaspora. My analysis of Marshall's short story "Brooklyn" in the introduction already served to demonstrate that Marshall has been concerned with issues of the body since she began writing in the early 1950s.[645] A brief analysis of her other texts will elucidate how she elaborates this concern throughout the entirety of her six decade-long career.

The possibility of embodying the spirit and history of the African diaspora is borne out in Marshall's fiction. Besides the characters I've thus far analyzed in this dissertation, the character of Merle Kinbona who appears in the novella "Merle" (1969) and the novel of the same year *The*

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[645] In Marshall's interview with Daryl Dance, she references "Brooklyn" as a feminist story before feminism took root in the Black community because of how it deals with Miss Williams asserting power over Max by using her body to destroy his fetishizing gaze. Dance, "An Interview," 114.

Chosen Place, The Timeless People (*The Chosen Place*)—which is essentially an extended version of the novella—most notably embodies the qualities of the diaspora. Born to Duncan Vaughan, a sugar cane plantation owner, and a nameless Black woman who "worked on his estate" and who was murdered by Vaughan's wife, Merle is the embodiment of diasporic history, identity, and trauma.[646] Marshall confirms that this was her intention: "Merle then takes on a larger and broader political meaning. She has been shaped by forces in the West Indies and by England so she, in effect, *embodies* the history of this hemisphere" (emphasis, hers).[647] Merle's face "reflect[s] the wide suffering—wide enough to include an entire history" of the African diaspora and "the faces of the children [and] the men and women" of Bournehills, the Caribbean place where she lives.[648] Merle's body is strongly connected to her diasporic identity and her place within the diaspora as an activist leader who resists American hegemonic domination of Bournehills. Marshall's much later novel, *The Fisher King* (2000), creates the same image of embodied diaspora through the young male character Sonny Carmichael Payne. Sonny's great-grandmothers Florence Varina and Ulene Payne, of African American and Caribbean origin respectively, are symbolic of the coming together of the peoples within the diaspora; Sonny is a result of these efforts. Like Merle, Sonny's body contains the diaspora. Florence Varina exclaims to Sonny: "You got some of all of us in you, dontcha? What you gonna do with all that Colored from all over creation you got in you? Better be somethin' good."[649] The novel suggests that Sonny, because he embodies the varied strands of the diaspora, has the potential to unite his family and community, much like the young Selina Boyce in *Brown Girl*. Like the novels I've analyzed in this dissertation, “Merle,” *The Chosen Place*, and *The Fisher King* all explore the possibility of the body functioning as an important identity marker for diasporic peoples.

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[646] Paule Marshall, "Merle," in *Merle and Other Stories* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1983), 123.
[647] Sandi Russell, "Interview with Paule Marshall," in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, 82.
[648] Marshall, "Merle," 122, 160.
[649] Paule Marshall, *The Fisher King* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 34.

Marshall’s oeuvre also contends that embodiment, beyond an integral aspect of diasporic identity, is also a path to agency and power for individuals and communities within the diaspora. Like Miss Williams in “Brooklyn,” the character of Cherisse in *The Fisher King* demonstrates that the Black female body is often objectified and fetishized. As a singer and dancer at a night club, Cherisse is constantly on display. Even after she parts ways with her music group, The Maconettes, she continues to display “her perfect limbs, perfect breasts, and the milk-chocolate perfection of her face” alongside her husband as he performs on stage.[650] From this space of embodiment, Cherisse asserts her power. This is Marshall’s feminist intervention; her texts doubly read the Black female body as a site of objectification *and* power. Navigating this paradox or “contradiction,” as the narrative characterizes it, is a complex and life-long endeavor for Black women.[651] Merle also expresses how the body reflects individual agency and power. She frequently uses her body as a source of power and protection. More specifically, Merle’s gaze engenders her power; she can be found often “staring at you with those eyes that make a person feel she can read his life with a look.”[652] Merle controls the gaze of men—especially those symbolic of patriarchal, capitalist power—with her own gaze: “her eyes narrowed because of the smoke from her cigarette, which she once jokingly claimed was her protection against people like him, who were always collecting data.”[653] The narrative makes clear that she is not joking, however; she intentionally makes use of her body in order to control how others perceive her, in order to claim ownership over her own body. Certainly, as scholars like Joyce Pettis have pointed out, Merle's savvy articulation and voice enable her power within her community, but her body does, too.[654] Merle's individual embodiment inspires collective embodiment among the women of Bournehills. In one scene, a "group of old women" exert a "veiled, even gaze from under the cloths covering their heads" in order to interpret the body of Saul Amron, an American anthropologist who has come to the island to improve it financially, and his true intentions in Bournehills.[655] Through this powerful gaze, their bodies transform from "ragged" to knowledgeable. They return Saul's gaze and diminish his inclination to objectify their bodies and classify them as uneducated. Their gaze back at Saul upsets the prescribed power dynamic between man and woman, first world and third world, anthropologist and subject.

