

## 4. Erotic Power and Motherly Bodies in Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend*

*Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.*

(Lorde 2007: 59)<sup>134</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

The first and so far only novel *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2002) by Jamaican Canadian writer, feminist, and activist Makeda Silvera is dealt with in this first analytical chapter. Silvera was born in the Jamaican capital of Kingston in 1955 and migrated to Toronto in the late 1960s, just when the city's Black community was 'coming of age' and the political activism of anti-racist movements, in which Silvera has played an important role, inspired by the Black Power movement in the United States, was ripening. She is the co-founder of Sister Vision Press, the first publishing house for the writings of Black women and women of color in Canada.<sup>135</sup> With her sociologist study *Silenced* (1983), she has been among the first to make public the struggles and inhumane living conditions of Caribbean domestic workers within Canadian society. She has

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134 Parts of this chapter have been published in the article "Sexual Citizenship and Vulnerable Bodies in Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* and Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging*" in a 2016 edition of *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* (13.2) and in the article "Caribbean Canadian Feminism and Decolonial Practice in Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* and *Her Head A Village*" in a special issue of *EnterText* on "Crossing Thresholds – Gender and Decoloniality in Caribbean Knowledge" (2018).

135 Sister Vision started to publish in 1985. The aim of the pioneering project was to increase the visibility of writers of color who remained generally excluded from both the mainstream and the alternative feminist literary communities and publishing houses (Ruth 2003: n.p.).

written articles for the journals *fireweed* and *Contrast* and edited various collections of poetry and creative writing, such as *Fireworks: The Best of Fireweed* (1986) or *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* (1991).<sup>136</sup> She is the author of the short story collections *Remembering G* (1991) and *Her Head a Village* (1994). Her feminist idea which she expresses throughout her oeuvre is intersectional and moves beyond white European, Anglo-American and -Canadian definitions of feminism in its focus on Black lesbian subjectivity and Black women's lived experience of racial, sexual, and gendered oppression in a majority white society.

Silvera, like other established writers of Caribbean descent such as Dionne Brand, Afua Cooper, Olive Senior, Claire Harris, or Nalo Hopkinson, has contributed to shaping the fields not only of Black feminist thought but also of Caribbean literature in Canada (cf. Williams 2008).<sup>137</sup> What adds to the rich, heterogeneous character of Caribbean Canadian literature are, for example: experiments with form and genre as in Hopkinson's speculative fiction *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998); non-fictional investigations of Black women's history in Canada as in Cooper's *The Hanging of Angélique* (2006); Brand's explorations of a cosmopolitan and multicultural Toronto in *What We all Long For* (2005); Shani Mootoo's literary transgressions of heterosexual identities in the novel *Cereus Blooms At Night* (1996); or representations of diasporic identities of Indo-Trinidadian-Canadian migrants in Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003). While testifying their strong links to the respective Caribbean homes, the authors are also deeply connected to Canadian soil – *rooted* and *routed* both ways.

The novel, while retracing the coming of age and migrant story of a young woman in Jamaica and Canada, foregrounds the issues of destructive gender relations, homosexuality, and bodily vulnerability. The focus of my analysis is placed on the coming of age of the protagonist, Molly Galloway, who needs to negotiate her becoming woman between the island home Jamaica and the new metropolitan home of Toronto while also dealing with the estrangement from her mother and the unspoken truth of her and her uncle's homosexuality. The

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136 Further works edited by Silvera are *Black Girl Talk* (1995); *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature* (1995); and *Má-ka Diasporic Juks: Contemporary Writing by Queer of African Descent* (1998).

137 By no means do I wish to diminish the work by writers such as Austin Clark, Dany Laferrière, Neil Bissoondath, or Cyril Dabydeen in shaping Caribbean literature in Canada. For a more in-depth discussion on Caribbean-Canadian literatures see Clarke (2005) and Bucknor and Coleman (2005). See also the work by Rinaldo Walcott, sociologist and critic in Black diaspora cultural studies, who has published extensively on Black Canadian culture and writing with a focus on queer sexuality, masculinity, coloniality, and citizenship (e.g. Walcott 2003).

chapter addresses the effects migration has on Molly's individuation process and familial interrelationships by paying attention to the ways she experiences her body and sexuality and relates to the women of her family.

Furthermore, I investigate the narrative representations of the homoerotic and maternal body as well as performances of masculinity to question gender conformity and the notion of 'respectability' through which certain bodies become a threat to hegemonic formulations of citizenship and Jamaican identity. The colonial continuity of these formulations, as Mimi Sheller points out, are particularly visible in the gendered codes inherent in the culture of respectability which is "based on the middle-class patriarchal Christian family, as well as expectations of heteronormative 'whiteness'" (Sheller 2012: 129). I suggest to read the main character's personal relationships through Audre Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic" (1978) in order to deconstruct those heteronormative notions of masculinity and femininity the novel identifies as destructive.

The next section, first, briefly summarizes some aspects of the socio-historical, political, and cultural context of Jamaica including the concepts of 'creole multiracialism' and 'middle-class respectability' as the pillars of Jamaican cultural identity, citizenship, and the perception of appropriate sexuality. For the reading of Silvera's novel, the historical and contemporary contexts is necessary to comprehend how normative conceptualization of sexual morality developed and how in the colonial situation particular sexual practices were defined as 'normal' or inappropriate which ultimately affects today's conceptualizations of body politics in Jamaica and in extension also within the diaspora community. In the following, I also describe the migratory movements from Jamaica to Canada which have led to what Andrea Davis and Carl E. James call Jamaica's "multiculturalizing presence" (cf. Davis/James 2012) in Canada particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, and conclude by focusing on Black Canadian women's writing of which Silvera's work is foundational.

#### 4.1.1 Jamaican History of Post-/Colonialism and Migration

Jamaica is the largest island of the Anglophone Caribbean with a population of about 2.7 million people according to the census in 2011 (cf. "Population Usually Resident in Jamaica"). That Jamaica used to be a slave society that relied heavily on sugar production accounts for the ethnic composition of its population with a Black majority, a white and mixed ethnic minority, as well as a small East Indian, Syrian, and Chinese population. The social division along

class lines, education, and achievement is inseparable from the "colour line" (Vickerman 2007: 485). Colonialism and the postcolonial processes of state formation, led by the small white and creole elite, condition the inseparability of ethnicity and race from class but also gender within politics and social hierarchies.

Jamaica was colonized by England in 1655, after the island had been under Spanish rule for 150 years, to start off a "sugar revolution" (Higman 2011: 98) that expanded into the global, highly capital-oriented triangular trade between Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. The second half of the eighteenth century marks the culmination point of the colonial enterprise with Jamaica as one of the greatest exporters of sugar in the Caribbean.<sup>138</sup> What emerged during this time – not only in Jamaica but also on other islands – was a multi-racial but strictly hierarchized social structure. These plural societies, Higman confirms,

consisted of segments defined by ethnicity and culture, and sharply distinguished from another in terms of status and legal and political rights. In this model, the highest ranks were occupied by whites who held to a Europe-oriented culture, whereas the lowest ranks were made up of enslaved field labourers who looked to Africa for their cultural roots. (Higman 2011: 138-9)

Against this background, creolization, a process of cultural and ethnic intermixing and assimilation, began to shape Jamaican society, however, as Brathwaite observes, it benefitted the European minority (cf. Brathwaite 1971).

Colonization and enslavement were always accompanied by resistance from those enslaved (most famously in the Maroon Wars during 1720 and 1739). The Christmas Rebellion of 1831, an event of passive resistance in which equal treatment and payment for field work were demanded, preceded the abolition of slavery in the colony. After Emancipation the British Crown compensated plantation owners for the loss of slaves but did not secure sustainable living and working condition for the formerly enslaved masses. Among the Black population there was a growing dissatisfaction with the land distribution, working conditions, and access to education and property, but also with the inequalities based on culture and color. Increases in taxes, worsened living conditions, and extreme poverty culminated in the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865. This rebellion, although unsuccessful, strengthened the want for political and economic enhancement, for the right of legal representation and the definition of a Jamaican identity that values as well the African heritage and cul-

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138 During the period of slavery, lasting officially from 1651 until 1867, more than one million persons mainly from Africa's West Coast were deported to Jamaica (cf. Helber 2015: 39).

ture.<sup>139</sup> The last two decades of the nineteenth century are foundational not only for a national consciousness but also for the emergence of a new middle class and enhanced labor migration.<sup>140</sup>

The first half of the twentieth century saw the beginning of nation building processes and decolonization. The installation of democratic rule and self-government along with the founding of the two major parties, the *People's National Party* (PNP) and the *Jamaica Labour Party* (JLP),<sup>141</sup> eventually led to independence and the formation of the sovereign state Jamaica on August 1, 1962 (cf. Sherlock/Bennett 1998). In now postcolonial Jamaica (in a strictly temporal sense) national unity was suggested and a common shared cultural identity pushed, thereby promoting the creole multiracial society (cf. Thomas 2004). Although the national slogan "Out of Many, One People" celebrates ethnic diversity, it was meant to exclude race as meaningful for the postcolonial society and cover up hierarchical racial relations. As consequence, the newly defined *Jamaicanness* widened the gap between the creole, or 'brown'<sup>142</sup> elite and the Black, African descended majority, mostly members of the working class. Jamaica's hegemonic cultural identity, as Patrick Helber argues, has increasingly been defined and appropriated by the middle class to privilege European and U.S.-American worldviews and respectability as life style and morali-

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139 Official acknowledgement of this aspect, however, would only be realized partially with national independence almost a hundred years later and politically installed under P. J. Patterson's administration between 1992 and 2006. Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) developed the "idea of one great international organisation of black people, educated, financially independent and having pride as a race" (Sherlock/Bennett 1998: 298). With the founding of the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association) he aimed at realizing the idea of Black consciousness, solidarity, and unity, taking race as important reference point for identification. His ideas of a transnational Blackness and 'Back-to-Africa Movement' turned him into an unpopular figure among the political elite in Jamaica.

140 There was a large increase in the regional demand for workforce to build the Panama Canal and to work the banana plantations in the Americas.

141 In 1938, Alexander Bustamante founded the alliance *Bustamante's Industrial Trade Union* as a reaction to strikes and famine. Norman Manley then founded the first party, PNP, collaborating at first closely with Bustamante. A conservative turn in Bustamante's political position led him to distance himself from the more socialist PNP to found the JLP in 1943. Both actively called for self-rule and reforms to install general elections thus contributing significantly to Jamaica's independence. The two-parties system is still in place today.

142 In Jamaica, according to Thomas, "the 'middle class,' the more fortunate,' the 'rich people,' and the 'upper sets,' fall into the range of color categories usually referred to as 'brown'" (Thomas 2004: 24). The creole elite, their 'brownness' is "an intermediary color and class construction that is linked historically with the population of free people of color that emerged during the slavery period" (ibid.).

ty codex but excluding Black urban working class culture that has been perceived as backward and not respectable (cf. Helber 2015: 43). The politics of identity formation has not only solidified paternalistic social constellations of the nineteenth century, but also juxtaposes citizenship, propriety, and heteronormative sexuality to condemn sexual and gender deviance (cf. Thomas 2004: 56-57).

Despite initial rapid economic growth and the emergence of a more influential middle-class, the majority of the population continued to live in precarious conditions. Poverty, urbanization, illegal housing, and violence became social problems. Riots in the 1960s and 70s were directed “against the deep-seated inequities inherent in Jamaican society” (D’Agostino 2009: 112), fuelled by elitist politics, ‘party clientelism,’ and a patronage-based democracy, or so-called “garrison politics.” The society was parted by the rivalry between the two parties and their leaders who instrumentalized the urban population especially young men of Kingston’s ghettos. Against this background, performances of virility and the glorification of the ‘gun man,’ violence, and urban working-class “*badmanism*” (Hutton 2010: 27) have come to define dominant masculinity.<sup>143</sup>

Jamaica has maneuvered into an economic crisis as a result of global capitalism along with neoliberal politics on part of the Jamaican government and austerity programs. State interventions by the U.S., structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank, international drug trade, control of local tourism and industry by multinational corporations continue to slow down economic recovery. The decline in domestic and international economy accompanied by social unrest has led to large-scale migration to the United States and Canada after Great Britain tightened the immigration laws. In the mid-1970s the numbers of Jamaican migrants increased especially from the middle- and upper-classes, being dissatisfied with then-Prime Minister Michael Manley’s policy of democratic socialism (cf. Jones 2008: 20), while since the 1980s members especially of the lower classes have increasingly left for North America. Today, an estimated number of 3.3 to 3.5 million persons make up the Jamaican diaspora community world-wide. The number of emigrants has remained constant during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at five to six persons per 1000 residents, or 13,000 to 16,000 emigrants annually, in the period from 2002 until 2013 (cf. “Components of Annual Population Growth and Rates”). Of

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143 See Hutton’s article “Oh Rudie” (2010) on the intersection of popular culture, performances of masculinity, and postcolonial politics. He describes the phenomenon of ‘rude-boy culture’ as subversive to elitist politics. Silvera’s novel, too, stages this aspect of Jamaican masculine identity.

interest is also the generally high willingness among Jamaicans to migrate (cf. Thomas-Hope 2002: 86, 91).

