KAIAMA L. GLOVER

A REGARDED SELF

Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being

A Regarded Self

BUY

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Kaiama L. Glover

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For Salome and Ayizan,
my glorious girls.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix
Terms of Engagement xi
Introduction 1
1 SELF-LOVE | Tituba 39
2 SELF-POSSESSION | Hadriana 68
3 SELF-DEFENSE | Lotus 111
4 SELF-PRESERVATION | Xuela 146
5 SELF-REGARD | Lilith 188
Epilogue 219
Notes 225
Works Cited 249
Index 267

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TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

DISORDERLY, adj. Not acting in an orderly way; not complying with the restraints of order and law; tumultuous; unruly; offensive to good morals and public decency.

SELF-DEFENSE, n. The act of defending one's own person, property, or reputation.

SELF-LOVE, n. An appreciation of one's own worth or virtue; proper regard for and attention to one's own happiness or well-being.

SELF-POSSESSION, n. Control of one's emotions or reactions especially when under stress; presence of mind; composure.

SELF-PRESERVATION, n. Preservation of one's self from destruction or harm; a natural or instinctive tendency to act so as to preserve one's own existence.

SELF-REGARD, n. Regard for, or consideration of, one's own self or interests.

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Definitions derived from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, and other sources.

INTRODUCTION

The "I" is unseemly.

—Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* (2000)

There is power in looking.

—bell hooks, *Black Looks* (2015)

This is a book about practices of freedom. Its focus is women, for reasons that I hope will become apparent, but many of its arguments are not, in the end, rigidly gender-specific. This is also a book about community—about assemblages of individual beings bound more or less comfortably together by a shared set of attitudes and interests, aims and imaginaries. By narratives.

More precisely, this is a book about the challenges posed by certain practices of freedom to the ideal of Caribbean community. *A Regarded Self* proposes an inquiry, within the geocultural space of the French- and English-speaking Caribbean, into the ethics of self-regard. It offers a sustained reflection on refusal, shamelessness, and the possibility of human engagement with the world in ways unmediated and unrestricted by group affiliation. It asks how, given a regional context that privileges communal connectedness as an ethical ideal, individual women can enact practices of freedom in its wildest sense. What alternative modes of being do their noncommunal or even anticommunal choices suggest? How do such freedom practices disrupt North Atlantic theorizations of the individual in/and community? How capable are we, Global South scholars and beings-in-community ourselves, of maintaining commitments to read generously in the face of antisociality or moral ambiguity? What ordering codes do we inadvertently perpetuate through our own ways of reading? These questions animate my reflections in these pages.

Reading "professionally"—critically—very often encourages our investment in the act of analysis as political undertaking. As scholars, especially those among us who are raced and gendered both within the academy and in society more broadly, we are inclined to read for our own politics. We tend

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to dismiss, decry, or question the value of creative works that do not plainly generate or gesture toward programs or possibilities for political change. In the worst instance, we become ensnared, as Anne Anlin Cheng has written, by "identity politics and its irresolvable paradox: the fact that it offers a vital means of individual and communal affirmation as well as represents a persistent mode of limitation and re-inscription" (2009, 90). Our critical selves risk falling into the trap of empathetic identification, a phenomenon Adriana Cavarero describes as the articulation of the self through "the use of a history of suffering and tribulation told by another—most of all by someone who belongs to the ranks of the oppressed" (2000, 91). This is an understandable desire, but it is a consumptive form of engagement, a selfish form of relation. It tends to want moral or political clarity at the potential, if not likely, expense of the other's unique experiences.

For while it is true that we have arrived at a moment in postcolonial and Global South studies wherein assumptions about national sovereignty as the ideal political formation or about the continuing symbolic power of communal narratives of suffering and redemption have been widely disavowed, we remain very much bound to the political. If we have become wary, that is, of placing too much faith in collective forms of governance, we nonetheless persist in evaluating individual actions through the prism of communal politics. In this, we inevitably invest in "whole sets of assumptions that our academy and society continue to make about marginalized subjects and the politics that surround them and the social preconditions that constitute them" (Cheng 2009, 91). In our desire to confront and contest the spiritual, intellectual, and material deprivations that are the direct result of long-standing global injustice, and to identify allies in those efforts, we risk deeming only a very narrow set of acts recognizable as legitimate forms of agency.

This book means to hold up a mirror to a broader critical community of readers that, with all the best intentions, implicitly demands allegiance to its moral principles and politicized practices. Though my inquiry is sited in the Caribbean, the questions I pose here resonate in other contexts as well. Indeed, writers in geocultural spaces beyond the Caribbean and its diasporas have also asked to what extent our own uninterrogated expectations can amount to a differently repressive dimension of contemporary critical theory, especially where these expectations interpolate raced and otherwise vulnerable women. As Toni Morrison has queried urgently: "What choices are available to black women outside their own society's approval? What are the risks of individualism in a determinedly individualistic, yet racially uniform and socially static community?" (2004, xiii).

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Morrison's questions are useful to pose as much with respect to the kinds of disorderly female characters I consider throughout this book as with respect to their various creators. The authors of the works in my corpus are themselves disordering. They present characters who remain morally ambivalent, politically nonaligned, and adamantly unrecoverable and so call attention to the inadequacy of any model that suggests a binary moral context. They remind us how often and how easily victim and perpetrator come to inhabit the very same being. Their narratives resist easy co-optation into any preexisting system. As such, they caution us not to get too comfortable in our righteousness. Perhaps most important, they encourage us to imagine refusal itself as a legitimate critique and to not burden the refuser with an obligation to fix things or to refashion the world for all of us.

I have wanted to honor refusal in my own readings here. Recognizing that it is our inclination to consume certain characters and the narratives that contain them in order to satisfy a latent desire for empathetic identification, the challenge both in reading these works and in writing this book has been to "remain in the gift of discomfort" (Cheng 2009, 90) these novels offer. I have sought not to systematize but to suggest useful commonalities among the works I engage here—this body of literature that has been so thoroughly read for its political intent, or lack thereof.

Admittedly, it may very well be that "without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression" (Lorde [1984] 2007, 112). And it is certainly true that communal affiliation of the right sort can provide an individual (woman) with both protection and deliverance. In the extended postplantation context of anticolonial nation-building and antiracist activism in the Americas, communities of contestation and resistance have transformed the hemisphere and defined freedom in unequivocal terms. But it is equally true that a certain communal imperative has emerged out of this context, an imperative that has posited normative social and political principles to which proper citizens are expected to conform. Adhering to these principles has meant a broad dismissal of individualism as an ethical subject position, wherein by *ethics* I mean the collectively determined frame within which moral legitimacy and consequent deservingness of social approbation are situated. Given the weight of this imperative, the significance of "simply" investing in the self must not be underestimated.

Writers in the postcolonial Americas, and in the Caribbean in particular, have long figured community as an objective to be achieved—to be actively crafted both in language and in law. Be it via masculinist discourses of nationalism,

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womanist conceptions of intergenerational cultural connections, or transnationalist and diaspora-based discursive frames, the Caribbean has been cast, from both within and without, as irrepressibly buoyed by a deep-seated ontological potential for the communal. The Caribbean literary tradition has been dominated to a large extent by those writers who affirm the existence of an organic, counterdiscursive collective ethos among the people they strive to represent in their work. Committed to articulating parameters for defensive solidarity and creative validity, male writer-intellectuals of the region have long pledged to give voice to silenced communal stories they insist need telling. Works by women novelists similarly insist on communal affiliation as the foundation for individual empowerment.