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[650] Marshall, *The Fisher King*, 183.
[651] Ibid.
[652] Paule Marshall, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), 33.
[653] Marshall, “Merle,” 172.

Perhaps more compelling than Marshall's argument about the individual body and power is her contention that embodied practices and rituals strengthen and empower diasporic communities. This contention was most forcibly made in all three of the novels I analyzed in this dissertation, but we can also find strong evidence of it in *The Chosen Place*. The Carnival and reenactment of the slave revolt led by Cuffee Ned serve as an assertion of diasporic community and power in Bournehills. The collective dancing of this community evokes the ancestors' enslaved past, "dark alien images of legions marching bound together over a vast tract, iron fitted into dank stone walls, chains—rattling in the deep holds of ships, and exile in an unknown inhospitable land."[656] This embodied act of song and dance also memorializes the slave revolt led by Cuffee Ned, and embodiment becomes both an act of mourning and celebrating the past. This embodied ritual ensures the continued retelling of true Bournehills history, a retelling that is not permitted within the classroom.[657] Communal embodiment serves to resist the erasure of slave history by colonial powers. This history is told by the people of Bournehills through the body. Both Harriet and Allen, white Americans who have traveled to the island with Saul, attempt to participate in Carnival, but are physically and symbolically ejected from the celebration. Harriet finds the parade to be dizzying and overwhelming; she gets subsumed by the enthusiastic crowd and leaves with a "bruised body."[658] Allen, too, suffers the same fate, and exits the Carnival with a "sore and tormented body."[659] The rejection of Harriet and Allen as participants in the Bournehills embodied ritual is symbolic of the community's rejection of the attempts of non-diasporic powers to intervene in, manipulate, or silence embodied practice that strengthens diasporic community. This section of the novel reifies diasporic power within the Bournehills community; the people of Bourne Island do not need the help of Saul's team to be strengthened.

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[654] See Joyce Pettis, "'Talk' as Defense Artifice: Merle Kinbona in *The ChosenPlace, The Timeless People*," *African American Review* 26.1 (Spring 1992).
[655] Marshall, *The Chosen Place*, 137.
[656] Ibid, 282.

Marshall builds on the ways in which diasporic communities and peoples within them can be strengthened by emphasizing and privileging African-derived healing practices besides dance that incorporate the body. Merle attributes her power to "read people's faces" to ancestral *obeah* knowledge, telling Saul that she "would have ma[d]e a good *obeah* woman."[660] We get the sense that she, like the women in *Daughters*, also embodies facets of Queen Nanny, namely her wisdom about her own body as well as other people's bodies. The opportunity for Merle to recover from her loss of power—which manifests in her "numb spent body"—after the factory is shut down isn't fully realized in the narrative.[661] Several women from the community initiate a healing ritual, which is similar in nature to the ritual that the women in *Praisesong* enact in order to soothe Avey's sore body before her embodied act of empowerment during the Big Drum Ritual dance. The women gathered around Merle and, "without a word, they drew her from [Saul], and forming a protective circle around her slowly guided her back across the yard."[662] Merle is, however, left to heal on her own, and it takes her months to recover from her loss of power and disconnection from her body. The full potential of healing ritual that focuses on embodiment is not realized until *Praisesong*. In Marshall's early collection of novellas, *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961), more specifically, her novella "British Guiana" also makes the claim that the body holds wisdom. Bodies become a part of cultural myth about life and death. When Medford, an elderly woman, views the deceased body of her dear friend, she knows to "look for somebody else to dead soon" because of the way her friend's "limbs [were] soft and limber so and warm."[663] And later, when Sybil assesses Gerald's face, she sees in it "the unmistakable form of his death lurking there."[664] The body serves as a predictor of the future, and these women who can read and understand this bodily wisdom are like *obeah* women. In this story and in Marshall's most recent novel *The Fisher King*, she invites men to participate in embodied healing ritual. In both of these texts, she briefly alludes to the "laying on of hands" that she more fully depicts in *Praisesong.* For example, after Gerald feels "the warm place where Sidney's hand had rested," he was "restored […] his limp muscles across his back stiffened, the faint gnawing within his stomach ceased."[665] This scene encourages male-centered and male-initiated healing that involves intimate bodily touch and initiates a conversation about men's role in embodied healing ritual within the diaspora. In *The Fisher King*, Sonny soothes his surrogate grandmother's physical and psychological suffering by holding her hand. It's a simple gesture and one that might seem trivial, but it's repeated often in the novel and is juxtaposed with Hattie's *médicaments* (doctor-prescribed pills). Sonny's touch—"he quietly slipped his hand into hers, as he always did when she was upset and hadn't taken her *médicaments"*—serves to "soothe her and to restore her to herself as well as to him."[666] This ritual provides an alternative method of healing that might be traced to African-derived practices like *obeah* or *Vodou* that use "the laying on of hands for […] healing purposes."[667]