In general, diaspora Jamaicans maintain close connections to the island and participate actively in and influence the regional cultural and political life from afar. With the regular remittances of money and other goods, the transnational community furthermore provides the major source of income for the Jamaican state and economy surpassing even the tourism sector. Consequently, as Jones testifies, “[e]migration from Jamaica and the transnational flows that have developed between the island and its primary destination countries have become not only an economic strategy for Jamaicans, but also a culturally and socially desirable practice” (Jones 2008: 1). While migration and life in North America or Europe for many offers prospects of improved living conditions and social mobility, for some it also means liberation from mechanisms of oppression and discrimination with regards also to sexuality and gender. In many cases, the diaspora location allows LGBTTIQ-persons to live more openly.<sup>144</sup> Writers and artists who left Jamaica like Thomas Glave, Makeda Silvera, Staceyann Chin, or recent Booker Prize winner Marlon James, who have come out as gay, continue to work as activists and speak out about the lack of rights for non-heterosexual persons and homophobic violence.

Canada is now home to the third largest Jamaican diaspora community, which ranks among the country’s fastest growing ethnic community.<sup>145</sup> According to the 2006 census, 231,110 persons claimed Jamaican origin (single and multiple ethnic origin responses; cf. “Ethnic Origins, 2006 Counts, for Canada”), among them 123,420 Jamaican-born (cf. “Immigrant Population by Place of Birth”). Most of them live in downtown Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area. The country looks back to a long-standing history of Jamaican immigration

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144 In the queer movement, the acronym LGBTTIQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and -sexual, intersexual, and/or queer identities. It acknowledges the diversity of gender and sexuality beyond heteronormative, binary understandings of gender.

145 The “era of racially preferential immigration policy” (Walker 2012: 27) officially ended with the introduction of the organized domestic scheme in 1955, allowing a small number of women from the Anglophone Caribbean to enter Canada annually as domestic workers. Due to a lack of workforce on the Canadian labor market, large migration waves were then encouraged by the introduction of a point system in 1967. The law favored skilled and professional workers by ranking “independent applicants [...] according to certain objective criteria concerning education, skills and resources” (Whitaker 1991: 19), as well as language, sex, marital status, and children. Selective admission and racial profiling and restrictions, however, continue to exist.

with the largest number of migrants arriving since mid-1900.<sup>146</sup> The immigration policy's focus on education and skill brings with it an immigrant population with a comparatively high level of training and professional expertise. While many Jamaicans in Canada have obtained a secure socioeconomic status, the majority still lives in inadequate conditions with a lower average income than the general population (cf. "The Jamaican Community in Canada"). Likewise, while many claim a strong sense of belonging to Canada (i.e. over 80 % according to the "Ethnic Diversity Study"), still more than half of the Canadian population of Jamaican origin have experienced racial discrimination (cf. "The Jamaican Community in Canada"). Despite the state's open, multicultural policy and higher living standards as compared to other minority groups, the Black Jamaican minority is still confronted with "pervasive patterns of social and economic marginalization" (Walker 2012: 33) vis-à-vis white supremacy.

Multiculturalism, on the one hand, facilitates the integration and accommodation of diverse ethnicities, but, on the other hand, it privileges white Anglo-Canadian identity. Every-day and institutionalized forms of racism continue to limit citizenship rights, access to education, housing, and professional career. Images of a 'problematic' Black masculinity in association with high crime rates are still pervasive. Without further critical investigation they reproduce among the population common stereotypes of a "Black Canadian identity, marked by performances of hyper-masculinity and physical aggression" to which Jamaicans have become tantamount, as Davis and James find (2012: 11). In opposition to this perception, studies like the one by Davis and James consider "Jamaica as integral, rather than marginal, to Canada's developed economy" (ibid.) and multicultural society. Thus, this and the subsequent chapter shall furthermore highlight the diverse ways Caribbean – Jamaican and Trinidadian – diaspora literature enriches the multicultural constitution of Canada's society.

#### 4.1.2 Black Canadian Feminist Thought

Since the last two decades in particular, the theorization and academic visibility of Black (and/or African Canadian) feminist thought in Canada have in-

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146 As Joseph Mensah confirms "one of the first large groups of Blacks to enter Canada was the Maroons of Jamaica, who landed in Halifax in 1796. Also, during the First World War, Jamaican Blacks were among those recruited to work in the coal mines [...] and the shipyards" (2002: 98).



creased.<sup>147</sup> Publications in the field explore, amongst others, Black women's histories, their struggles and possibilities of resistance, educational and schooling matters, as well as multiple forms of discrimination in Canada (cf. Mas-saquoi 2007; Wane 2002).<sup>148</sup> According to Yvonne Bobb-Smith, what historically defines a Caribbean-specific feminism in Canada are the "opposition and resistance to a dual system of capitalism and patriarchy" (Bobb-Smith 2004: 167) which are experienced as equally oppressive. She adds that their continuous struggle "for liberation has produced a counter ideology to many ideas of women's roles in Western society" (ibid.). Different to white (especially middle-class) Canadian feminism, this ideological counter-discourse takes note of the often lower level of education of migrant women and lacking resources; it re-evaluates the domestic sphere and family not as an oppressive, patriarchal space but as a microcosm of self-expression and freedom; it is sensitive to ethnic and gender diversity and often neglected issues of racism.<sup>149</sup>

While acknowledging close proximity to Black feminism in the United States both intellectually and with regard to shared lived experiences, Black feminist thought in Canada is also different.<sup>150</sup> This is mainly due to the lesser degree of academic institutionalization, on the one hand, and, on the other, to a different history of slavery and racial segregation, the overall smaller size of the Black population in Canada as compared to the U.S., the different patterns of community building, predominantly in metropolitan areas, as well as a different migration policy that has targeted the attraction of skilled labour while discouraging reunification of families and denying racist profiling (cf. Mullings 2004: 136).<sup>151</sup>

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147 An early foundational key text in the field is *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (1994) edited by Peggy Bristow with contributions by Afua Cooper and Dionne Brand, among others.

148 The 'denominators' 'Black' or 'African' as unifying categories may seem slightly problematic here, because it glosses over ethnic diversity and heterogeneity among the Black population in Canada. But, it is a politically useful term, a common ground for self-affirmation, identity politics, and empowerment. On this point, see for instance Bucknor and Coleman (2005). Rinaldo Walcott critically examines how Blackness in Canada usually conflates with Caribbean (Jamaican) diaspora identity, arguing that "it is around Canadian blacks of Caribbean descent that definitions of blackness in Canada are clustered. The hyper-visibility of Caribbean blackness makes indigenous black Canadians invisible" (2003: 46).

149 This is also pointed out by Silvera, most expressly in her study *Silenced* (1983).

150 Important for the theoretical groundwork of Black Canadian Feminism are, for instance, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, or Audre Lorde.

151 On the 'color line' in Canada, see Mathieu (2010), especially chapter one. On community building and migration policies, see Mensah (2002).

Black feminist theory and activism in Canada aims to achieve equal participation and recognition. It not only critically examines the multiple and intersecting factors of oppression that shape women's lived experience, but also focuses on solidarity in the common struggle, which is regarded as source of strength and as liberating practice (cf. Wane 2002). In this respect, "Canadian Black feminist theory is the articulated consciousness of Black women's awareness of their place in the Canadian state and a cultural narrative that explains Black Canadian women's understanding of themselves" (Massaquoi 2007: 13). It is "grounded in the specific materiality of Black women's lives, while acknowledging uprooting, movement, and reconstitution, and interrogating the dominant racialized and gendered discourse of the Canadian nation" (ibid. 7). As a discipline of knowledge it recognises the important and crucial role of Black women in shaping Canadian history since the seventeenth century. At the same time, it reveals the public denial of slavery as part of Canada's national history.<sup>152</sup>

A founding figure for Black feminism in Canada, Silvera's political agenda is noticeable also throughout her fictional work. In an interview, she positions herself and her work at the intersection of multiple societal factors and self-identifies as: "I am a woman living in a patriarchal society. I am black living in a racist society and a lesbian living in a homophobic society. I'm a Caribbean-born Jamaican, with all the stereotypes. These factors are intricately linked to who I am and occupy a large place in my work" (Ruth 2003: n.p.). Influenced at an early stage of her career by Audre Lorde's work, the anti-racism by intellectuals such as Malcolm X, and the creative work by artists of the Harlem Renaissance her work is always creative and political at the same time and cannot be separated from its individual historical and spatial context. As the quote makes clear, Silvera transgresses several borders of a perceived 'normativity' that tends to exoticize Caribbean women's bodies and exclude non-heterosexuality, Blackness, and working-class migrant identity. Her work is groundbreaking, because she explicitly addresses the issues of racism and classism but also homophobia both within the Jamaican community as well as the Canadian society.

For instance, the sociological study *Silenced* (1983) documents one aspect of Black history in Canada from the perspectives of Caribbean migrant and work-

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152 An important documentation is *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal* by Afua Cooper, in which she confirms that "[f]rom 1628 to 1833, slavery was a legal and acceptable institution in both French and British Canada and was vigorously practiced" (2007: 70). Cooper offers a detailed analysis of the nation's history of slavery and the role of enslaved women in particular.

ing class women. The study contains several interviews with women from the West Indies who came as domestic workers to Canada, first in the course of the West Indian Domestic Scheme in 1955, then after the introduction of the point system in 1967. Silvera denounces common practices of economic exploitation and the degradation experienced by the women working in this sector – “an occupation which is not seen as ‘respectable’” (Silvera 1986: 39) in Canadian society. As one of the first written documents on the gendered experience of Caribbean labor migration in Canada it is exemplary for how these women have been denied full rights of participation as citizens and were subjected to discrimination and sexual harassment by their employers and government authorities.<sup>153</sup> It further reveals the fact that the emancipation of white middle-class women, who were increasingly entering the labor market at the time, would not have been possible without the support of their domestic ‘servants.’ “[T]he humiliation of being a legal slave” (12), in Silvera’s choice of words, becomes symptomatic for the struggle against continuing neo-colonial oppression of African Caribbean bodies in contemporary Canada – and this is the background against which Makeda Silvera’s work is set.<sup>154</sup>

The essay “Manroyal and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians” (1992) elaborates on the notion of “Black women’s strength” as a particular expression of the “cultural continuity of [her] struggles” (521) for recognition as a Black lesbian woman and inclusion in Jamaica and Canada. Silvera argues for solidarity and coalition building among homosexual People of Colour in order to gain more acceptance and visibility within the own community as well as recognition by white mainstream feminisms in

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153 In the applications, gender, marital and children status needed to be indicated. Preference was given to those women without spouse and offspring in order to avoid family reunion in Canada. As a consequence, many women concealed the existence of their children back home in Jamaica for which many were deported years later.

154 Those epistemes and approaches (artistic, intellectual, feminist etc.) that are directed against the “colonial matrix of power” (Quijano) and which attempt to undo neo-/colonial dominance, institutionalized racism, or heteronormative family structures, for example, contain decolonial potential. *Silenced* constitutes a source of empowerment and liberation by giving a voice to women who have been relegated to the margins of Canadian society. Arguably, “[a]llowing these women to speak,” as phrased by Amy Kebe (2008: 277), does, however, poses a further problem concerning power relations along the dividing lines of class and education. This relates to the problem of *representation* – who is allowed to speak for whom – which Gayatri Spivak famously elaborates on in the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) and illustrates the complex structure of writing subaltern histories into mainstream discourses.

Canada.<sup>155</sup> A “family/community coming out,” the text is, she explains, an “exploration of a Caribbean lesbian sexuality” and “how deep it is buried in people’s family history, and the silence that surround this” (Silvera 1995b: 407). A relic of the colonial period and imperial body politics of reproduction as well as Caribbean nationalist claims for respectability, it is this enforced, uncomfortable silence around homosexuality in Jamaica and the diaspora community that she attempts to break by carving out a space for queer identities. It is also this silence that is the central issue in the novel and negatively influences much of the characters’ decisions and mobility.

The title of Audre Lorde’s poem “There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women” constitutes the epigraph to Silvera’s novel. Lorde (1934-1992), whose parents were Caribbean immigrants in New York and who grew up in Harlem, was a (self-defined) Black lesbian feminist, writer, mother, and civil rights activist. With the poem, Silvera introduces some of the book’s main subjects, such as death and resentment, as well as the second most important character, Molly’s grandmother Maria, whose death marks the beginning of the story. In dedicating her novel to Lorde, she also writes the novel explicitly inside the tradition of a radical Black lesbian feminism concerned with interlocking forms of social inequalities.

## 4.2 *The Heart Does Not Bend*: Adolescence and Non-normative Sexuality

*The Heart Does Not Bend* tells the story of the family Galloway in five generations and their history of migration and displacement from Madagascar across the Atlantic to Jamaica, Canada, and the United States. Protagonist and first-person narrator is Molly Galloway, at the point of narration an adult woman in her thirties who retrospectively narrates her *coming-of-age* and *not-coming-out* story as homosexual woman. The reader accompanies her from adolescence to adulthood, from the 1960s up to well in the 1990s. Her process of self-actualization is complicated by the difficulties she experiences as Black migrant woman in Canada but also the conflicting relationships to her grandmother, mother, and her own daughter as well as her shifting position within this in-

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155 It was not until 1998, six years after the publication of the essay, that J-FLAG, the first Jamaican human rights organization for lesbian, all-sexual, and gay persons was founded.

tergenerational triad. In addition, the social stigmatization and silencing of her and her uncle Mikey's homosexuality impact negatively on Molly's transition to womanhood. Central to the plot are Molly's attempts to come to terms with her sexuality, to be a lover, and to become a caring mother and independent of her grandmother Maria, the strong, unbending matriarch who continues to control the lives of the family even after she has passed away. Maria's death in Jamaica frames the novel: The narrative starts *in medias res* during the reading of her will (the narrative present), which initiates Molly's journey back to her childhood days in the Caribbean and her move to Canada. The novel's ending returns with Molly to Jamaica shortly after the funeral.