Such privileging of collective self-definition is a phenomenon that bears out in the critical context as well. As I have argued elsewhere, scholars of Caribbean literature tend to celebrate those writers whose texts focus most vocally on representing the valor of the unheard and disenfranchised insular community (see Glover 2010). The postcolonial Caribbean collective these authors and many of their theorists describe is placed in opposition to the exploitative capitalism and bleak inhumanity of Europe and North America—a strategic refusal of "the unmitigated market-centered, selfish individualism, and rampant materialism of contemporary globalization" (Meeks 2002, 166). The Caribbean presents a space of resilience, resistance, and fruitful heterogeneity—creolized but ultimately coherent, poor in resources but rich in "folk." Irrepressibly buoyed by a deep-seated ontological commitment to the communal, the Afro-Creole Americas declare themselves a Global South cultural corrective to a soullessly technologized, alienated First World order.

Taking as a point of departure this investment in communalist ideology in the Caribbean, *A Regarded Self* looks closely at the linked matters of freedom, community, and ethics—freedom as an ethical practice within and often in conflict with community. While the idea of community as an essentialist, romanticized, and forcibly affiliating social structure has been contested within multiple and diverse academic and political spheres, few have attended to the particular place of Caribbean letters in these debates.[1] Moving in that underexplored space, I consider the motivations and the methods, the stakes and the consequences, that inform representations of women's contestatory grapplings with community, taking as my point of departure five works of prose fiction: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (*Moi, Tituba . . . sorcière noire*, 1986), René Depestre's *Hadriana in All My Dreams* (*Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, 1988), Marie Chauvet's *Daughter of Haiti* (*Fille d'Haïti*, 1954), Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), and Marlon James's *The Book of Night*

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Women (2009). The woman at the center of each of these narratives exists in a state of conflict vis-à-vis her textual community that more and less explicitly queries the extratextual ordering practices of the postcolonial Caribbean literary community. Her privileging of the self emphatically resists co-optation, both by repressive narrative communities and by ostensibly liberal and liberating critical discourses.

It is the "radical indeterminacy" (Cheng 2009, 91) of their protagonists that positions these works outside of certain canons and has earned them greater and lesser degrees of disapproval, if not disparagement, from postcolonial scholarly and broader reading communities. In their representations of adamantly self-articulating, sexually self-defining female characters, these writers present self-love—physical and emotional—as both provocation and critique. Their respective creative positions in many ways unsettle the ideological imperatives outlined by the region's most prominent writers. As a consequence, most have seen their political loyalties and ties to a national or regional Caribbean identity called into question by their contemporaries, or their works insufficiently or reductively attended to by literary scholars. *A Regarded Self* thus takes into account both the extratextual and the textual. I look here not only at the ways in which these characters disorder their narrative communities but also at the ways in which their creators disturb and have been misapprehended by communities of theorists and readers, more broadly. I am interested in the critical context within which the writers of these disorderly texts have been implicated, and I ask what the cost of advocating self-regard can be within postcolonial Caribbean literary communities. In this respect, *A Regarded Self* proposes an interrogation of our reading practices—a consideration of the ways in which we as theorists engage in processes of gatekeeping, naturalizing, and otherwise ordering the subjects of our inquiries.

Emerging from a variety of national spaces and historical moments, the novels I consider are united in their crafting of stories that uncover and break apart inflexible constructions of regional collective identity. In representing women characters animated by preservationist self-regard, these works critique the phenomena of totality, unity, and closure that so often endanger those who, by virtue of their race, gender, sexuality, class, citizenship status, or otherwise personal identification, constitute the world's most marginal. Although not one of these works suggests a viable alternative politics (and this very deliberately, I argue), by revealing the insidious pathologies of the social, they create space for the articulation of an ethic.

The self-regarding women at the center of these novels are frustratingly equivocal beings. Every one of them is controversial. Some are downright

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unpalatable. Always removed from the explicitly political, and often manipulative or even dangerous, they elicit profound ambivalence from the reader. It is admittedly difficult, for example, not to be frustrated by Condé's Tituba, the free Black woman in the colonial Americas who resigns herself to servitude not once, but twice, in the name of love and lust. It requires an initially counterintuitive reading of Depestre's white Creole beauty Hadriana to understand fully her abandonment of an adoring Black community in the interest of her own (sexual) liberation. It calls for an unflattering reassessment of Black radicalism not to dismiss out of hand Chauvet's Lotus, a frivolous Haitian girl who plays at revolution like a game of seduction. It takes some work to see past the simmering rage that fuels Kincaid's Afro-Carib antiheroine Xuela, faced with her stubborn refusal to get on board with the Caliban-as-hero machine so fundamental to anticolonial subjectivity. And it is, yes, an especially great deal to ask the reader to accept the very fact of James's Lilith, an enslaved woman-child who, quite frankly, is not a very nice person. Tituba. Hadriana. Lotus. Xuela. Lilith. These provocative names announce the disruptive power of the women who bear them—women who defy rather than defer to communities that will not have them or will not love them as they are. Each of these women is an audaciously disordering force within, and on the margins of, her social world. Her defiance of gendered expectations subtends what is ultimately a wide-ranging discourse of dissent.

Whereas the self can be devoured by public scrutiny, it can be saved by private self-objectification.

—Iké Udé, "The Regarded Self" (1995)

The criminal and the narcissistic woman are subject to, yet outside the law; both are attempting to evade its effects, if only momentarily.

—Jo Anna Isaak, "In Praise of Primary Narcissism" (2005)

The practices of freedom and disorder—the practices of refusal[2]—enacted by the women in the works of my corpus demonstrate an unwavering devotion to what I have come to call the "regarded self," a formulation I borrow from a context entirely ex-centric to that of the writers and characters who concern me. Coined by Nigerian visual artist and photographer Iké Udé, the *regarded self* describes the ambivalent nature of social being, wherein it is at once crucial to love oneself, deeply and protectively, and to publicly perform modesty, selflessness, and love for one's community. For Udé, as

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for me in my analyses of these Caribbean texts, the regarded self proposes a strategy for navigating the individual's vulnerability to the gaze of more powerful others.

Being gazed upon is a matter of being beheld, which literally—etymologically—implicates both regard and possession.[3] Thus, the anxiety produced, as psychoanalytic theory would have it, by the fact of being seen and known as an object-being that exists for others—of being grasped or seized and "understood"—is arguably compounded in the postcolonial context. Postcolonial studies is deeply preoccupied with the question of the gaze and the hierarchies of power it determines. The field has been influenced definitively, for example, by Édouard Glissant's notion of opacity as a strategy of Global South resistance to the degrading transparency imposed by the North Atlantic imperial gaze. Frantz Fanon's memorable account of devastating interpolation—"*Look*! A Negro!" ([1952] 2008, 89; emphasis mine)—similarly demands we consider who, historically, has regarded whom and with what consequences. Jean-Paul Sartre's passionate opening salvo in his essay "Black Orpheus" offers yet another expression of this concern: "Here are black men standing, *looking* at us, and I hope that you—like me—will feel the shock of being seen" ([1948] 1964–65, 13; emphasis mine). As these canonized instances attest, the stakes of the (formerly) colonized individual's exposure to the regard of the metropolitan Other (and, later, vice versa) animate regional intellectual production. It is against this backdrop that I situate the women of these novels at varying points on a continuum of *self*-regard—that I highlight their indulgence of behaviors ranging from self-concern to selfishness, from self-care to something brazenly akin to narcissism.