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[657] Merle was fired from her job as a teacher for "telling the children about Cuffee Ned and things that happened on the island in olden times, when the headmaster wanted her to teach the history that was down in the books, that told all about the English" (*The Chosen Place*, 32).

[658] Ibid, 297.

[659] Ibid, 312.

[660] Marshall, "Merle," 163.

[661] Ibid, 189.

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[662] Ibid, 188.
[663] Paule Marshall, "British Guiana," in *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (Chatham, NJ: The Chatham Bookseller, 1961), 108.
[664] Ibid, 126.
[665] Ibid, 109.

Marshall's depictions of male embodiment is territory this dissertation did not have space to cover, but they are nonetheless important in helping to realize Marshall's vision of an embodied diaspora. Analyzing the ways in which Marshall describes male bodies within the diaspora has the potential to enhance an already rich discussion. In contrast to most of Marshall's other texts, *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* is primarily about men. The male characters in this collection experience disembodiment as they age, which connects the body to identity in a new way. Mr. Watford in "Barbados" "spur[s] his body to perform like a younger man's."[668] He finds that without his youthful body, he has lost power both within his community and in regards to his sexual ability. His female housekeeper's younger, sexually active body exerts power over him in the narrative. Gerald in "British Guiana" is also concerned with his aging body. The narrative connects embodiment to masculinity; without virility, a man loses his position of masculine power. Because of this loss of power, Gerald wants to get "rid of himself: of his old man's body."[669] Instead, he desires to become one with the "seated, unwashed bodies" of the crowded bar so that his body will become re-invigorated with substance, life, and power.[670] This same disembodiment as a result of aging is experienced by Heitor in "Brazil," in which he becomes enraged because of "the disgust he felt for his aging body."[671] As a performer, Heitor's livelihood and career success are tied to his body. When he can no longer perform with a young, able body, he slowly makes his exit from the performance spotlight. In this narrative, embodiment is tied to Heitor's identity as a performer, which gives him power within his community. Even though embodiment isn't directly connected to diasporic identity in this collection of novellas, Marshall's depiction of male embodiment is a worthy consideration in scholarly conversations about her oeuvre. Each novella explores the physical and psychological effects of disembodiment as a result of aging and living in a society that privileges youth and beauty. Marshall reminds us that not only women's bodies are judged and silenced; so, too, are men's.

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[666] Marshall, *The Fisher King*, 220.
[667] Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 256.
[668] Paule Marshall, "Barbados," in *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*, 4.
[669] Marshall, "British Guiana," 105.

If I were to expand this project, I would consider all of the various ways in which Marshall engages embodiment within diasporic spaces, among both women and men, in order to arrive at a more complete analysis of her oeuvre. I see the potential for future scholarship to build upon what I've begun in this dissertation by considering her other texts in much more detail than I was able to do here and by continuing to assess how and why embodiment is integral to the identity—diasporic or other types—and power of African diasporic peoples. Marshall's oeuvre is additionally important to study because of its real world implications and application. In Chapter Two, I referenced Jacqueline Copeland-Carson's anthropological work that investigates how African diasporic communities in the United States use embodiment and embodied practice like dance to express and strengthen their diasporic identity and community.

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[670] Ibid.

[671] Paule Marshall, "Brazil," in *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*, 135.

Marshall’s oeuvre is literary testament to this ritual enactment. It provides a model to her people about how not only to exist, but also thrive in the diaspora in ways that are self-affirming and that value the role of the body in cultural expression and knowledge. Just as Marshall was inspired by earlier models of embodiment, resistance, and communal cooperation within African and diasporic communities that date back to the time of slavery, she creates a model of an embodied diaspora through her fiction for future generations of the diaspora. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Marshall’s work is her unwavering optimism that the peoples of the diaspora have the potential to be powerful, embodied members of their communities.

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