Molly recalls how she grew up with her grandmother and Mikey in Kingston during the time of Jamaica's independence in the 1960s. Her mother, Glory, and her uncles, Freddie and Peppie, had already left for Canada to seek better opportunities. At the age of fourteen, in 1971, Molly moves with Maria to Toronto joining her mother and the rest of the family. The reader is provided with two different versions of what has led to their departure. Molly recounts her annoyance with Maria's strictness and repeated alcohol excesses, which she refuses to endure any longer and writes a letter to her uncle asking him to move in with him in Canada. Maria communicates later that their departure was due to Mikey's openly lived homosexuality and the shame he apparently brought over the family in Jamaica. The relocation, however, negatively affects Molly's sense of self, especially since she does not easily reconnect with her mother and becomes an outsider at school because of her Jamaican looks and accent. Maria, too, has a hard time adjusting to the new place and takes to heavy alcohol consumption and, later, fervently to religion. When Molly becomes pregnant and is abandoned by the baby's father (Justin, a friend of Glory's partner), Glory throws her out of the apartment. She does not sympathize with her daughter who, like herself, seems to become a teenage-mother without a proper education.

After several years of adjustment problems and feelings of confinement, Molly falls in love with Rose, a young woman from Grenada whom Molly admires for her independence and her strong will. Molly finds comfort in the relationship to Rose, who encourages her to attend university in Texas; she does so very much to Maria's dislike, since for her homosexuality is shameful and a sin according to biblical and Jamaican moral norms of respectability. Molly eventually breaks up with Rose and accompanies Maria back to a desolate Jamaica, where Maria dies. Molly seeks for a connection to her natal land and finds comfort in visiting her childhood home. She uses the time after Ma-

ria's funeral for an attempt to reconcile with her estranged daughter, who is now a mother herself, apparently continuing the cycle of teenage pregnancy.

In her reading of the novel, Sharon M. Beckford elucidates on "the shifting phases of womanhood and the realities of sexual difference" (Beckford 2011: 218). She describes these phases as "archetypal patterns" by comparing the novel to the Demeter/Persephone myth and the staging of womanhood and the cyclic development of female subjectivity both in the myth as well as the novel. The body becomes the central element of *The Heart Does Not Bend*, especially through the novel's representations not only of aging, maternity, and virginity, but also by discussing issues of self-/alienation, exclusion, and discrimination. Drawing from Beckford who highlights "sexuality as a conflict in Molly's process of individuation" (220), I wish to retrace her individuation by investigating Molly's various personal relationships. Beside the strong intergenerational connections to maternal figures, the sisterhood and bonds of solidarity among girls in their process of becoming woman constitute a typical feature for woman-centred coming-of-age narratives. Molly's individuation and socialisation from girlhood to being an adult woman is shaped by various important relationships significant for her understanding of gender roles and sexuality (cf. Beckford 2011: 242).

Maria's death at the beginning of the novel forces Molly to undertake a painful journey of self-discovery during which the reader is taken through the different stages of subject formation and is confronted with the contradictions inherent in the formative process of becoming woman, the various roles Molly must perform, and expectation she needs to fulfil. Told retrospectively from the I-perspective of Molly, the story focuses on her coming of age influenced and shaped by various persons and often opposing life-styles. From the start, her insecurity regarding her sexual identity and desire permeate the narrative, embodied, too, by the different characters like Petal, Punsie, or Mikey in her adolescence phase, and Rose in her adulthood. It is her home space in Jamaica in particular that stands in for heteronormative socialization and her sexual awakening – the latter oscillates between a heterosexual crush on her best friend Punsie's brother and the queer, homoerotic experience she shares with the girl next door, Petal.

That the move from Jamaica to Canada means deprivation and separation from her friends is indicated by Molly shortly after settling down in Toronto: "We missed our home and our freedom. Perhaps I missed it even more than Mama because I longed for my crowd, for Punsie, Junior, the others on the street and even Petal" (102). The change of home location thus goes along with restrictions and limited self-determination. It also hits Molly particularly hard

because she leaves the peer group which is extremely important for adolescent socialization. Molly's friendship to Punsie, for example, is crucial with respect to Molly's awareness of sexuality and sex education. They share secrets about their pubescent bodies as well as their experiences with boys. "Punsie, mi granny say if a boy kiss mi or touch mi, ah can get pregnant. Is true?" Punsie laughs about her friend's naivety: "Yuh too fool" (67). In reality, the grandmother's warning serves as means of both deterrence and surveillance. Molly, whose "periods started" at almost fourteen of age, needs to be prevented from "getting close to any boy, not a touch, not a kiss" (66). That the adolescent body is potentially in danger and dangerous is made even more explicit earlier when Maria forbids her granddaughter to go out, saying "Mi nuh want nutten happen to yuh. Mi have to deliver yuh to yuh mother in good condition" (62). The female body is objectified as a commodity that in any case must be kept in good, respectable order, meaning unspoiled and virginal. The warning is repeated when Molly wants to join her friends for a birthday party and Maria locks her inside the house with the explanation "Mi nuh want yuh spoiled. Mi nuh want to hand over any damaged goods to yuh mother" (81). That way she is punished and denied autonomy. Maria watches over Molly's adolescent body as she had monitored her own daughter's sexuality – though unsuccessfully ("mi had to get her off de island – mi was afraid she would mash up herself wid baby after baby" [119]).

Also, Molly turns to her best friend Punsie when she is ashamed and confused after having caught her grandmother with the gardener "doing things" (55). It is not completely clear whether she is outraged because she considers this as an act of indecency, or whether she is rather unknowing about what was going on when she heard the bed "creaking." Punsie, who is obviously more informed when it comes to sexual intercourse, lectures her friend, "What yuh going on like dat for, yuh don't know is a natural thing for a man and woman? [...] Girl, now yuh know 'bout de birds and de bees" (56). Punsie's uncomplicated treatment of the matter is noteworthy, her perception of "natural" sexuality, however, is entrenched in a body politics that normalizes sexuality in strictly heterosexual terms.

If Punsie is important for Molly in her heterosexual initiation, it is Petal, the girl who moves in next door, who embodies Molly's wish to push the boundaries of this normativity. Petal is marginalized by society, because she is an albino. Her difference transgresses socially acceptable norms and ideals relating to the body and beauty and she is made fun of by the children in the neighbourhood, but endorsed by Molly who starts to visit her in her tree house. In the scenes of sexual awakening that take place in the seclusion of the tree house,

when the two girls discover their curiosity for each other, we find a playful initiation into same-sex desire, which for Molly will be realized fully when she meets Rose. Molly remembers the encounter clearly:

Petal had two matchboxes with two grasshoppers in each waiting. We chewed on them, savouring the juices. "Don't swallow," she said to me, "ah want to taste yours." She squeezed my lips open and we exchanged grasshopper juices. She held on to my tongue and I did the same with hers. Then she pressed her body against mine and lay on top of me. She pressed me hard and let out a sigh. (53)

During the encounters she experiences her body in yet unknown ways, finding comfort in the touch of her friend – "I had been thinking about Petal and how good I felt when she rubbed against me" (55). That her desire for her friend's body may be forbidden is indicated by Molly not telling Punsie about the secret meetings with Petal. On the other hand, however, for Molly same-sex attraction is not completely alien to her, observing Mikey kissing his boyfriend (cf. 60) or seeing two of his female friends dancing closely together (cf. 59). Actually, the deviance in her uncle's behavior is made clear to Molly, who anticipates this already, by Petal who yells at her that her "uncle is a battyman" (66). Petal's own perceived 'otherness' as albino then underlines the same-sex encounter as even more deviant, abnormal act.

Molly learns from a young age that society, in general, is homophobic. As she matures, her desire to embrace her sexual preference is repressed by her family's homophobia. Silvera, then, might also be suggesting that there are many Mollys in this world, who are unable to self-actualize because of sexual oppression by society and familial expectations. (Beckford 2011: 220)

Christine Kim questions the actual existence of Petal and sees in their homoerotic relation a projection only of Molly's imagination. She describes this as a fruit of Molly's "fantasy of queer sexuality" (Kim 2006: 72). Whether Kim's statement is true or false is not of significance, what is, according to Beckford, is that "Silvera's use of Petal as Molly's initiate into sexual difference is a powerful commentary on identity and difference, suggesting that difference is considered 'abnormal,' and is, therefore ridiculed by society" (2011: 245). The novel makes explicit that whereas sexual intercourse is apparently natural for a man with a woman, as Punsie remarks, it is condemned in same-sex relations. Maria's rant much later reveals this, since "man do not lie wid a man as one lies wid a 'oman. [...] And dat go for 'oman, 'oman thing. Destruction can only follow" (187).



The tree house constitutes a safe space for Molly to escape from her grandmother's surveillance, her alcohol excesses, and the constant fights between Maria and Mikey. Even more importantly it is her space of socialization and corporeal experiences where she can self-actualize and try out her sexual fantasies. It symbolizes the freedom and privacy she is deprived of when moving to Canada. A similar safe and queer space in which the body can move freely is created by the regular parties Mikey and Frank host (cf. 58-59). Beyond those spaces that re-/produce normative corporeality, here the maternal body can be sexy, homoerotic desire is not stigmatized or prohibited, and the adolescent body is not under observation.

### 4.3 The Missing Body: Absent Motherhood and Breastfed Existence

While the novel closely examines the strength and weaknesses of the *present* mother figure, the novel also critically questions the issue of *absent* motherhood in Jamaican families. Economic hardship and labor migration lead to transnational family constellations in which the structure and duty of caring must be re-negotiated and parent and child may be alienated from each other.<sup>156</sup> One major aspect of Caribbean families, especially those of the lower classes, that Silvera reveals is the prevalence of the woman-headed household with a simultaneous insignificance of the nuclear family.<sup>157</sup> The dominant fig-

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156 On the intersection of maternity, migration, and diaspora identity, see Charmaine Crawford who suggests that transnational motherhood “counters dominant notions of motherhood linked to the institution of motherhood under patriarchal capitalist relations” (2012: 331).

157 That many Jamaican families display a matrifocal structure and value the role of the mother does not mean that they claim the dominant role in their communities. Eudine Barriteau, quite to the contrary, argues that Caribbean societies tend to be patriarchal and have an unequal gender system that intersects with class and ethnicity (cf. Barriteau 1998). Scholarship on family compositions of African-Caribbean households offers various explanations arguing that either “maternal families were an adaptive strategy to the slave system”, or “stemmed from the traditional African system that survived in spite of the African’s forced migration” (Prior 2005: 373). While these historical explanations are certainly true, the economic situation, migration, and patterns of sexual behavior account for female centered households in contemporary Jamaica and, partially, in the diaspora communities. This adds to the critique of the Eurocentric concept of the nuclear family which does not fit the

ures in the Galloway family are the women, which the novel underlines by relegating the (rather flat) male characters to minor positions.

The separation of mother and daughter negatively impacts on the individuation of the child or adolescent and, in turn, may also trouble the emotional attachment of the mother to the child, as is the case Glory's relation to Molly, which Maria taunts her with yelling at her daughter "yuh don't even turn mother fi Molly yet" (92). In the context of migration and transnational family structures, the practice of grandmothers' (or members of the extended family) raising their grandchildren may, in some cases, "retard the development of womanhood" (Beckford 2011: 223). Accordingly, what is at issues in Silvera's text is "the inner confusion that the grand/daughter experiences when she first has to decide whom to recognize for nurturing her, and second, whom to respect as the authority figure in her life" (ibid.). In her criticism of "interfamily adoption" (ibid.), which is the term Beckford uses, Silvera furthermore asks for the role the biological mother is left with and whether she "can even develop a relationship with her daughter without appearing to be overbearing and interfering, or to be holding a contrary perspective to that of the grandmother – as the mother-substitute figure" (ibid.). Molly herself reveals the tension to her mother upon their reunification in Toronto: "I'd hoped for love and tenderness, yet I knew she could never take my grandmother's place" (89). Molly discloses her disappointment with Glory's lack of affection. Yet, she also reveals her own reluctance to bond with Glory and to accept anyone else as mother figure and authority but her grandmother.

Molly, too, is faced with the difficult decision to seek education and (personal) advancement and to leave her daughter in the care of others, which will result in the profound estrangement of her daughter. At the age of 27, she moves to Texas without her daughter in order to attend university.

I didn't want to leave my daughter, but I knew I couldn't take her with me. For a brief moment I understood why Glory had left me with Mama to come to Canada. [...] And so, with the promise for a better future for me and my daughter, I left her with Mama. It seemed the right thing to do and it was what I knew: to make a better life one had to go away. (163)

Molly describes her inner conflict revealing her understanding for her mother as well as the apparent commonness of leaving, meaning migration. However, this separation from her daughter is at the same time one step in her own indi-

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postcolonial Jamaican context and neither the region's migrant or diasporic condition where single motherhood, multiple partnerships, and the phenomenon of so-called 'barrel children' are often by necessity part of the family patterns.

viduation necessary for her development and self-actualization especially in terms of her sexual identity, because once in Texas her relationship to Rose can flourish.