Admittedly, *narcissism* is a big word. First conceived of by Sigmund Freud as a normal psychological condition constitutive of the fundamental human drive to defend the integrity of the self, narcissism so defined amounts to a "libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation" (Freud [1914] 1957, 73–74). If the individual's childhood environment is emotionally stable, so Freud's logic goes, a balance is maintained in adulthood between love/desire for the self (ego-libido) and love/desire for others (object-libido). If, however, this balance is somehow upset (via improper parenting or trauma, for example), that healthy "primary" narcissism can become pathological, causing the individual to withdraw any love for or attachment to other objects in the world and to direct libidinal energy exclusively toward the self. Since Freud, narcissism has been in fact most readily associated with pathology: the gaudy frivolity of the reality television star, the humble-bragginess of social media, the vanity of the millennial. Narcissism triggers our innate suspiciousness

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regarding the individual and, especially, the autobiographical subject. It is perceived viscerally and adamantly as incompatible with ethics—and it is "a characteristic commonly and pejoratively attributed to women" (Isaak 2005, 50).

Over a decade before historian and social critic Christopher Lasch (1979) denounced narcissism as the scourge of post–World War II modernity, however, psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut called for consideration of a narcissistic continuum and of the pop-cultural propensity to obscure its complexity. As Kohut observed in his 1966 essay "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," "although in theoretical discussions it will usually not be disputed that narcissism, the libidinal investment of the self, is per se neither pathological nor obnoxious, there exists an understandable tendency to look at it with a negatively toned evaluation as soon as the field of theory is left" (1966, 243).[4] In other words, while narcissism is, according to early psychoanalytic theoretical principles, a natural and neutral human behavior, it is anxiety producing in the practical context of human relation. This anxiety is particularly acute when it comes to the postcolonial Caribbean, wherein the very possibility or desirability of a lone, integrated self is itself a question, and narcissism is perceived as a distinctly North Atlantic pathology, the inevitable product of a coldly individualist culture.

Given that *narcissistic* is an epithet that has been used to describe (condemn) not only several of the fictional characters I consider but also their creators, my reflections throughout this book are overlaid or undergirded to varying degrees by this analytical conceit. Recognizing that narcissism is overburdened by pathological connotations, I pointedly lean into its pejorative and unsettling dimensions in my analyses here. Accusations of narcissism attach to several of the novels I discuss, making apparent the threat they issue to the communities they represent as well as to certain communities of readers. I mean to underline the discomfort and even outrage these characters and their texts produce—to home in on their disordering effect, in both the medical and the metaphorical sense. The popular understanding of narcissism as a "relational malady" (Schipke 2017, 5) accords with what the American Psychiatric Association names a "personality disorder"—"an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture" (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 645). I want to insist on the fact that the term *disorder* is meant to signal a fundamental maladaptivity of the self with respect to externally constructed models of acceptable or reasonable social (communal) behavior. In the works in question here, the maladaptivity of their protagonists produces a disordering effect that crosses the boundaries of the text.

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Digging further into the literal-cum-metaphorical purpose of the concept, it is crucial to note that pathological narcissism—like every other personality disorder—arises foremost as a coping mechanism. It is an individual's means of contending with her or his perceived vulnerability to the psychosocial assaults of the outside world and, as such, can be a far more nuanced term than popular understandings would have us believe. It is important, then, to examine Kohut's rearticulation of narcissism as a necessary adaptive strategy, a survivalist impulse to provide resources for the self in moments or spaces wherein that self is denied sustenance—or denied altogether.

This nonpathologizing conception and deployment of narcissism in a Western, European context as a defensive response to one's community and its order is taken up explicitly, albeit ambivalently, by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. On the one hand, Fanon condemns narcissism as an essentialist obstacle to his ideal of race-blind human solidarity.[5] Yet, on the other, he hints at the possibility of a dynamically narcissistic practice of individual disalienation whereby it becomes possible to refuse the psychic violation of hostile external forces—"I grasp my narcissism with both hands and I turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism" ([1952] 2008, 23). I am interested in this latter instance, the instance attended to by Sylvia Wynter, who reads Fanon's deployment of narcissism as a veritable "counter-manifesto with respect to human identity" (2001, 37)—the means by which to negotiate, if not resist, being "locked in thinghood" (Fanon [1952] 2008, 193), which is the result of one's being determined from without the self, being posited as lack, either sexual (in the Freudian context) or racial (in the postcolonial context). For Fanon, the concerted denial of the individual colonial subject's interiority reflected the primary malignancy of colonialism and racialization. The reduction of the colonized body's use value to the desires of racial capitalism was a violation that could be countered only by a retrieval of self-awareness in its most robust form. Decoloniality and the psychic survival of the colonial subject depended on this operation. Inasmuch as Fanon, a practicing psychoanalyst, understood the phenomenon of the nonwhite-raced individual's inferiority complex and alienation as socially conditioned—as something imposed on that individual's subconscious—narcissism as a praxis of extreme *self*-consciousness offered something of an escape valve.

Admitting the existence of a continuum from healthy to pathological narcissism makes it possible to understand narcissism as something other than the product of a "culture of competitive individualism" (Schipke 2017, 5). It allows us to tease out what Monica Miller elegantly names, in her analysis of Udé's and others' work, "a narcissism more compensatory" (2009, 245).[6]

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Narcissism thus understood would signal the performance of self-love in a context wherein that self is improperly loved or unlovable on its own terms. Narcissism thus understood dovetails with Udé's call for defensive self-regard.

Self-regard exists in a wide and slippery ethical space. While it is defined as "regard for or consideration of oneself or one's own interest," it is also synonymous with "egocentricity, egocentrism, egomania, egotism, narcissism, navel-gazing, self-absorption, self-centeredness, self-concern, self-interest, self-involvement, selfishness, selfness, [and] self-preoccupation" and "related to" "complacence, complacency, conceit, conceitedness, ego, pomposity, pompousness, pride, pridefulness, self-admiration, self-conceit, self-esteem, self-importance, self-indulgence, self-love, self-partiality, self-respect, self-satisfaction, self-sufficiency, smugness, vaingloriousness, vainglory, vainness, vanity, self-assumption, self-consequence, self-content, self-contentment, [and] self-glorification."[7] This connotative concatenation reflects the ambivalence with which we tend to approach expressions of self-regard in general. And the stakes are particularly high in contexts wherein self-sacrifice and solidarity are the privileged modes of social identification and interaction. The stakes are arguably even higher when it comes to nonwhite women, perhaps because Black and brown women are presumed neither to have nor to aspire to such a relationship with the self.