*The Heart Does Not Bend* intertwines the negative side effects of migration with issues of interfamilial relations, motherhood in particular. Molly and Maria experience difficulties to acclimatize to the new surroundings in Toronto. Even after living with Glory and her partner for a year “we still weren’t used to our new country, our family and our apartment” (88). As Jamaican migrants they have hoped for a more comfortable life in the North; the reality, however, turns out to be not as accommodating. What also becomes clear is that after reunification, Molly will not succeed to establish a meaningful or emotional relationship to Glory, who has become too estranged.

At first I had secretly hoped that Mama’s move would allow my relationship with my mother to change for the better, since there would be just the two of us, but it didn’t. When I sometimes tried to hug her, she would pull away. We didn’t do anything together. [...] I must have reminded my mother of the father I never knew. Perhaps I reminded her of the shame she felt when she discovered she was pregnant. She found fault at my every twist and turn. My English was bad. If I expected to reach anywhere, I better learn to talk good, she said. My breasts were too big, my eyes too knowing. (120)

With the topic of absent motherhood, Silvera points to another issue that turns out to be problematic in the unification of mother and adolescent daughter: the unexpected maturity and sexuality of the pubescent body. When Glory left Jamaica, Molly was still a baby. Now a grown young woman, she seems conscious of her sexuality; the sexual attraction and attention she receives from the opposite sex does not go unnoticed. Molly describes her looks to the reader (“I was tall for my age, slim like her, but my breasts were already rivalling Sophia Loren’s, and I was very conscious of them as I sat next to my mother” [90]), contrasting her body to her mother’s (“Glory was thirty now, tall, slender, her breasts the size of small Jamaican oranges” [89]). She earns the approval of Sid, Glory’s partner, and his friend Justin who compliment her (“Yuh really growing into a looker” [97]), much to her mother’s dislike.

Similar to the adolescent female bodies that I will look at also in the three novels that follow, Molly’s body is gazed at as dangerous and loaded with guilt: “I had to be home right after school or I’d have a lot of explaining to do, especially to Glory, who figured my breasts were going to get me into trouble [...] like I was a walking time bomb because of the size of my breasts” (95). It seems like what Silvera is hinting at here is a culture in which the ‘breasted’ (i.e. sexualized) Black female body provokes “trouble”; a culture in which the young

woman is taught to be ashamed of her body and of attracting the gaze of others. In her analysis of the lived body and woman's sexuality, Grosz pointedly summarizes the social significance even stigma of the female breast. In referring to Iris Young, she elucidates the "specificities of female embodiment and lived experience" as well as a society's "ways of compartmentalizing their [the women's] bodily unity" (Grosz 1994: 108). She continues explaining how "[i]n the experience of breasted existence in a sexist society, for example, breasts are an inherent bodily attribute subjectively lived and at the same time function as objects, both for men and for women" (ibid.). To this, Silvera alludes in making explicit how the female breast is a marker of gender identity and already sexually charged, implying that women live and experience their bodies in ways different to men but also that the sexual body of a black girl like Molly – "a walking time bomb" – has further, meaning racial implications than that of white girls.

The over-sexualization of the young woman's body is disclosed in a further instance. One evening, Molly dresses up for a dinner party to which Justin, whom she feels attracted to and who will eventually father her child, is also invited. She recalls "buying a halter top [...]. I had bathed and combed my hair carefully [...] feeling quite pleased with myself. Suddenly I saw Glory's face reflected in the bedroom mirror" (95). Glory is outraged upon seeing her daughter's attire and turns to Maria for support: "Mama, you call dis a blouse, dis little piece a cloth dat barely cover up her tittie dem?" I stood there, half frozen with embarrassment" (96). Maria, on the contrary, finds nothing wrong with the top and Molly's body. In psychoanalysis, the mirror stage indicates a moment of self-recognition. In the mirror scene staged here, quite to the contrary, it marks a moment of non-recognition and dis-identification; the child is not seeing herself in her mother nor is she seen by her, which may be caused by migration and absence and the thusly created emotional distance.

The scene contrasts the mother's sense of propriety and the daughter's wish for self-expression. It reveals the discrepancy and conflict between self-perception on the one hand, and her mother's gaze and social expectations regarding the adolescent body's decency on the other. Coming of age and sexual development as a natural process goes hand in hand with the increased policing of the female body, emblemized by the spiteful and jealous gaze of Glory. Glory seems to be unable to cope with a pubescent daughter and her blossoming sexuality. She sees in her a rival. The situation escalates when Molly is pregnant. Glory tells her to get an abortion and throws her out of the apartment, feeling confirmed in her assumption, accusing Molly that she has seduced her own partner. She reproaches her daughter and insults Molly, "Yuh

is a blasted dutty wretch. A sneaking bitch [...]. Ah only hope to God is not Sid” (159). Migration leads if not to dysfunctional family structures then in some cases to a dysfunctional mother-daughter relation, in which jealousy and rejection cannot be dealt with adequately.

#### 4.4 The Matriarchal Body and Black Women’s Strength

A central issue in *The Heart Does Not Bend* is the quest for identity alongside the issue of maternity and often troubled relationships between mothers and their daughters. The motive of motherhood and representations of the maternal body are prominent in general in the literatures of the African diaspora. Denise DeCaires Narain confirms that the predominant literary representation of the Black female body manifests itself in particular in the “figure of the all-powerful mother” (1998: 258).<sup>158</sup> The archetype of the strong and nurturing but asexual mother figure pervades much of Caribbean women’s writing. In critical readings of these texts, the maternal body has often been interpreted not only as a trope for nature and fertility but also as allegory for the nation and, in the maternal body’s capacity of reproduction, the guarantee for the nation’s ‘survival.’ For example, in *Allegories of Desire: Body, Nation, and Empire in Modern Caribbean Literature by Women*, the author examines allegorical representations of Caribbean mothers and daughters suggesting that their bodies record a violent history and serve as “glosses for the geographical landscapes they inhabit” (Adjarian 2004: 11). She furthermore argues that “as much as the women to whom those bodies belong are daughters of human mothers, they are daughters of specific (mother)lands as well.” Their bodies “become (re)producers of historical truths that transcend the genetic and biological to include the national” (ibid.).<sup>159</sup>

Maria fulfills partially the stereotypical role of the mother as healer and nurturer especially in the life of her granddaughter. The bond between grandmother and grandchild and the protecting capacity of the maternal body is revealed in the following quote: “Every night yuh sleep right under mi breast”

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158 Patricia Hill Collins confirms the prevalence of the image of strong Black motherhood and a certain representation of motherhood in African American communities ranging from the “happy slave” to the “matriarch” (cf. 1990: 176).

159 On the relationship of Caribbean women to body and land, see Florence Ramond Journey (2009); on the interconnectedness of motherhood, mothering relationships, home, and history, see the edited volume by Verena Theile and Marie Drew (2009).

(119). Molly furthermore remembers, “[y]ou held me, steadied me so I could float till I wasn’t afraid anymore. I always started off in your arms” (9). She takes Molly in, takes care of her, and raises her while Glory leaves the island for better opportunities in Canada. When Molly is pregnant, she receives from Maria the love and support she is denied by her biological mother Glory, who has never learnt how to become and be a mother: “I was thankful I had my grandmother to teach me how to be a mother. [...] I loved my grandmother’s pure and simple generosity, the return of the unconditional love I’d had throughout my childhood and now enjoyed again with my baby inside me” (160). That this love, however, is by no means unconditional becomes clear when Maria exerts her power and excludes her from her will upon finding out about Molly’s relationship with Rose. Moreover, Maria’s loving and caring characteristics are contrasted by other, more revengeful and unforgiving character traits; this, in particular, when her children fail to be obedient. The novel opens with the reading of Maria’s will, in which she bequeaths all her money and property to Vittorio, her careless and criminal grandson. Mikey, disinherited because of his sexual identity, comments: “Mama is a wicked, revengeful ‘oman. How she could do dis? Wherever she gone, she won’t find peace” (5). The opening thus reveals the resentment and anger the family members harbor towards Maria.

Maria is an ambivalent character who alternates between being benevolent and careworn. Indeed, though, the reader does not obtain an objective description of Maria free of Molly’s emotions and personal biases. Her actions, feelings, and animosities towards other persons are all filtered through Molly’s perception. At one point, Molly herself admits her unreliability when she evaluates Mama’s affairs and relationships: “Men had caused her so much grief, but if she were telling this, she might tell it differently” (160). Adding to this, on a paratextual level, the epigraph “There are no honest poems about dead women” questions her reliability right at the beginning suggesting that what follows is not an honest account of a dead woman’s life. Molly’s retrospective account is biased revealing her actual ambivalence towards her grandmother.

Nevertheless, Maria’s strong voice the reader hears through Molly’s account creates the impression that the story is as much about her. Her thusly created omnipresence supports her status as the center and the pillar of the family Galloway. As the narrative continues and retraces the genealogy of six generations of women, Maria takes on the dominant role of the matriarch, or

the unbending heart as the novel's title implies.<sup>160</sup> Beckford characterizes Maria as "the archetypal black mother figure" (2011: 220). She points out that Maria is imbued

with so much power that she is revered, however grudgingly, by her family. [...] Maria has power – primarily the negative freedom to destroy – to continue or not continue a legacy. Accordingly, in her portrayal of Maria as matriarch, Silvera disrupts the common belief that woman-headed households are powerless and (re)presents an alternate depiction of a woman-headed household as powerful – one that accounts for some peculiar historical factors. These factors are informed by race, gender, and sexuality in a "Christian and patriarchal" Jamaican society, as well as in Canadian society; they illuminate the shifting characteristics that at once eliminate and preserve some of the stereotypical characteristics of woman as matriarch. (227)

That Maria embodies a conservative Christian Jamaica and respectability, the moral standard about which the novel is actually critical, becomes obvious in her name. Not only does her name underline her role and authority as mother, as archetypal of motherly love, devotion, and communal care in Christianity, it also stands for a certain, rather conservative interpretation of faith, strength, and virtue.

In Black women's fiction, matrifocality, the "control over resources and authority to make household decisions" (Prior 2005: 375), is frequently translated into woman's strength. Living in Kingston, Maria is used to being the breadwinner, providing for herself and her granddaughter. She owns the house and runs her own business. By taking to drinking and taking her binges out to the street and nearby rum shops (cf. 62-64), she enters a masculine connoted space and transgresses normative notions of gender and feminine behavior. Of her grandmother's inappropriate behavior Molly is reminded by her friend Punsie: "Look pon fi mi father – him do de same, except him a man" (64). This transgression furthers her status which resembles that of the patriarch but is ultimately denied to her once she lives in Canada. But, how does *The Heart Does Not Bend* at the same time claim and contradict the dominant image of "Black women's strength" and the maternal stereotype? Is the novel a celebration of self-sacrificing, devoted, unselfish motherhood?

Describing the portrayal of Black women in African American literature, in the essay "This Disease Called Strength," Trudier Harris takes up on the stereo-

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160 From Molly's perspective the six generations of the Galloway's women are her great-grandmother Mammy, grandmother Maria, her mother Glory, Molly herself, her daughter Ciboney, and Ciboney's daughter Maud.

type of female strength and the essentializing versions of Black motherhood. Harris argues that African American writers have created the image of "Black women's strength" in order to write back to common negative depictions of Black female identity and to contrast strong Black womanhood to the "perceived weakness of white women" (Harris 1995: 124). The characters are regarded as "towers of strength against the degradation of slavery [...] against the abuse of husbands and the demands of children. They were towers of strength in taking care of their families [...] they formed the pillars that supported the black churches" (109). In addition, "Black women were the spiritual as well as the physical healers" (ibid.). To a certain degree Maria indeed embodies this tower of strength as she is represented as strong and powerful throughout much of the narrative. The first proverb in the novel introducing the *Prolegomenon* supports this: "What is said over the dead Lioness's body could not be said to her alive" (2). The lioness – equally stereotypical in its transmission of a certain image of motherhood – lays claims to power and authority: She defends the own territory, does not accept a rivalling party, and protects the herd sometimes to the point of her own exhaustion.<sup>161</sup>

Harris, however, also identifies major problems with this concept pointing to the negative consequences for the image of the woman in general and the mother in particular.

Seldom have we stopped to think, however, that this thing called strength, this thing we applaud so much in black women, could also be a *disease*. Yet the very virtue so praised historically has, in African American literature, become its own form of *ill health*. Strength frequently perpetuates *dysfunction in literary families*, where the strong characters and actions of black women become *malignant growths* upon the lives of their relatives. Unaltered and uncontained, the *virus* of strength becomes *its own reason* for being for these women, and no matter how compelling the reason, the *illness* still *dominates* their lives. (110; emphasis added)

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161 The lioness not only symbolizes woman's strength, but is also the female counterpart to the Jamaican Rastafari symbol of the lion thus opening up a space for women's empowerment within Rastafari as postcolonial counter-hegemonic movement of resistance that has been criticized for its misogyny (cf. Lake 1998; Chevannes 2001). Queen Ifrica, Jamaican reggae artist and rastafari 'feminist,' in the track "Lioness on the Rise" (2009), praises the strength of the lioness: "When the roll is called up / I'll be standing taller / To face the darkest and the hardest of times / We'll be taken care of / All the children there of / But if it's required we'll be on the frontline."



Strength is considered as a parasitic element crippling/sickening the maternal body but also invading in the lives of those close to her. Molly is well aware of her grandmother's influence and flaws: "Of course, there was also the larger problem of Mama interfering too much in her adult children's lives" (108). As a matter of fact, Maria remains dependent on others needing her (cf. 166).