Community presupposes the visibility, and concomitant policing, of its members. And some members are decidedly more policed than others. Women's bodies—be they placed in a colonial, nationalist, postcolonial, or even feminist context—are particularly vulnerable to the regulating impulse of the communal. To be in community is, above all, to be exposed, "to be posed in exteriority, having to do with an outside in the very intimacy of an inside" (Nancy 1991, xxvi). To be in community is to be vulnerable to the regard of others. It is to be always considered. Beheld. Rendered, ultimately, transparent to the gaze of others. Given this, self-regard constitutes an effort at individual liberation from, or at the very least resistance to, being beheld and judged from without. And to the extent to which this external regard can be intrusive, coercive, or otherwise violent, efforts to render oneself illegible or to see oneself otherwise certainly may be read as attempts at self-protection.

Every one of the narratives I examine in this study encourages a careful consideration of the extent to which a woman's self-regard might be recognized as an achievement—a justifiable response to the prejudices and other perils of the existing communal order. The female protagonists in all of these fictional works at some point become aware of the literal and symbolic threats posed by the often dangerously fragile community in which they are embedded. They

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attest to the fact that many supposedly safe spaces contain the possibility for great harm, depending on who inhabits them. They reveal the insecurity of home—the extent to which the domestic is under siege by or complicit in the maneuverings of politics. All of these women engage in some degree of narcissistic pushback with respect to persistent, structural social trauma—self-regard is the tactic they adopt in the face of impossible satisfaction from their community. What, they compel us to ask, should we make of an individual's "misbehavior" in social contexts that are themselves pathological? Do conditions of enslavement and its traumatizing aftermaths expressly call or allow for radical narcissism? Under conditions of constraint, might deviance better be understood as defense? Might self-regard be a legitimate recourse—the best and only recourse—for a self ever vulnerable to the violent, consuming force of the ordering social gaze?

I am certainly not the first to consider the challenges to individuated being in community in the Caribbean—what Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken pithily articulates as the question of "how personhood has been constructed under the weight of the notion and practice of 'nationhood'" (Benedicty[-Kokken] 2013, 7). Nor am I the first to do so in foregrounding matters of gender—to ask "how national belonging and the nation-state continue to play a fundamental role in circumscribing Caribbean people's lives" (Horn 2014, 3). Notions of (in)decency and (dis)order have long been understood as having everything to do with women's social—and especially sexual—(non)conformity to behavioral conventions governing the public sphere. Further, as Donette Francis reminds us, "conditions of belonging presuppose a raced, gendered, classed, and sexed body, and . . . for women and girls the struggles have often been against kin as much as colonizer" (2010, 2). It is no coincidence that the novels I consider feature disorderly women characters in contexts of nation-building, wherein the stakes of communal identity formation are particularly high and wherein incautious women too easily find themselves cast as necessary Others to a developing idea of Same.

The claims of both literary theorists and social scientists of the postcolonial Americas—put forward in works like Belinda Edmondson's *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative* (1999), Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (2010) and *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (2018), Donette-Francis's *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature* (2010), Mimi Sheller's *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (2012), M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005), and Deborah

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Thomas's *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica* (2011)—advance compelling critiques of the heteronormative and misogynist continuities between colonialism, nationalism, and postcolonialism. Moreover, as these studies make apparent, the diverse societies of the Caribbean have long adhered to an entrenched Protestant ethic of respectability—with women in particular expected to conform to codes of "decency" as part of their commitment to shore up liberatory anticolonial projects as well as postcolonial nation-building efforts—to adhere to and "perform normative scripts of sexual citizenship such as the good mother, the respectable woman, the worthy Christian, or the father of the family . . . which involved the harnessing and simultaneous disavowal of the erotic potential of the body" (Sheller 2012, 10). These masculinist ordering codes are well known and have been well studied. Also well known and well studied are the gendered expectations of and constraints on Caribbean womanhood intrinsic to colonialism, along with those resulting from the blind spots of white feminist politics.[8]

On the one hand, there is little surprising about the phenomenon wherein women in colonial and postcolonial spaces, literary as much as extraliterary, are called upon to do battle with misogynistic and patriarchal white supremacy, with misogynistic and patriarchal Black nationalisms, and with hegemonic North Atlantic feminisms. These are the "enemies" we know ("we" being postcolonial, Caribbeanist, womanist scholars). Of interest to me, however, are coercions slightly different from those to which we already have become attuned. I am interested in texts and authors that not only defy the usual suspects but also deeply unsettle *un*usual suspects—ostensibly progressive, antiestablishment communities of readers and critics—thus revealing the strictures to which that same "we" is perhaps insufficiently attentive.[9] Crucial here is my effort to enact the praxis David Scott outlines in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, notably, "to imagine an ethos, or perhaps even a *habitus*, of critical responsiveness to the tendency of . . . identities to harden into patterns of exclusion that seek to repel or abnormalize emergent or subaltern difference" (1999, 217).

Throughout this book I propose possibilities for thinking more broadly about human efforts that are not overtly state-centric but make affective calls for transformation. In this respect, my project dovetails meaningfully with our current suspicion regarding existing modes of revolutionary upheaval and calls for greater attentiveness to risky individual expressions of defiance. Whereas, for the most part, the theorists with whom I engage seek in their work to identify or construct coherent counterdiscursive (literary) strategies via which sexed Caribbean subjects claim the status of citizen, *A Regarded Self*

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attends to literary configurations of individual refusal that not only transgress existing models of postcolonial Caribbean community but also caution against the codification of potentially constraining counterdiscourses. Insofar as a distinction is maintained between the notion of communal identity and that of bourgeois individualism, I am interested in the space between the presumed virtue of the one and the unseemliness of the other. What *do* we get when we don't get what we expect—ideologically or politically—from these women, these authors, these texts?

Order

One of the basic impulses in Caribbean thought is undeniably the need to reconceptualize power. The fascination with worlds of closure; the need to ground a new society on a visionary discourse; the exploration of a foundational poetics . . . [are] manifestations of the desire to establish a new authority, to repossess time and space . . . pursuit of an ordering and ordaining vision.

—J. Michael Dash, *The Other America* (1998)

Our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people," with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This "oneness," underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of "Caribbeanness," of the black experience.

—Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1994)

The border between the political and the literary in the Caribbean has always been permeable. Over centuries of official colonial exploitation and in the interminable wake of North Atlantic empire, peoples of the Caribbean have struggled to delineate and to assert a geoculturally specific, resistant identity. Community has been a particularly significant concern for Caribbean writer-intellectuals in their efforts to determine empowering sociopolitical identities in the face of centuries-old practices of dispossession, historical erasure, and disenfranchisement—both by racist Euro–North American imperial structures and by rapacious neocolonial regimes. Confronted with the relentless twinned forces of psychosocial alienation and military repression, Caribbean social actors have understood that purposeful national and regional unification is critical to cultural and political survival. In the anticolonial context of the first half of the twentieth century,

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especially, community clearly amounted to a political imperative—"a militant and strategic response to a situation of oppression which [could] only be overturned by organized collective action . . . predicated on a strong sense of unity and solidarity" (Britton 2011, 5). To define community in opposition to clear and common enemies was a political necessity. And it was politically advantageous given the vulnerability of European empires in the wake of World War II.