In drawing a partially negative image of Mama, lending her draconian, authoritarian features, Silvera feeds into Harris' critique of maternal, "emotional domination, [...] tyranny" (Harris 1995: 111), and unquestioned authority as side effects of the illness of strength. Maria is frequently read as Molly's antagonist, the person who prevents her granddaughter's happiness and sexual self-fulfillment in her relationship with Rose. Nurturing her physically and emotionally, she also puts a lot of pressure on Molly. "If it wasn't for mi, yuh would never see life" (119); this having been said for not unselfish reason after an argument with her children, she expects indefinite gratefulness, demands uncritical devotion, her decisions go unquestioned, and she plants deliberately a constant sense of bad conscience in Molly. Also, whereas Maria complains about her daughter in law Val how "she bossy" and "cyan even give mi a little time wid mi son" (121), Val confides in Glory that Maria "is a handful. There is nothing I can do right. I don't even recognize my own kitchen. [...] She is the authority on everything" (122). The kitchen, obviously, serves as space in which the struggle for women's authority takes place, a struggle that Maria at all cost needs to win. In Jamaica, the domestic sphere constituted financial independence and success rather than oppression and confinement for Maria. This reconfiguration of the domestic sphere contradicts a liberal, Euro-American feminist epistemology that regards domesticity as patriarchal tool of oppression.<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, Maria Galloway despotically rules over her children's lives, finds fault in every single decision they make, unable to see anything positive in her children: "Uncle Peppie had no guts, Glory didn't love her enough, Freddie had abandoned her, and Mikey was on the road to destruction" (166). When Maria is about to leave for Jamaica, Glory and Molly have one serious conversation in which Glory blames her mother for "ruin so much people life. Give out bad advice and defend people failures. [...] Just like she never have any right fi tek yuh out of mi house" (201). Maria's constant interfering in her children's lives, her almost threatening dominance, the inability to confer her strength upon the next generation turns them away from her and separates them from each other

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162 A Womanist approach, on the contrary, re-evaluates the home as a meaningful space of personal freedom and motherhood, since both was denied to Black women during slavery. Womanism is one branch within Black Feminism (cf. Walker 1991).

creating a dysfunctional family (cf. Harris 1995: 118). Not free of fault, Maria, too, is "almost too strong for [her] own good" (Harris 1995: 110) even after her death. She disinherits her children and granddaughter, bequeaths her grandson Vittorio all her money and property.

Nevertheless, a consistently negative description of Maria, reading her one-sidedly as antagonist to Molly and the rest of the family, would not do justice to her character. Maria is not always the stronghold; her body is not always nurturing or protecting but also wears the wounds and scars of migration. That she is not granted her own narrative voice throughout the novel undermines her authority. Molly and Maria suffer equally from being trapped in the claustrophobic space of Glory's apartment, which symbolizes the diasporic condition as well as migrant life in Toronto in the 1970s and 80s. Maria saying "[s]ometime ah wonder why ah left and come here" (118) expresses the longing, disconnectedness, and uprootedness that is integral to the diasporic experience. Her heavy consumption of alcohol may be regarded as a therapeutic strategy of denial, to forget temporarily the hardship she continues to suffer from. Maria's attempt to rule over her family needs to be related to the migrant context and to her marginalized status as a Black woman in a majority white society. She needs to compensate for her loss of power, independence, and autonomy. She does so by drinking, taking fervently to religion, or taking over her daughter-in-law's kitchen – the only available space for her empowerment and agency.

Silvera's novel, like her non-fictional writing and short-stories, reflects on the lives and hardships of Black immigrant women. The Galloway women's lives, their outsider status in a "gendered diasporic social space" (Kim 2006: 68) is determined by limited access to resources and citizenship, limited mobility, dependence, and anonymity. Later in the novel, when back in Jamaica, Maria will tell her sisters about the plight of the domestic workers from the West Indies. Unlike the stories Aunt Joyce tells about her work experience and good life in the U.S. "dem is not de story [Maria] hear in Canada" (226), hinting at the miserable living and working condition of these women in Canadian families. Staying on temporary visas and working permissions, they are subject to the arbitrariness of state authorities, which renders their citizenship status volatile.<sup>163</sup> Molly, too, as the migrant 'other,' her body marked as 'different,' experiences this isolation, the exclusion from the community of schoolmates, "I was the odd girl out and hadn't made any real friends. [...] they never invited

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163 For a detailed discussion of the status and practices of citizenship, the simultaneity of *being* and *acting as* a citizen, see, for example, Lister (1997).

me” (90). Glory also warns Molly to beware of Canadians, “their undisciplined manners” (91) and racist prejudice Glory herself has been confronted with.

Although Maria “was never the type to stay at home” (94), life in Jamaica taking place outside in the streets, in Canada she has to give up her independence and is confined to the house to “watch [...] the world on television” (95). She settles into a tedious daily routine that does not leave much space for joy and self-fulfillment. The only refuge seems to be a nearby park, where Maria befriends Paolo, an Italian immigrant who is “just as lonely” (106). Bored, unbelonging, “so vulnerable, so helpless” (113), Maria, indeed, “suffers an identity crisis and becomes alienated from her Jamaican *self*” (Beckford 2012: 89). Her status as citizen back in Jamaica is in stark contrast to her situation in Canada where her position as matriarch is now threatened and she is ‘degraded’ to partial citizenship. She turns to drinking again to compensate for her feeling of isolation, uselessness, and loneliness. Whereas Maria could easily cover her alcoholic escapades in silence when in Jamaica, she is not able to do so at Glory’s home – “this wasn’t her house” (117). Although her children do not confront her directly, they take the liberty to decide what is best for her, thereby further patronizing and disempowering her.

The difficulties both Maria and Molly experience during the first couple of years, their failed attempt to re-create a home are representative for migrant life in the diaspora. Loss of agency goes along with oftentimes inhospitable conditions in the host country and unfulfilled promises in the foreign. That Maria refuses to be victimized and remain passive she proves herself by taking on a job providing childcare and moving in with her new partner, Melbourne (the uncle of her daughter-in-law). Both of this she does against the will of her children; what matters, however, is “that she was once again mistress of her own house” (153).

#### 4.5 Erotic Bodies

Harris furthermore identifies the denial of active sexuality as another symptom inherent in the “illness” of the strength of Black women. With Maria’s character, Silvera reproduces the stereotype of strong Black motherhood, but, at the same time, contradicts this image by depicting her as sensual and by allowing her weaknesses. In her representation of the maternal body, Silvera critically examines the archetype of the Black mother attempting to subvert the “imperi-

al culture's view of motherhood: mothers are virtuous, mothers are asexual" (Ruth/Silvera 2003: n.p.). This is achieved in the novel particularly in Silvera's portrayal both of Maria as a sexual, erotic woman with bodily desire as well as of Molly as lesbian, suggesting "an alternative form of motherhood" (Kebe 2008: 291).

The description of Maria's eroticism and her active sexuality contradicts the notion of Black women's strength that either excludes sexuality all together or includes it in an excessive, hypersexual form. It is Maria's lived sexuality – the affair with the gardener Myers, the liaison with her ex-partner Oliver, the acquaintance with the Italian immigrant in Toronto, and finally her last partner Melbourne – that defies stereotypical representations of the maternal body and a certain image of "Black women's strength" embodied in the matriarch. While by naming the character Maria, Silvera invokes the image of the virgin, the embodiment of pure maternity and immaculate conception, she then contrasts this image to another female figure: Sofia Loren. In the novel, Loren is the embodiment of sensual femininity and eroticism, described by the young, pre-pubescent Molly, who watches her in the movies, quite explicitly in erotic terms: "Her lips were tomato ripe, her body generous, her eyes hungry [...], she was beautiful" (38-39). She identifies her grandmother with the Italian actress, noticing that Maria "looked every inch like a black Sophia Loren" (58). And she "watched her dancing to a mento beat, [...] her dress hugging her Sophia Loren breasts. [She] wanted to dance like her when [she] grew up. [She] wanted her breasts and floating hips" (32). Different to the rather negative reference to the female body and breasts earlier, here a positive notion of the "breasted existence" (Grosz) is paired with sensuality and femininity defined in corporeal terms but desirable. Interestingly, as Molly observes, "Sophia Loren looked so strong, she could protect her daughter from everything" (39). Of significance here is the intersection of the erotic beauty of Loren with her motherly strength, like the lioness mentioned earlier, and Maria's blackness suggesting that Black women as mothers can indeed be both.

Molly, too, transgresses normative expectations of motherhood through her sexuality. The homoeroticism and same sex desire described in the novel counter the long literary absence of lesbian bodies in Caribbean fiction which Dionne Brand denounces:

In a world where Black women's bodies are so sexualized, avoiding the body as sexual is a strategy. So is writing it in the most conservative terms, striving in the text for conformity to the norm of monogamous heterosexual male gratification. Leaving pleasure to men, that's a strategy, too. I know that not talking

about the sexual Black female self at all is as much an anti-colonial strategy as armed struggle. (Brand 1994: 27)

Brand adds that paying too much attention to a non-sexual, maternal Black body while at the same time ignoring its eroticism has been a strategy adopted by many African Caribbean and American women writers until well into the 1980s to write back to the dominant image of the hypersexualized, exotic Black body. Audre Lorde links this neglect of the erotic to existing structures of oppression. She declares that “[i]n order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various *sources of power* within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a *suppression of the erotic*” (Lorde 2007: 53; emphasis added).<sup>164</sup> According to Lorde, the erotic is made up of human need, psychic (cognitive, spiritual) and emotional components, as well as bodily, sexual expression and satisfaction. It has been successfully oppressed within misogynist social structures, misnamed and abused as the mere sexual or pornographic: “The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women” (Lorde 2007: 58). The corruption and distortion, according to Lorde, stem from within Western societies promoted by “European-american traditions,” heteropatriarchy, and global capitalism. It is women’s true knowledge of the erotic that leads to self-fulfilment, completion, and eventually to empowerment.

Silvera privileges lesbian erotic and intimacy as source of power, using Lorde’s phrasing here, that goes beyond the mere sexual. That the lesbian body is imagined in erotic and described in positive terms is seen early on when Molly recounts her uncle’s ‘gay parties’ and the ways she notices the persons, i.e. embodied subjects, in the room along with her own attraction (“The sweating bodies gave off a wonderful heady smell. [...] I was watching Helen and Angela dance. They danced slowly, their bodies pressed against each other in the heat [...]. I stood nearby, their bodies brushed mine, and I trembled” [59]). The relationship of Molly and Rose constitutes, on the one side, a transgression of accepted sexuality and, on the other, a celebration of the Caribbean female body and lesbian sexuality. Molly meets Rose, who is also an immigrant from the Caribbean, for the first time at a doctor’s appointment with her daughter feeling instantly attracted to her. “She was from Grenada, the Isle of Spice.

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164 Lorde introduces an ontological approach to the ideal of the erotic and self-knowledge, which is essentially woman-centred, see her philosophical political essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1978).

Mountainous, lush, fertile. Grenadians say, 'Throw a seed on de ground and fruits, vegetables, flowers spring up.' Rose was all that: sensuous, lush, warm and generous" (162). Similar to the descriptions of the dancing couples at her Uncle Mikey's parties when she was still a girl back in Jamaica, Molly in referring to Rose emphasizes her bodily sensuousness and eroticism. Rose in emblemizing nature and evoking Molly's affinity to it can be read as a reversal of what is perceived as 'natural' and 'unnatural': a lesbian erotic, here seen as the 'natural,' crosses categorical understandings of heteronormativity. The evocation of nature, the equation of a natural imagery with the female body and sexuality is not merely essentializing (see also chapter 7), but rather a narrative strategy to 'naturalize' homoeroticism and the performance of lesbian sexuality. That Rose may in fact be the completion of Molly's sexual quest, even her individuation, is indicated by the names Petal and Rose. Molly realizes that "Rose was everything I had liked about Punsie and Petal" (164). Tellingly, the petal and the rose strongly symbolize Molly's affinity to nature as well as her sexual maturation and erotic consciousness.

*The Heart Does Not Bend* testifies women's empowerment and celebrates a lesbian erotic and sensuousness, implying that within the homoerotic body lies strength. The sex act between Molly and Rose is the only one explicitly mentioned in the novel and intimately described.

We soaked up glasses of rosé wine and savoured the taste of each other's tongues. I let her suck on my breasts and held my breath as her teeth grazed them. I pulled her up on me, caressed the nape of her neck and her black locks, rich with the smell of spice. I tasted her nipples, then rolled on top of her, my tongue tracing her sinuous body. I knelt between her legs to sweet pleasures. Spent, I luxuriated in her scent into the morning. (169)

The novel gives precedence to women's lived experience. It emphasizes relationality on an interpersonal level as Molly tells Ciboney, "we don't live our lives independent" (263). This sense of community, solidarity, and mutuality is the quintessence of Lorde's thinking and features in many woman-centered novels to challenge an ideology which promotes individualism and egotism. Moreover, heterosexual relations in the novel seem to limit women's happiness and self-fulfilment, are disappointing and destructive.<sup>165</sup> The novel suggests

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165 The relationship of Molly's uncle, Freddie, and his Italian wife Bella is one example to illustrate this point: "One day Bella left. She left to save her life. [...] We all knew from way back that Uncle Freddie was a woman-beater" (153). Also, Maria expresses her frustration with her partners: "love is a terrible weakness dat mi can't afford. It hurt mi every time" (79).

that the erotic and personal fulfilment are not accessible in heterosexual partnerships, because they remain, and arguably so, locked within aggressive masculinity reproducing patriarchal, oppressive structures of exploitation.

Returning to Dionne Brand's statement on the narrative absence of the erotic, sexual Black body, Silvera, in writing a sensual Black lesbian erotic explicitly into a larger literary discourse and linking motherhood to an active sexuality counters such stereotypes which imply a denial of Black women's sexuality. Amy Kebe, in her reading of the novel, furthermore argues "the black female body, which is usually the prime marker of discrimination and oppression, is [re]appropriated by Silvera" (Kebe 2008: 291-292). Silvera privileges Black women's agency and "articulates a powerful counter-discourse to homophobic and ethnocentrist notions of masculinity that consider lesbianism a threat. [...] By 'queering' the racist heteronormative hegemony of the nation, [...] Silvera deconstructs the heteronormative myth that women's bodies are only for male consumption" (ibid.).

#### 4.6 Sexual Citizenship and Respectability

At the age of fourteen in 1971, Molly and her grandmother move from Kingston to Toronto, to join Molly's mother, who migrated to Canada when Molly was still a baby. Maria pretends that the reason for them leaving Jamaica is Mikey's open homosexuality and relationship to Frank, an upper-class fashion designer. In the following, I discuss Mikey and Molly's sexualities and argue that Silvera criticizes anti-homosexual attitudes and compulsory heterosexuality in the formulation of respectable citizenship and belonging to Jamaican communities, which Thomas describes as "heteronormative conceptions of the social body" (Thomas 2011: 171).

Suzanne LaFont, in her essay on the development of sexual morality in Jamaica, discusses sexual intolerance towards "same-sex sexual acts and heterosexual sodomy" (LaFont 2001: n.p.), i.e. oral and anal sex. She ascribes the origin of a rigid heteronormative ideology and appropriate sexual practices to the colonial past and European domination. The Enlightenment period has strengthened a binary gender system and patriarchal social hierarchies, which was also transferred from Europe to the colonies via the notion of respectability, Christianity, and normative views of sexuality. Far from home, the Europeans displayed a loose sexual behavior, which was justified by a promiscuous,

uncivilized Black sexuality as promoted by colonial, racist ideologies. Specific sexualities and sexual mores, as “fluid, multifaceted, historically constructed phenomenon” (LaFont 2001: para.12), then emerged in dialectic negotiations between the colonizers and colonized. Both groups rejected some sexual practices while embracing others depending on the perceived immorality of the ‘other.’ However, within an extremely power-related hierarchy, the colonizer still had the control to use, to abuse, and exploit the enslaved body (cf. Stoler 1989). Well aware of their own powerless position, this had consequences on how the Black population perceived *white* and elite sexuality, but also on how the Black female body and its availability was subsequently constructed within Jamaican society. As a reaction to the perceived “morally deficien[cy]” and “sexual hypocrisy” (cf. LaFont 2001: para.51) of the elite, the notion of respectability gained increasing importance, including a narrowly defined heterosexuality and morality that resulted in the perception of homosexuality as a decadent western (meaning *white* and colonial) or upper-class sexual orientation and practice.

Deborah Thomas defines respectability in the Anglophone Caribbean as a “value complex.” It emphasizes “the cultivation of education, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency via land ownership, moderate Christian living, community uplift, the constitution of family through legal marriage and related gender expectations, and leadership by the educated middle classes” (Thomas 2004: 5-6). As an inherently patriarchal, heterosexual concept, respectable citizenship and the “appropriate expression of sexuality and intimacy” have been redefined by “political and cultural elites, middle-class professionals, and most religious communities” (Thomas 2011: 170).<sup>166</sup> The legal prohibition of homosexuality, the ‘buggery laws,’ is stated in the *Offences Against the Person Act* (1864) under the headings of “Unnatural Offences” and “Outrages on Decency.”<sup>167</sup> The law itself is a legacy of British colonial rule. The post-independence Jamaican government, however, chose to include these laws in the new constitution to use them as an instrument for national politics to regulate citizenship; they are an effective means of biopolitics to exert power over the civil body by criminalizing and pathologizing ‘deviant’ sexualities.

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<sup>166</sup> LaFont concludes that “creole sexual ideology approved of sexual activity as a natural part of human pleasure, but sexuality had to be expressed within the confines of respectability” (2001: para.57).

<sup>167</sup> “It is a common understanding that the issue of gayness must never enter the ‘national arena’ or at least not in any way that gives the issue any political legitimacy” (Williams 2000:108). Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller set equal treatment of homosexual persons on her political agenda of the election campaign in 2011, but so far, sadly, the annulment of the buggery laws has not been put forward.



The concept of respectability concerning sexuality finds way into the novel through Maria who contends that “man do not lie wid a man as one lies wid a ‘oman. [...] And dat go for ‘oman, ‘oman thing” (187). Arguably, as “Maria,” she already embodies Christianity and as such also respectability. However, as the previous section on the maternal body has shown, Maria refuses to be fitted neatly into this stereotype. Also, Mikey’s homosexuality ‘queers’ the respectable social body. Early on in Molly’s childhood, she senses that something is ‘wrong’ with her uncle; something she does not quite understand yet; something that troubles her grandmother; something that is silenced. There is pride in Maria’s voice when she talks about Mikey’s job but at the same time concern when she thinks about him not having a girlfriend. Once Molly overhears Mama saying

‘Ah only hope to God him find a nice girl soon. Ah can’t tell nuh lie, ah really worry sometime ... ah don’t know how him turn so. Ah love him wid all mi heart, but ah wish him was more like Peppie. Even like Freddie, [...] a little more manly, especially in de voice. [...] From him born him different. Him tek him whole physical features off Mammy, same small bone, all him have from him father and me is de blackness.’ (28)

Torn between humiliation and shame for his allegedly effeminate masculinity, on the one hand, and, on the other, fear and concern for Mikey’s well-being, Maria demands that her son stays in the closet, that his sexuality belongs to the intimate domain only: “Ah telling yuh fi yuh own good [...]. If yuh a go do it, do it under cover. A danger yuh putting yuhself in” (65). By linking appropriate behavior to heterosexuality and confining homosexuality to the private sphere, the dominant or “strong community” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 4), which sets and controls the moral codes and norms within a society, limits Mikey’s agency and right to self-determination, sexual expression, and bodily autonomy – four constituents of his status as citizen. Richardson points out that “sexuality is commonly understood to belong to the ‘private’ sphere, but more especially so in the case of lesbian and gay relationships. For lesbians and gay men the private has been institutionalized as the boundary of sexual citizenship and social tolerance” (Richardson 2000: 120). Accordingly, in the novel, the threat of violence of “man come in wid gun and machete fi kill unnu ass?” (65) when transgressing heteronormative boundaries is, as Andrea Davis states, “metaphorically and literally [...] the socially defined punishment for homosexuality that Mama does not question” (Davis 2004: 68). The queer body that does not conform is put under surveillance and public scrutiny. In fact, it does not own the right to intimacy. The threat of “man coming in” rather proves that a private

space detached from the public where queer bodies may be safe does not exist, is an imaginary – and both spheres are highly politicized arenas.<sup>168</sup>

*The Heart Does Not Bend* links the question of sexuality to the question of national politics and juxtaposes sexuality with concerns relating to religion, race, nation, and class (cf. Davis 2004). By condemning homosexuality as a foreign, white people 'way,' Maria considers global and transnational links as threat to Jamaican constructions of heterosexuality, family structures, and masculinity.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, homosexuality as "Satan work" (185) presumably contaminates Jamaican society and corrupts national politicians and wealthy business men, which Maria describes as the "battokrisy" (228).<sup>170</sup> Non-conforming, queer bodies and homosexual desire are considered as a threat to heterosexual masculinity, social and communal structures. Maria reminds Mikey that he is only "a poor uneducated bwoy" (65), that he is used and exploited by well-off men, who take advantage of him and his lower social position. "[D]em money man will run lef yuh at the smell of trouble" (65), they will sacrifice him for the sake of their own survival, not taking the risk of being discovered in their 'deviant' sexual activities. Inherent here is the critique of the denial of rights to sexual citizenship, but also that access to citizenship is inseparably linked to prescribed forms of gender, sexual, and class performances.

When Maria returns to Jamaica much later, she reunites with Mikey but very soon spoils their relationship further. "So who de bwoy yuh live wid and in a business wid? [...] Den yuh nuh 'fraid a de talk, unnu nuh 'fraid people shoot unnu? [...] A sin, yuh know. A sin. De world nuh love mampala man [...]. A only fire waiting fi yuh" (229). Blinded by her almost fundamentalist religiosity and anti-homosexuality, she is unable to realize that it is not her son who

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168 The phrase 'The personal is political' is the celebrated slogan of the second-wave feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s, especially in white European and American feminism.

169 "Baby," one of the short stories in Makeda Silvera's collection *Her Head A Village* (1994), picks up the similar idea of a perceived link between homosexuality, white culture, and migration: In Toronto, a group of Jamaican men is gossiping about two Caribbean women who, once in Canada, "get influence in dis lesbian business [...] adopt[ing] foreign ways" (71). They argue that same sex desire does not exist in the Jamaican community, especially not in the working class, but is a direct result of transnational circulations. See also Thomas (2011: 128).

170 Maria's point of view needs to be contextualized in contemporary Jamaican politics. P.J. Patterson, Prime Minister from 1992 to 2006, saw himself confronted with rumors of his homosexuality so that he felt the urge to emphasize his heterosexuality publicly. "My credentials as a life-long heterosexual person are impeccable. Anybody who tries to say otherwise is not just smearing but is engaging in vulgar abuse." *Jamaica Gleaner* <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/gay/homophobia.html>

needs to be blamed, but societal norms of gender and sexuality; she is unable to accept her son and acknowledge that Mikey has made a living for himself despite the social stigmatization of his sexuality. After all, his business career in fashion design and his financial success defy all prejudice and stereotypes of the degenerated gay man. In fact, Mikey “survive[s] without any help from de family [...] not walking and begging on de streets. Me nuh wear tear-up clothes and mi nuh walk and holler and mi nuh tief” (230). In spite of being an ‘unrespectable’ citizen, he contributes to the economic survival and progress of the nation state more than many others (cf. Davis 2004). Thus, Silvera radically undermines the link between national identity, heterosexuality, and virile masculinity, a link that needs to be re-negotiated both in Jamaica and the diaspora.

Molly’s relationship with her grandmother turns out to be problematic when Molly falls in love with Rose. Unable to confront her grandmother with her relationship, Maria finds out eventually and “all hell broke loose” (184). Molly suffers the consequences for overstepping respectable codes of social, sexual behavior, which Maria, too, has incorporated. “Ah don’t have to tell yuh dat it nuh right, a Satan work. [...] Look pon yuh, a nice attractive girl, yuh can get any man out dere, even a husband, and yuh go tek up wid woman. It nuh right. [...] First Mikey, now mi one and only granddaughter” (185). Also, she makes a point saying “[d]em is white-people ways” (187). Interesting here, again, is the connection Maria draws between homosexuality and *whiteness*, Christianity, respectability, and (sexual) citizenship in order to support and legitimize the rejection of homosexuality: “Mek friend wid yuh Bible, for a de only weapon dat can drive Satan away. Yuh know seh dat di wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Neider di sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders. [...] It nuh right, it dangerous” (185-7). Thereby, she seals Molly’s fate of social exclusion. Molly feels guilty. Overpowered by her grandmother’s strong influence on her life, Molly’s sense of responsibility, and having been socialized into heteronormative power structures, she abandons her lover. Maria punishes her by emotionally excluding her from the close family circle. “They—[Maria], Vittorio and Ciboney—were the family [...] while my life was tearing up like an old worn-out rag” (195). Being left out of Maria’s will, Molly feels her grandmother’s judgment even after her death, which complicates her attempts to reconcile and come to terms with her sexuality. Respectability as battalion of middle-class morality becomes damaging to the individual.

Molly’s story is as much about the responsibility and expectations to fulfill the role assigned to her by the family and community, as it is about the struggle for the right to free sexual expression, personal freedom, and desire. Maria’s

sexual intolerance and rejection of Molly's and Mikey's sexual orientation and choice of partner needs to be read against the influence of Christianity in Jamaican society. 'Good Christian' conduct is one of the pillars of the notion of respectability and middle-class lifestyle. The deep-seated religiosity, in which Maria finds solace and comfort when in Canada, however, translates into emotional violence when dealing with the persons who in fact need her.

Molly and Mikey are denied the liberty (and legal right) to express themselves sexually. Molly observes that the family back in Jamaica has never "accept[ed] Mikey's difference" (227), however there is no mentioning about her own "difference" since neither Molly nor Maria have ever told them anything about Rose. "The grand-aunts and cousins knew little about my personal life back in Canada" (227). Molly is not going to disclose her sexuality in front of them, but rather "take[s] the coward way out" (205). Mikey is excluded, his name never mentioned in family meetings (cf. 89), his sexuality covered up in silence; his sister, Glory, "pretend[s] that his relationship with Frank didn't exist" (111) and Maria, although she misses him badly, cannot bring herself to forgive that she had to leave her house and life in Jamaica because "fi him careless living" (115). Molly is disinherited and emotionally excluded by her grandmother as a deserved punishment for her transgression. The pressure within the community certainly affects her agency and limits the access to sexual rights.