The construction of Caribbean community as refusal had—and has—at once tactical, ethical, and creative dimensions. It has served as a political rallying cry, undergirding long-standing masculinist discourses of nation-building and Black radicalism as well as more recent narratives "of globality, transnationalism, diaspora and various other forms of international community" (Forbes 2008, 17) so critical to the sociopolitical survival of peoples of color. Integral to these interventions in the realm of policy and governance has been an investment in the communal on the part of the Caribbean cultural elite. The centrality of strategically constructed community in the domain of politics has manifested with equal clarity in Caribbean letters. As Celia Britton (2010) and Lucy Evans (2014) have outlined in their studies of literary representations of community in the putatively former colonies of the French and British Americas, respectively, Caribbean fiction is marked by a commitment to highlighting and promoting the collective specificity of the region.

Both Britton and Evans consider the diverse challenges prose fiction writers face in seeking to give voice to the people whose stories, they argue, have been globally silenced. They consider the "*models* of community" (Britton 2010, 4) these writers propose not merely as representations of communal solidarity but also as so many "self-conscious engage[ments] in the act of community-building" (Evans 2014, 16). Britton argues that the writers of her corpus—among whom are Jacques Roumain, Édouard Glissant, and Patrick Chamoiseau—understand the creation of community to be "their duty *as writers*" (2010, 3).[10] Evans identifies a parallel phenomenon among anglophone intellectuals: "Brathwaite concludes his study [*Contradictory Omens* (1974)] with the phrase 'The unity is submarine,' suggesting that beneath the region's plurality of cultures and ethnicities lies the unifying experience of migration. Derek Walcott's vision of Caribbean culture as a 'shipwreck of fragments' places a similar emphasis on the unification of disparate parts" (2014, 9). Evans goes on to cast a wider net, noting that "the cultural theory of [Wilson] Harris, Glissant and [Antonio] Benítez-Rojo engages with the concept of communal identity in relation to broader visions of a Caribbean regional consciousness" (28).

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This assessment echoes Stuart Hall's reflections on "cultural or national identity" and "forms of cultural practice" (1989, 69) in the Caribbean. Hall points to two, largely chronological understandings of culture in the Americas. The first, the "oneness" model, undergirds Negritude, Rastafarianism, and other forms of Pan-Africanism up to and through the 1950s and 1960s and defines "a sort of collective 'one true self'" (69) in opposition to the imposed version of selfhood by which colonizing forces relegated African-descended peoples to positions of degradation and lack. The more recent, more modern approach to identity—"which qualifies, even if it does not replace, the first" (70)—Hall sees as a movement beyond Africa-sited "imagined community" and "imaginative geography and history" toward a recognition of difference and discontinuity among Caribbean subjects.[11] It marks the "play of 'difference' within identity" (73) and aligns with Glissant's *antillanité* (Caribbeanness), the doctrine of *créolité* (Creoleness), and the antiessentialist cultural multiplicity of the Caribbean Artists Movement.[12]

The postcolonial (as opposed to anticolonial) intellectual landscape Hall, Britton, and Evans describe proclaims the internal diversity of cultures and nations in the Caribbean as a decisive refusal of the homogenizing, ethnocentric, universalizing practices of the North Atlantic. This refusal remains bound, however, by a persistently communal intention. These later-century conceptions of the human are, at their most granular, invested in *collective* specificity. Be it in the context of Glissant's Relation, Benítez-Rojo's "repeating island," or "the collective human substance of the Village" celebrated by George Lamming (Lamming [1970] 1991, xxxvi), the smallest unit of engagement is the community. Moreover, such "corrective theories of creolization, métissage, and hybridity have often ended up reinforcing the empirical, geographical, and biological fact of boundaries and borders, recalling the imperatives they seek to undermine" (Cheng 2009, 89). These writers advocate for the significance of discrete cultures in relation and account for exchange and contradiction among diverse nationally or regionally identified collectives. Yet they never go so far as to consider the particular identifications of individuals unmediated by cultural or national identification.

It is well understood that "Caribbean literature deals more with the cultural and political problems of the region than with the inner conflicts of individual souls" (Torres-Saillant 2013, 275). There are consequences to this well-established phenomenon—notably, the codification of a prescriptive order that risks "increasing, not diminishing, the fragmentation in the individual subject" (Lee-Keller 2009, 1297)—the creation of a reified center with respect to which particular, individual souls are (made) marginal, their inner conflicts

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elided. Directly paralleling the sociopolitical arena, it is the case, as Curdella Forbes plainly asserts, that Caribbean literary culture, “whether diasporic or nationalist, has insisted on the ascendancy of the communal over the individual” (2012, 40–41).

Women in particular have found themselves inhibited and/or left on the margins by such calls to communal order—obliged to conform to and sacrifice for social and political objectives that in important ways fail to account for or even address the specificities of women’s existence or that prescribe fixed gendered modes of adherence as a condition for belonging. Caribbeanist sociologist Mimi Sheller emphasizes the myriad ways in which contemporary constructions of citizenship (and its corollaries, inclusion and legitimation) reflect profound “entanglement in deeply seated colonial *and* postcolonial ideologies of gendered, ethnic, and heteronormative boundary drawing and exclusion” (2012, 7). Caribbeanist gender theorist M. Jacqui Alexander puts forward an even fiercer critique of these constraining continuities: “Black heteropatriarchy takes the bequeathal of white colonial masculinity very seriously,” she writes. “Heteropatriarchal nationalist law has neither sufficiently dislodged the major epistemic fictions constructed during colonial rule, nor has it dismantled its underlying presuppositions” (2005, 62).

The absenting or narrow representation of the Caribbean woman in works by male authors of the region—the “consistent erasure of the figure of the black woman in both African American and Caribbean male-authored texts” (Edmondson 1999, 99)—is a much-discussed phenomenon. The very authors credited with providing lexical and philosophical tools for undoing the psychosocial binds of colonialism are guilty of more and less subtle sidelinings of women from the postcolonial canon. Scholars like Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley have criticized the rhetoric of Black male Creole radicalism for having done battle with white patriarchy only to “reinvent heteropatriarchy in black and brown, in Creole” (2010, 208). Caroline Rody has argued that “the male authors whose texts dominated the Caribbean canon until the 1970s, generally tended to objectify women and delimit their figural possibilities” (2001, 113).

Susheila Nasta identifies only two possible representations of “woman” in Caribbean fiction: “either as the rural folk matriarch figure, representing the doer, the repository for the oral tradition, the perpetuator of myths and stories, the communicator of fibres and feelings, or, alternatively, woman, as a sexy mulatto figure, a luscious fruit living on and off the edges of urban communities belonging to no settled culture or tradition” (1993, 214). Allocated the role of auxiliary or sister, advocate or mother, martyr or lover, Caribbean women have been configured in regional fiction as infinitely willing and

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expected to orient themselves in service to communities that are little attentive to their individual needs and desires. With few exceptions, canonical texts of the mid- to later twentieth century omit the presence of women altogether, relegate them to the status of romantic partners and muses to politically awakening or awakened men, turn them into metaphors for the violated and exploited homeland, or position them as noble mother-warriors who "battle to provide for their families" (B. Thomas 2006, 12) and, by extension, their communities.