Silvera furthermore shows how the private, intimate sphere is invaded by the political. Sexualities which do not conform to the norm need to be hidden, and if practiced then only secretly. Molly as well as her uncle Mikey transgress those sexual and gender norms that have been set by their social environment; consequently, their bodies are made vulnerable and sites of violation. Molly, because of her homosexuality and her migrant status, risks being doubly marginalized, both within Jamaican society, represented by Maria, and the community in the diaspora in Canada. Maria's "social anxiety" (Kim 2006: 64) and religious fundamentalism translates into sexism and homophobia, which prevents her from accepting her children's queer sexual identity and relationships. The dominating "gender ideals and heterosexual social scripts" (Kim 2006: 67) within the community and family in Kingston and Toronto regulate the intimate sphere and sexualities of the two Galloways. The queer body and same sex desire (gay more than lesbian) are considered a threat to heterosexual masculinity and the 'healthy,' fertile social bodies that are needed for the survival of the nation state. On the intersection of the body, sexuality, and citizenship Jacqui Alexander states:

Although policing the sexual [...] has something to do with sex, it is also more than sex. Embedded here are powerful signifiers about appropriate sexuality, about the kind of sexuality that presumably imperils the nation and about the kind of sexuality that promotes citizenship. Not just (any) body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, these bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation. (Alexander 1994: 6)

Homosexual practices challenge those norms that are meant to pathologize queer sexualities, and unsettle the institutionalization of heterosexual hegemony. In order to achieve social control over the body, to condition the body to be more compliant, and productive, individuals are socialized into a heteronormative power matrix (Butler), internalizing certain structures of a so-called 'normality.' In *The Heart Does Not Bend* it is the socio-cultural construction of respectability, the Bible, and fundamentalist Christianity embodied in Maria that serve as legitimization for the punishment of the "sodomite," of "homosexual offenders" (186).<sup>171</sup> To further reveal the constructed notion of gender performances as well as a good heterosexuality versus an evil homosexuality, the following sections draw attention to the text's construction of masculinities. The novel plays with binary constructions of a body politics that Silvera is in fact quite critical of.

#### 4.7 (Imperfect) Masculinities and Embodied Badness

Linden Lewis understands masculinity and femininity as the "ontological process of becoming aware of [and internalizing] societal roles and expectations that are inscribed on the text of the body" (Lewis 2005: 2). The typical stereotypes Silvera employs and criticizes are those that, according to Lewis, have been prevalent also in scholarly literature about Caribbean men, which he very critically examines. Often, these texts describe

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171 By way of a very brief preview: Ramabai Espinet, like Silvera, writes social taboo surrounding homosexuality and queer bodies into her novel. As the following chapter on *The Swinging Bridge*, a coming-of-age novel set in Trinidad and Canada, will demonstrate, the character Kello transgresses Indo-Trinidadian notions of patriarchal, heterosexual codes of morality and respectability, which are also at issue in *The Heart Does Not Bend* (see chapter 5)

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the Caribbean male as powerful, exceedingly promiscuous, derelict in his parental duties, often absent from the household and, if present, unwilling to undertake his share of domestic responsibilities. The Caribbean male also comes across in this literature as possessing a propensity for female battering, and a demonstrated valorization of alcohol consumption. (Lewis 2003b: 107)

The Galloway family's men Oliver, Freddie, Peppie, Mikey, and Vittorio Oliver overly embody the stereotypes of masculinity such as the irresponsible, violent, cheating, dishonest, effeminate, or coward man. Silvera, in part, reproduces stereotypical constructions and performances of gender, while criticizing patriarchal social structures that favour this kind of manhood and pressure young men into such behavior. In the novel, the negative images of masculinity are enacted especially by Freddie, who abuses his girlfriends, fathers babies, and refuses to take care of them, as well as by Vittorio, who is careless and proves to be a failure through his criminal record. In addition, Sid, who, after Glory leaves his wish for children unfulfilled, finds his masculinity validated in extramarital affairs, which eventually leads to their separation. Maria turns a blind eye to their behavior, justifies or even encourages them in their conduct.

Arguably, Silvera, too, deliberately and strategically applies such stereotypical representations of gender conventions and aggressive performances of masculinity in order to privilege Black women's subjectivity as well as to criticize dominant ideologies and the status quo of multidimensional oppression. Unfortunately, positive examples of Black masculinity are found wanting almost throughout the entire novel, apart from the character of Mikey whose manliness nevertheless is questioned by his surroundings. These rather one-dimensional representations lead to the assumption that Jamaican manhood is in crises and imply a need for self-definition.

The prevalent image of Jamaican masculinity, reproduced and re-worked in fiction and popular culture, has its origin in the garrison policies of postcolonial Jamaica and the glorification of the 'gun man' among the urban working class, where the display of strength has oftentimes guaranteed survival (cf. Hutton 2010). On the other hand, these images need to be set against the migrant context in Canada. Canada's discriminating surroundings as well as social and economic marginalization, stigmatizing Black male bodies in particular of the lower class, may lead to crime and dysfunctional relationships. On this Davis comments: "The redefinition of black masculinity as a celebration of the reputational traits of physical strength and sexual virility are clearly not enough to protect black men. It highlights their vulnerability and leaves them

susceptible” (Davis 2006: 37).<sup>172</sup> The display and performance of tough, violent manliness is imperfect, meant to compensate for the loss of economic power and racial stigmatization. The novel refers to these extra-fictional accounts of Black Jamaican masculinity in Canada and hyperbolizes these images.

The brothers Freddie, Peppie, and Mikey embody opposing forms of masculinity and sexuality: “‘Him different from him born,’ [Maria] repeated. ‘When Peppie a fly kite and knock marble, Mikey playing dolly house wid Glory. When him turn teenager, him tek to de sewing machine more than Glory’” (28). Also, Maria’s comment on Mikey’s fragile physique, his unmanly voice and indifference towards women all hint at his effeminate homosexual masculinity. Molly, too, takes note of her uncles’ diverging tastes and behavior. Here, musical elements are included to aestheticize the differences especially between Mikey and Freddie.

Freddie loved Audie Murphy, Alan Ladd and John Wayne and outdoor sports. Mikey stayed indoors and was partial to sewing and planning dinner parties. The one passion they shared was music, but even in that they had different tastes. Freddie loved rocksteady, Duke Reid and Sir Coxstone, Prince Buster and street dances. Mikey loved American R&B, Johnny Mathis, Jackie Edwards, Little Richard and Frank Sinatra ballads. (31)<sup>173</sup>

Freddie’s preference for Western movies and John Wayne is a further example of the celebration of heroes and guns, which Hutton specifies in the “rude body narrative” (cf. Hutton 2010). This underlines the link of Freddie to a performance of urban badness. On the other hand, Mikey’s preference for U.S. popular culture gives the impression that the queer body is an ‘import’ from North America, threatening the nationalist construction of ‘Jamaicaness’ (cf. Thomas 2011).

The lineage of a destructive heterosexual masculinity is continued by Freddie who has taken this up from his surrounding and his own father, Oliver who

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172 “A current perceived crisis of gun violence in Toronto’s black communities has led to an increasing criminalization and marginalization of black men and Jamaicans, in particular. Jamaican men have come to represent for many white, as well as middle-class black Canadians, a deep fear of black masculinity—the kind of masculinity that has to be kept in check and guarded lest it upset the delicate balance of this liberal democratic state” (Davis 2006: 23).

173 The music genres of ska and rocksteady have their origins in Jamaica’s urban ghettos of the 1950s and 60s and are often considered as counter-cultural, decolonial movement to elite assumptions of the Jamaican nation state. Hutton connects the popular music of the time to masculinity and ‘authentic’ expressions of urban badness (cf. Hutton 2010).

## Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend*

used to beat Maria and is “still running wid de woman and de rum” (71). Freddie names his second son after his own father: Vittorio Oliver. This is not only an expression of Freddie's wish that his son will follow in his father's footsteps. His name is thus symbolic for Maria, above all, is the one who is the most critical of men in general:

Mi had it rough, life never easy fi mi, even now ... [...] Man nuh good, yuh can't depend on dem. Dem is just a necessary evil. Ah glad Freddie left de island. Peppie will tek care of him. Teach him responsibility. Thank God Glory gaan. It would a pain mi fi see her go through pickney after pickney wid dem wutliss man, wid not a penny in a dem pocket. All dem have is promises.... (63)

Of course, Maria's perception of men needs to be ascribed to her own experience and disappointments, that she ruined her youth because she fell in love too easily with a man of the wrong, because higher, class, and another one who lied and betrayed her. Although she “had it rough wid dem wutliss man,” the fact that Maria bequeaths all her belongings and property to her grandson, a male heir, thus punishing the female family members, proves her ingrained sexism, her preference for the men in her family. Maria, too, fails in her attempt “to interrupt the pattern of destructive masculinity” (Kim 2006: 67). Vittorio is not punished, gets away with his behavior, is even rewarded by a society that is unaccommodating to deviant, non-normative bodies, while situating the heterosexual male as the most representative, prioritized social body. Beckford claims that most characters in their own ways support “the patriarchal system in its need to perpetuate itself” (217).

Maria's relief that her sons and daughter have left Jamaica suggest that the diasporic space offers the possibility for a more responsible, caring, and loving masculinity, a gender role that apparently is impossible in Jamaican postcolonial society. In Canada, however, the ways her children enact their expected gender roles, Maria's contradictory reactions and double standards, show that in the diaspora no significant changes can be expected and that Maria in part is actually responsible for their behavior; she has incorporated certain gender roles and what is socially accepted. In such a constellation, Molly struggles to fit in. These negative male role models render it impossible to comprehend why for Maria, homosexual relationships are still not an option. This is due to a socio-cultural environment that naturalizes the heterosexual body, while it polices non-reproductive sexual practices (cf. Alexander 1994). Through Maria, Jamaican and patriarchal expectations of gender and sexuality are reproduced within the family in Canada, which is reminiscent of Judith Butler's definition of gender identities as “a performative accomplishment compelled by social



sanction and taboo [...] with clearly punitive consequences [...], those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (Butler 1988: 520, 522). Thus, the efficacy of cultural norms framing individuals and their sexuality reaches beyond geographical borders. The boundaries of the micro-cosmos of the transnational family seem too strong to grant access to a possibly more open sexual politics in Canada, which, at a first glance, negatively impacts on Molly’s right to free sexual expression. The diaspora community here is seen as island within.

The reiteration and enacting of political and cultural structures enforces social scripts of respectable citizenship as well as heteromascularity. However, Silvera succeeds in creating a space for homo- and female erotic agency by a celebration of sensuous homosexual bodies and love making, and in particular, by the silence surrounding heterosexual acts and refusal to depict heterosexual masculinity in positive terms. In its depiction of irresponsible men and destructive masculinity, *The Heart Does Not Bend* criticizes patriarchal structures of power. The novel’s partially stereotypical illustration of feminine and masculine gender roles and embodiments of hetero- and homosexual identities, a strong masculinity contrasted with an effeminate manhood is a strategy to challenge essential notions of hegemonic masculinity and a critique of destructive heteromascularity.<sup>174</sup> Arguably, Silvera confronts her readers with their own expectations of and association with Black masculinity. The author may be criticized for this simplistic binary and for making use of the same strategy – ‘silencing’ – in order to criticize a discourse that she disapproves of. Indeed, the question whether “the master’s tool will dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde) remains open. However, I argue that this radical feminist stance is an attempt to center-stage certain subjectivities and counter a body politics which has marginalized woman-gendered, Black-racialized, lesbian-sexualized identities.

#### 4.8 Genre Transgression and Diasporic Journeys

Indeed, central to the novel are characters and bodies that transgress normative notions of gender and sexuality which do not fit in neatly in the majority society neither in Canada nor in Jamaica. Arguably, the process of individuation as

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174 This is a narrative strategy Silvera makes use of in several short stories, for instance in “Baby” in the collection *Her Head a Village*.

homosexual Person of Color, which Silvera makes the subject of her novel, may be understood as a queering of the genre that traditionally depicts normative socialization of a heterosexual subjectivity. The novel demonstrates the extent to which the coming-of-age genre is able to accommodate and juxtapose multiple forms of marginalization. These pertain not only to Black subjectivity and homosexuality but also to the linguistic level of the novel and its usage of 'non-standard' English, which may be conceived of as a transgression as well.

If the overall concern of the novel is sexual transgression and the non-conformity of the queer subject through her situatedness outside the heterosexual matrix, a transgression of formal, generic nature is accomplished through linguistic creolization. Silvera makes strategic use of the Jamaican language, being well aware of that "patwah was never recognised as anything but the language of the illiterate masses" (1995b: 415) in Jamaica and also stigmatized within the Canadian host society. In postcolonial Jamaica, patwa, ill-reputed as 'broken' English, continues to be perceived as a social marker of low strata. The colonial education system and dominance of the white and creole elite in particular contributed to the stigmatization of the language used predominantly by the working-class or rural population. In recent years, there has been the move towards standardization of the language through dictionaries and acceptance of patwa as an academic language, advocated most prominently by Carolyn Cooper.