Theorists have been, to a large extent, complicit in reinforcing this order, as Vèvè A. Clark has outlined compellingly in her foundational essay "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness":

> The New Negro, Indigenist, and Négritude movements of the 1920s and 1930s constitute the grounded base of contemporary Afro-American, Caribbean, and African literary scholarship. Critics return repeatedly to this textual field as if to embrace a heralded center, familiar and stable. . . . New letters works became communal property to be read and revised across national boundaries. . . . .
>
> Even as the predominantly male new letters voices were materializing in the Caribbean, their narrative and discursive strategies were being redefined in terms of gender by women novelists the likes of Suzanne Lacascade and Annie Desroy, whose texts inaugurated "la littérature féminine" in the Guadeloupe and Haiti of 1924 and 1934, respectively. Scholars consistently overlooked these early texts primarily because none of the authors participated in either Indigenism or Negritude. A separate tradition developed for over five decades and was not recognized as such until Maryse Condé published her study of Antillean novelists, *La parole des femmes*, in 1979. (1991, 9, 10)

Not only was Condé instrumental in recognizing the contributions of Caribbean women writers to global literature at a time when few readers were paying attention, but she also analyzed the specific ways in which women's literature had been dismissed within the region itself. No one has been more thorough and succinct than Condé in outlining the tendency of Caribbean literary canons to oblige allegiance to a masculinist status quo and, more broadly, to a representative "we." In her oft-cited 1993 essay "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," Condé insists that literary history in the French-speaking Caribbean has been dominated by the consecration of limiting artistic models to which "acceptable" works of literature tacitly have been expected to adhere. Pointing to Jacques Roumain, Aimé Césaire, Édouard

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Glissant, and the Creolists Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, among others, she argues that an exclusive and excluding order has long diminished the significance of women's literature or kept it on the margins, in large part by its suggestion that female authors are insufficiently committed to what is assumed to be the common struggle of the Black postcolonial collective—what in the anglophone context Edmondson identifies as the presumption "in the black community that feminism is incompatible with the project of black liberation" (1999, 99).

According to Condé, holding to the criteria for authenticity posited by male authors has been tantamount to abolishing portrayals of individual struggle, personal tragedy, and female sexuality in regional literature. She famously argues that novels conforming to this literary order ultimately restrict themselves to depicting only messianic male heroes working to revolutionize their communities and to "rehabilitate the exploited Black Man" (1993, 125). Condé cites a number of points of "order" that make up the homogenizing masculinist template, which are (paraphrased): (1) individualism must be resisted, as only the collective should express itself (led by an individual male hero, if need be); (2) the masses should be considered the sole producers of Beauty and sole source of inspiration for the writer; (3) the principal, if not unique, purpose of writing should be to denounce one's political and social conditions and thereby join the liberationist struggle; (4) poetic and political ambition should be viewed as inextricable from one another; (5) the spatial framework should be the native land; (6) the hero should be male and of peasant or proletarian origin; (7) the brave and hardworking woman should be the auxiliary in the man's struggle for his community; and (8) although children are produced, no reference should be made to sex (and, if any, only to male sexuality).[13]

Disorder

Like any movement with integrity, [feminism] requires that a person live her/his life entirely by its principles, and not many are prepared to go that far at this stage, especially in the Caribbean where small societies exert tremendous pressure for conformity on the individual.

—Elaine Savory Fido, preface to *Out of the Kumbla* (1990)

As a counter to this pervasive sidelining and constrictive stereotyping, a discourse of (Afro-)feminist scholarship has become highly visible in critical approaches to Caribbean women's writing

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since the early 1990s, most often in critical studies devoted to discovering and promoting a female authorial voice. These studies emerged in response to the late 1960s and early 1970s "literary explosion" (Larrier 2000, 4) of postcolonial women's writing in Africa and the Caribbean. They point out that, before this period, few of the women who wrote were ever published, and certainly none were included in regional canons, which meant, of course, a silencing of women both as creators and, largely, as agentive characters.

Feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s made it a point to identify certain character types and forms of storytelling as subversively feminine, highlighting the degree to which women authors have sought to dismantle frames put in place by their male predecessors and contemporaries from what, it is generally maintained, is a decidedly feminist—or, at the very least, feminized—perspective. Groundbreaking Afro-Americanist and Caribbeanist women scholars in particular, among them Carolyn Cooper, Carole Boyce Davies, Belinda Edmondson, Elaine Savory Fido, Françoise Lionnet, Pamela Claire Mordecai, and Susheila Nasta, have taken up the task of establishing a place for women writers in the postcolonial canon, offering sophisticated articulations of the challenges women's prose fiction presents to the region's male-authored (national and nationalist) narratives. As Lionnet has affirmed, postcolonial women's narratives offer "an important site in which to study the personal, cultural, and political transformations that are the legacy both of the colonial encounter and of the postcolonial 'arts of resistance' it produces" (1995, 3).

The original project of building feminist community relied on a number of specific, cohering preoccupations and presumptions, all of which affirmed the legitimacy and political necessity of a gendered analysis of literary production—"a specifically female position" (Davies and Fido 1990a, 1)—on thematic as well as formal levels. The most prominent of these points of connection is unquestionably the matter of voice. There has been a decided consensus regarding the essential linkage between individual women and their local and global, historical and contemporary feminine communities through storytelling—an extolling of "the voices of black women who bind together, through memory, voice, and metaphor, the quotidian detail of community life, moral and spiritual insight, and the profoundly personal" (McKinney 1996, 22).[14] From Condé's *La parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de la langue française* ([1979] 2000) (*The Voice of Women: An Essay on Novelists of the French-Speaking Antilles*) to Myriam J. A. Chancy's *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (1997a) and Adele S. Newson and Linda Strong-Leek's edited volume *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars* (1998) to Isabel Hoving's *In Praise of New Travelers: Reading Caribbean Migrant Women*

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Writers (2001), whose introductory chapter is titled "Place, Voice, and Silence," scholars of Caribbean women's literature and of the representation of women in Caribbean literature have consistently touted strategies via which women, on behalf of their communities, challenge the "inability to express a position in the language of the 'master' as well as the textual construction of woman as silent" (Davies and Fido 1990, 1).

Crucial to these and other studies is an investment in telling "herstory" from a first-person perspective, with fictional "I" narrators presenting the single most important element of the subversive stance taken by their creators.[15] Emphasizing the relationship between communal focus and the agency accorded the self-telling individual featured in writings by women authors, Valérie K. Orlando, for example, notes that the authors in her corpus "do agree that when a woman steps outside the confinement of village and home to speak in her own words she becomes automatically politically engaged and compelled to become an active agent for herself and other women within her society" (2003, 6). Myriam Chancy maintains that the specific practice of first-person narration "reflects a political strategy used not only to create a sense of extra-textual intimacy, but also to create a space within the parameters of the genre that redefines national identity in terms of the personal" (1997a, 6). And Renée Larrier describes the practice wherein women writers encourage conflation with their first-person fictional narrators as one of "dual authorship," a formal approach in which the Afro-Caribbean and African women authors she discusses in her study "create first-person female narrators who relate their own story" and so "wrest the representation of their experiences from others." She argues that the technique "moves them—writers and characters—toward subjectivity, empowering them, thus conferring authority on women and their communities" (2000, 1–2).

The parallel discourses of genealogy and community consistently mark scholarly examinations of women writing and written. Critical works like Chancy's *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* describe a foundational feminine (comm)unity anchored in female ancestral linkages that persists despite differing geographic, social, and national affiliations. Chancy writes, "Although these writers do not form a 'cohesive' community, in the sense that they are not all from the same island [and do not] reside in the same country of exile, they do speak from similar vantage points and express the same concerns for the necessity of preserving Black women's ancestral and contemporary voices, as they emerge from the Caribbean and other nations where descendants of the African diaspora remain" (1997b, xix). Davies and Fido, for their part, posit that "the new Caribbean woman's text becomes a

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locus for the reinscription of the woman's story in history. . . . Storytelling becomes a central cultural metaphor for the ability to communicate oral history through the generations" (1990a, 6). Ancestral connections and, implicitly, then, maternity and procreation are presented as the key to strategies of insubordination deployed within female-centered narratives as well as to processes of historical and cultural insertion that concern women writers themselves.

The essentialist subtext of these discursive feminist and womanist challenges to a masculine literary order has not gone unnoticed. As Edmondson remarked in 1999, "any articulation of feminist consciousness *necessarily* involves an essentialist construction of the subject" (89).[16] Moreover, the initial decades of the twenty-first century have seen ever-increasing political, social, and artistic awareness of gender identifications that undermine or escape classifications like "male" and "female." The work of Caribbeanist scholars like Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, M. Jacqui Alexander, Vanessa Agard-Jones, Christian Flaugh, and others have provided compelling accounts and analyses of "gender complexity" (Flaugh 2013, 46) in Caribbean culture. Yet while the very category of "woman" has certainly been upended in many ways with respect to Caribbean social orders, it remains crucial to take seriously the persistent heteronormative demands on and conscriptions of the (Afro-)postcolonial feminine. Even as theory turns toward the fluid and the unbound, notions of womanhood remain tethered to standards set for the roles of mother, wife, daughter, muse, and so on. And the privileging of a feminine creative community as a framework for the critical study of women's fiction has created a valuable and productive space for the consideration of transnational and transcolonial phenomena—sociopolitical and aesthetic. Discursive feminist and womanist challenges to the masculine literary order have brought much-needed attention to the role and particular struggles of women in the Caribbean and the wider context of the Global South.

The purpose of my investigation here is not to oppose this perspective, nor is it to enter (directly) into the rich and important conversations currently being held among scholars, activists, artists, and others regarding the (il)legitimacy or (un)usefulness of the categories of woman and man in the Americas. I do want to draw attention, however, to the presumption that women's politicized self-conception is inherently and, ultimately, freeingly based in either maternal or sororal community—the presumption that a woman's recognition of herself as responsible for protecting and preserving a transgenerational feminine community is essential to her coming to full subjectivity. It is crucial to examine the ways in which such discursive challenges to a masculine order are marked by the constraining presence of gendered expectations and thus risk

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flattening, albeit differently, the experience of individual women. I want to dig into the irony of Fido asserting "[feminism] requires" in the same breath with which she laments "the pressure for conformity on the individual" in the Caribbean (Davies and Fido 1990c, xi).

I want to look closely, that is, at texts in which the female protagonists do not behave in ways that fit asserted parameters of feminine solidarity—characters who do not successfully exist in, who are not necessarily nourished or empowered by relationships with other women, who are not generatively linked to mothers or daughters, who do not come to voice within their narrative space, and whose author-creators subsequently find themselves in tension with extratextual communities of readers and scholars. The disorderly women who are the subject of this inquiry fall short of promoting "the reconstructive powers of female community" (B. Thomas 2006, 13) articulated by Caribbean feminist discourse. If the centrality of the relationship between grandmothers, mothers, and daughters to history-making is a veritable touchstone of regional "women's literature," the works I consider here unsettle customarily positive readings of intergenerational knowledge transmission between women and decouple resistance from the maternal-cum-communal. In these novels, sisterhood proves unreliable, and mothers betray. Girls have to fend for themselves.

Not only do these works not propose "the counter-order of a matriarchy" (Dash 1998, 109), but some also explicitly contest it. They do so primarily via a persistent questioning of the value—or, conversely, an exposing of the negative consequences—of certain matrilineal connections, focusing on difficult, even dangerous relationships between mothers and daughters rather than on—or without the counterpoint of—the more readily idealized connections between grandmothers and granddaughters. Rather than affirm "the dominance of the French Caribbean matrifocal family where the all-powerful mother reigns supreme and the father is noteworthy for his frequent absence and unreliability" (B. Thomas 2006, 8), several of these texts privilege complicated relationships between fathers and daughters, inevitably setting up a Freudian schema. Their protagonists tend to question, if not outright reject, a maternal heritage that conflicts with their own understanding of the world and their place in it—or they simply have no access to such a heritage. They cannot trust the advice or the emotions of mothers they do not really know, may not respect, and by whom they may even have been betrayed. The tenuousness or nonexistence of these mother–daughter relationships thus has the effect of interrupting the correlation between postcolonial womanhood and memory-as-history.

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Absent a sustained relationship with a maternal ancestor or personal experience of maternity, the women of these narratives are for the most part focused on the present; none of them engages significantly with long history. Preserving, reclaiming, and reinscribing community are not their concern. Neither, then, does any sort of communal feminist project emerge from the stories they tell. As such, they challenge claims regarding the presumed politicization of "voiced" women. They question the presumption that self-telling equals empowerment or that it is a de facto feminist gesture. The truths these women speak, moreover, are often unsettling. Although they in many ways subvert well-known enemies of the marginalized—heteropatriarchy, classism, and other forms of bigotry—they nevertheless fail to identify or interpolate their readers as allies. They demand, that is, by the very fact of their "I"-narrating selves, a measure of intimacy with a reading "you" whose sympathy they ultimately seem to discourage. In their insistent refusal or inability to embrace sisterhood, they undermine the potentially "ethical relationships between writing selves and reading others," the "bonds of mutuality or coalitions of resistance" (Campbell 2010, 34) we have come to expect women's narratives to generate.[17] They push against assessments of the singular importance of first-person female narration as inherently indicative of a communalist, politicized intention; their narratives amount to so many individual stammerings.

If these women stammer, it is perhaps at least in part because they are angry. None of them is a madwoman, but they are all mad women.[18] Their behavior is, in fact, reasonable. This is a crucial point. Each of them has experienced the childhood trauma of not being seen or of being subject to abuse; each is or becomes keenly aware that her situation is unsafe and unfair—and that she is far less at fault for her unhappiness than the world would have her believe. Each comes to realize that her safest course of action is to take care of herself.

Freedom?

How does one call into question the exhaustive hold that such rules of ordering have upon certainty without risking uncertainty, without inhabiting that place of wavering which exposes one to the charge of immorality, evil, aestheticism. The critical attitude is not moral according to the rules whose limits that very critical relation seeks to interrogate. But how else can critique do its job without risking the denunciations of those who naturalize and render hegemonic the very moral terms put into question by critique itself?

—Judith Butler, "What Is Critique?" (2001)

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For what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom?

—Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (1997)

In a 1984 interview, Michel Foucault makes a case for the paramount importance of self-care as a practice of individual freedom. "One must not have the care for others precede the care for self," he comments. "The care for self takes moral precedence in the measure that the relationship to self takes ontological precedence" ([1984] 1987, 118). Over the course of the conversation, he affirms the primacy of self-care over manifest political alliance. He pointedly distinguishes between ethics as an individual "practice of freedom" and processes of liberation that have to do with institutional possibility. For Foucault, practices of freedom are contingent on but distinct from a politics of liberation. Referencing anticolonial independence struggles in particular, Foucault acknowledges the legitimacy of emancipation discourse but argues that "the act of liberation is insufficient to establish the practices of liberty that later on will be necessary for this people, this society, and these *individuals* to decide upon receivable and acceptable forms of their existence or political society" ([1984] 1987, 114).