Although patwa can be read as a "language of power, of self-determination, of pride, of resistance, of comfort, of inclusion, of solidarity, of struggle and of voice" (Henry 2012: 100), the stigma associated with the language persists also in the diaspora. According to Annette Henry, "the ideological biases against Caribbean Creoles are deeply entrenched in the dominant society and in our cultural memory of shame and inferiority vis-à-vis an imposed British standard" (ibid.). She furthermore states that "Black/Jamaican students are often stereotyped as deficient because of their language and sometimes erroneously placed in remedial classes or embarrassed by teachers in front of peers" (Henry 2012: 99). In Canada, where Jamaicans compose a minority group, language is a marker of difference, and may thus lead to exclusion and marginalization.

Language use in the novel creates communal belonging and constructs a space of home and diaspora identity. In this context Marta de Luna speaks about language as a "conveyer of culture" (2008: 53). At the same time, however, patwa as a marker of ethnicity distances the characters from Canadian mainstream culture.<sup>175</sup> By way of code-switching, the narrative voice of Molly

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175 Beckford (2012) analyses the use of food and food metaphors as well as the act of cooking as cultural practice to establish a sense of community and belonging.

alternates between patwa and English. She reproduces her thoughts in English, but speaks mostly patwa and only English at times depending on both the temporal and geographic setting as well as to whom Molly talks. Molly recounts in retrospect her coming-of-age after she has socialized in the Canadian context and education system; thus English is the dominating code projecting the diasporic situation. The use of patwa in her speech in Canada is less frequent than in Jamaica; she would speak patwa to Maria but not to her daughter Ciboney. Molly's in-between position is clearly expressed in the form of code-switching, which one may also interpret as a sign of confusion – after all Molly's individuation process is interrupted by migration. Her language use marks Molly not only as an outsider within Canadian society but also as a “foreigner” when she travels to Jamaica, as a male nurse comments on their way to the hospital in Kingston, “Yuh a foreigner, right? Mi like how yuh mix de Jamaican” (236).

Maria speaks consistently Jamaican. For her, it is “the language of home, her family, her feelings, her heart” (Henry 2012: 99). She is the one who has lived most of her life in Jamaica and it is quite common that the Galloways as a working-class family in Kingston's down town in the 1960s and 1970s speak patwa. She is also the one who has the most trouble adapting to the new environment, which is also due to her age and unemployment status. Ciboney and Vittorio, on the other hand, have both not taken to patwa which indicates that they are more integrated in Canadian society and do not identify with or deliberately distance themselves from their Jamaican background. This is a strategy to express identity and to represent processes of cultural exchange and transculturation in a diasporic situation.

The linguistic level of *The Heart Does Not Bend* bears resemblance to much of Jamaican and Jamaican-diasporic literatures.<sup>176</sup> The written form is “simplified” and resembles English more than patwa actually does, placing Jamaican speech on a linguistic continuum. In a transnational context, language changes and is adapted in order to make it readable for an audience unfamiliar with the Jamaican language. It combines English and patwa into a “hybrid form of [...]

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176 Claude McKay was one of the first writers to use Jamaican Creole in his novels. His novel *Banana Bottom* (1933) is a celebration not only of Jamaican identity but also of African cultural heritage. Louise “Miss Lou” Bennett, one of Jamaica's most famous poets and literary figures, is well-known for the extensive use of patwa as an artistic medium. She has contributed to the public recognition and acceptance of the language. In the poem “Bans O’Killing” (1944) she criticizes with much irony the linguistic imperialism, hierarchization, and standardization of the English language. “Meck me get it straight Mass Charlie / For me noh quite undastan, / Yuh gwine kill all English dialect / Or jus Jamaica one?”

the standard and the vernacular dialect" that "reinforces the importance of two linguistic codes in the Caribbean [...] complementing each other in an attempt to describe more truthfully the realities of the languages and cultures of Caribbean people" "Creole language is much more effective to render Caribbean cultural experiences than English because it is used as a form of resisting assimilation to the 'metropolis' and as a subtle weapon of resistance" (de Luna 2008: 48). By including patwa as the spoken language in the dialogues, Silvera not only lends an 'authentic' voice to her characters (cf. Silvera "The Characters Would not Have It"), she also destabilizes the linguistic dominance of standard English – the colonizers' language.

While the novel in terms of its representation of sexual-queer identities, use of language, as well as the evocation of the colonial and (an almost extinguished) indigenous history may transgress the genre's usual foci, the structure hints to a common narrative organization. Similar, in fact, to Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*, the novel is divided into four main parts that correspond not only to Molly and Maria's migratory movements but also, and more importantly, to the various stages of Molly's subject formation. These four stages of maturation create an inner structure of a rather chronologically narrated memory process, embedded within the narrative frame of the *Prolegomenon* and *Epilogue*, both set in present day Jamaica. We can observe a circular pattern as the narrative returns to the place of departure in Jamaica and the initiating event of the funeral. The narrator in her account may not jump back and forth in time and space, as the narrator of *The Swinging Bridge*, for instance, does. The novel, nevertheless, imagines a diasporically fragmented identity. Beckford confirms this observation: "The characters' existence is marked by experiences of dislocation, displacement, exile, and fragmentation – all characteristic of a diasporic consciousness – that produce within them a sense of alienation from self and place" (Beckford 2011: 20). The feeling of alienation and disorientation as well as the intimate link between geography and personal history is exemplified well in Molly's observation: "For the past was where we lived" (88). Silvera, in the narrative pattern, retraces the routes and roots of Caribbean migratory subjectivity, the need of the diaspora subject to know her origin. "The search for self [...] concerns a search for origin, an indication that in order to know one's self and one's destiny, one must know and understand the past" (Beckford 2011: 3).

That this past that continues to 'haunt' Molly and Maria reaches far back in time is made explicit by Molly's great-grandmother in Jamaica.

Is about 1890 mi born yuh know, so mi pon dis earth long time. Mi see whole heap, mi born not far from here, Port Antonio. Dem time whole heap of ship use

to come in from all over de world and dock dere. Is right dere dem dock mi grandmother, tek her from Madagascar, bring her pon slave ship to here. (47)

The quote is significant for several reasons. For one, it reveals a history of enforced displacement and enslavement. It chronicles the past of the family and points to the colonial heritage that is still defining for the Caribbean. It also localizes one part of contemporary Jamaican creole culture in the African island state of Madagascar. Thirdly, the middle passage and the imagery of the slave ship are strikingly evoked here. For Gilroy, the ship is a (transcultural) microcosm, “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” (1993: 4), symbolizing at once deterritorialization and a counter culture of modernity. In the ship and the Black Atlantic is expressed both the co-existence of Black history and present as well as the idea of a dynamic identity, which Silvera creatively interprets by means of the coming-of-age genre. Now, if Gilroy’s cultural concept of the Black Atlantic encompasses primarily the African continent, the United States, and Great Britain, Silvera suggests to extend it to include not only the cultural production circulating in the transatlantic triangle of Africa, Northern Europe, and the United States but also Canada and the Caribbean as further cornerstones of this diaspora consciousness. Silvera complements Gilroy’s conceptualization by adding a Jamaican-Canadian feminist and literary perspective.

Silvera’s diasporic coming-of-age novel reflects on subject formation across time and space. The novel connects the Caribbean and Canada by its investigation of the Jamaican presence and migrant life in Toronto. It also retraces the African diaspora journey and ancestral connections, which is accomplished in particular through the inclusion of African proverbs (cf. Beckford 2011). By naming one of her characters Ciboney – (Molly’s daughter who embodies the following generation of Jamaican migrants in Canada), Silvera furthermore evokes the indigenous history of the Caribbean.<sup>177</sup> The African diasporic, or Black Atlantic journey is retraced on an intra-textual level, which is achieved through the inclusion of African proverbs as chapter headings. These are: the Congolese “What is said over the dead lioness’s body could not be said to her alive”<sup>178</sup>; the Nigerian, Oyo “Earth is the queen of beds”<sup>179</sup>; the Yoruba “You

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177 The Ciboney are an indigenous people originally from South America who later lived mainly in Cuba and Haiti. See *Encyclopædia Britannica* “Ciboney” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117529/Ciboney> [accessed 6.1.2014].

178 <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/esdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=12&msg=1130853485> [accessed 23.07.2019].

179 <http://proverbsafricanliterature.wordpress.com/country-profile/west-africa/nigeria/> [accessed 23.07.2019].

cannot shave a man's head in his absence"<sup>180</sup>; the Ashanti "No one tests the depth of a river with both feet"<sup>181</sup>; the Guinean "Around a flowering tree one finds many insects"<sup>182</sup>; another Congolese "He who is free of faults will never die"<sup>183</sup>; and the Fulani/Niger-Congolese – from which the novel's title derives – "The heart is not a knee; it does not bend."<sup>184</sup> One may assume that these phrases disrupt the narrative and reading process or have a didactic purpose. The proverbs, though, have a rather ornamental function, introducing the following chapters (or 'foreshadowing' the events). Although they are translated into standard English, they function as a third structural level, whose proverbial elements bind the narrative back to African origins and thus charge the Jamaican-Canadian story proper with the qualities of a transnational, trans-historical tale of Atlantic connectivity.

At the very end of the novel, after Molly's funeral, Molly and her daughter Ciboney are not yet "ready to face home – the snow, the cold, the emptiness" (256). They visit the old home on Wigton Road in Kingston's Downtown. Ignoring Aunt Joyce's warning about the "duttiness" (257), Molly soon realizes how much the Jamaica she remembers has changed. "The sidewalks are littered with garbage, broken bottles and dog shit. Skinny stray dogs circle each other, vying for chicken bones. Barefoot children in tattered clothes run about the streets" (257). Walking through the dead-end street where she used to live, Molly becomes aware of the damaged pavement, weathered houses and shacks, the once beautiful house shabby and run down and lush garden now covered with concrete. The motives of a degenerated society and politics, poverty and unrest, as well as the unfulfilled promise of independence are striking. Returning to Jamaica does not seem to be an option. The nostalgic look back is clouded by the 'real' condition of what once used to be her home. The novel crosses strict categorical thinking of diaspora in which the home space is overly celebrated. It becomes clear that Molly needs to decide actively for and settle in her life as a 'New Canadian' citizen. One may ask whether fictional characters like Molly contribute, if only to a small degree, to the "multiculturalizing" of Canadian culture?

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180 <http://lifelinesproverbsliving.blogspot.de/p/ashanti-yoruba-swahili-and-zulu.html> [accessed 23.07.2019].

181 [http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/a/ashanti\\_proverb/](http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/a/ashanti_proverb/) [accessed 23.07.2019].

182 <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/proverbs/guinean-around-a-flowering-tree-one-finds-many-insects/> [accessed 23.07.2019].

183 <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/esdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=12&msg=1130853485> [accessed 23.07.2019].

184 <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/proverbs/fulani-peul-the-heart-is-not-a-knee-it-does/> [accessed 23.07.2019].

## 4.9 Concluding Remarks

Patricia Hill Collins interlinks homophobia and racism maintaining that the homophobia Black gay or trans-persons experience cannot be separated from the oppression based on race, class, and gender (cf. Collins 1990). Similarly, Silvera is daring her readers to be conscious of this intersection of multiaxial differences which simultaneously affect each individual's life, however in different ways meaning oppression for some and privileges for others. With her fictional and non-fictional work, Silvera carves out a space in which queer persons of color are made visible to create emancipatory potential. Her own experiences of migration, racism, sexism, and homophobia, the struggles with Jamaican constructions of respectability, but also her family's strict Christian moral values are integral parts of her writing. She seeks to provide answers to the questions of "[w]hat happens when specific gender roles as well as sexual orientation do not find a space of acceptance within the dominant patriarchal society?" (Beckford 2011: 5); of what happens when specific racial and sexual inscriptions do not fit into the dominant mainstream culture as is the case with Black diaspora or Jamaican subjectivity in Canada? She suggests a reorientation on love, feeling, and solidarity within Canadian feminism and demands, as she puts it, "a rhythm that is uniquely ours – proud, powerful, and gay. Being invisible no longer. Naming ourselves, and taking our space within the larger history of Afro-Caribbean peoples. A dream to be realized, a dream to act upon" (Silvera 1992: 532). Silvera has thus actively shaped Black Caribbean Canadian feminist thought.

Literary scholar Andrea Davis rightly claims that Silvera's writing "challenge[s] dominant discourses of exclusion especially as those discourses influence debates about identity and engage questions of (un)belonging" (Davis 2004: 66). The novel raises issues of citizenship and socialization along the lines of sexuality and a perceived deviance in the postcolonial state of Jamaica as well as in the multicultural society of Canada, itself a colony of the former British Empire, and elucidates how migration shifts the meaning of national belonging. The focalization and narrative perspective privilege Caribbean women's voices, erotic agency, and Black female embodiment, while constructing and marginalizing a destructive masculinity. A reading of the novel with Audre Lorde's approach to the erotic, feeling, and sharing, places Silvera's work in a larger Black feminist tradition that is now increasingly visible in Canada.

## Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend*

Silvera introduces characters who challenge different norms, associated, amongst others, with citizenship and the discourse of respectability, which promote a fertile, reproductive body and pathologize a queer sexuality. Moreover, Silvera's feminist writing is an attempt to deconstruct the colonial continuity of relations of domination and social stratification based on race, gender, sexuality, class, and migrant status. The body politics invoked here is intertwined with modernity and coloniality, to adopt the decolonial paradigms of Lugones and Mignolo, suggesting that it is crucial to delink institutionalized forms of citizenship and national cultural identity from exploitive heterosexist, gendered, racialized, and capitalist hegemonies. This implies a radical reconfiguration of social, economic, and political conditions to engender a way of thinking across and beyond fixed categories and to initiate social progress based on equality.