Foucault's context is explicitly Greco-Roman and proto-European, despite his brief, punctual references to the (post)colonial. Yet a turn to Foucault in thinking about the right- or wrongheadedness of the disordering Caribbean women at the center of the narratives I discuss here is warranted not only by his insistence on the inherent ethical value of the individual's "voluntary insubordination" (Foucault 1997b, 47) but also by the nature of the consequent criticism of his work by materialist scholars.[19] Multiple theorists have taken Foucault to task for the perceived moral and political insufficiencies of his ethical paradigm—his espousing, as Karen Vintges notes, of what are perceived as "unrealistic notions of radical freedom and moral nihilism" (2001, 166). Foucault has been accused of a "lack of ethics," his work marked by "an attitude of narcissistic self-absorption" and thus devoid of any "discernible trace of human solidarity, mutuality or fellow-feeling" (Wolin 1986, 85). Such critiques point to the absence of a definitive, explicit, normative political stance in Foucault's work—to the absence of a categorical right and wrong and an indifference to the project of achieving social justice. Such formulations unambiguously posit "bad," "narcissistic" self-focus against "good" communal entanglement, making plain the intuitive hurdle to reconciling a privileged self with a humanist notion of morality.

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Those who would defend Foucault argue, however, that not only is Foucault's philosophical position ethical, but it is also deeply political. They note that Foucault advocates for caring for oneself "*correctly*," with the objective being "to *behave correctly* in relationship to others and for others" ([1984] 1987, 119, 118). Foucault is clear: "Care for self is ethical in itself, but it implies complex relations with others. . . . Care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community or in interindividual relationships which are *proper*" ([1984] 1987, 118; emphases mine). Theorists like Campbell, Vintges, and Richard Wolin, among others, argue that Foucault's concept of self-care is foundational to an ethics of empathy wherein understanding the self allows for an appreciation of others' equally legitimate projects of self-knowledge, "a respect for the (self-understanding of) others" (Vintges 2001, 173).[20] Thus do Foucault's defenders deem his work, which he himself characterized as "a few fragments of an autobiography" (1988, 156), fundamentally ethical in its solipsism. Foucault "made philosophy out of his life and 'lived' his philosophy," writes Vintges, thereby transforming "an individual attitude into a challenge to society, charging his experience with an ethical significance" (2001, 166–67).

Judith Butler similarly recovers Foucault's self-focus and the broader matter of self-telling as central to ethics and a precursor to politics. She offers acute insight into Foucault's "What Is Critique?" in her own essay of the same title (2001), as well as in her more expansive philosophical treatise *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). Butler affirms Foucault's perspective on the inherent morality of self-construction, evoking in particular the subject's opacity to itself and its inextricable, engaged positioning within the community by which that self is conditioned, what J. Aaron Simmons identifies as Butler's "recognition of sociality at the heart of subjectivity" (2006, 86). Thinking through Foucault's propositions in the specific context of self-narration and ethical responsibility, Butler argues that there exists no "outside" of the (constrictive, coercive, possibly violent) communal space from which the individual might somehow look objectively upon and give an account of a coherent self.[21] Self-narration necessarily occurs within and participates in the "domain of unfreedom" (J. Butler 2005, 42) that is the social order. "When the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself," Butler explains, "it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; when the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist" (7–8). Following Butler's logic, to "indulge" in "I" narration must

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not be understood as the expression of a "nomadic self that escapes" without "taking responsibility and making basic moral commitments" (Vintges 2001, 177), as Foucault's critics would have it, but rather as a form of active engagement with a "beyond-oneself," an enacting of the simultaneous or doubled gesture of critiquing at once the self and the community that is constitutive of that self.

Butler takes the survival stakes of self-construction and critique into consideration. Thinking with Foucault, she makes explicit the extent to which performing self-scrutiny against the backdrop of an alienating normative social order represents profound risk. "To question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is, in relation to the present regime, to risk unrecognizability as a subject," she posits (2005, 23). Moreover, such questioning amounts to virtuous performance. That is, "if that self-forming is done in disobedience to the principles by which one is formed, then virtue becomes the practice by which the self forms itself in desubjugation, which is to say it risks its deformation as a subject" (201).

In an earlier text, referencing in particular the question of gender and also channeling Foucault, Butler insists that for the marginalized subject "survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred" (1999, 3). The very possibility of achieving "a livable life"—of facilitating one's "persistence as an 'I'" (1, 3)—demands the foundational capacity to pose an "interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living" (4). Through interrogation, critique stages a "confrontation with authority" (Foucault 1997b, 46) that, while it does not necessarily propose a moral or political alternative, does reveal the "mechanisms of coercion" (59) on which community relies to suppress threats to its coherence. The retreat into the intimacy of the self amounts, then, to a "critical attitude" (42) with respect to the group in and to which that self presumably belongs. And herein lies the potential for the discernment of an ethic.

But what kind of ethic, precisely? On the one hand, Foucault's reluctance to supplant a critiqued normative order with another, presumably "better" normative order proceeds from the distinction he establishes between morals (externally determined rules of social conduct, requiring/demanding obedience) and ethics (internal reflections on the praxis of self-making, requiring/demanding virtue), a distinction I read in parallel to that which separates the gaze and self-regard. Nonetheless, those seeking to "rehabilitate" Foucault foreclose the very zone of liberty such a distinction allows. The ethical pur-

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chase of the twinned practices of critique and self-construction Foucault outlines is, in the end, community focused:

> For Foucault [and those who would defend him] the ethical subject is always already a political subject. "Being occupied with oneself and political activities are linked" [1998, 26]; and "freedom is thus inherently political" [1997a, 286]. Foucault's concept of ethics is political through and through. A concern for who you want to be in life and how you want to act is a political concern. It is a concern about acting in the polis—making politics. (Vintges 2004, 286)

By the same token, while Butler raises the stakes in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, positing individual survival as the principal objective of critique and self-creation, her contextual frame is nevertheless alliance politics and communal solidarity (intersex advocacy, a critique of same-sex marriage, queer theory and activism, etc.). As with Foucault, for Butler, "individual agency is bound up with social critique and *social transformation*" (J. Butler 1999, 7; emphasis mine). In positing the legitimacy of individual self-care but then making it into a polis-facing practice, both Foucault and Butler ultimately conjure an ethical possibility they do not pursue. They do not go so far, that is, as to imagine the potential value of refusal that does not explicitly yield a political program for engagement.

This neglected (rejected?) ethical opening is, however, precisely the path chosen in the works of my corpus. The women they present neither build nor transform their worlds: they escape or they survive them. Yes, these Caribbean women characters' refusal to cede the primacy of their self approaches what may be understood as a Foucauldian ethics of self-care, insofar as it puts them in critical relation to the normative social codes governing not only their textual but also their extratextual existence. Yet, if "there is something in critique which is akin to virtue" (Foucault 1997b, 43), it is also true that we do not demand the same virtue from all subjects. There are those we would much prefer keep their critique to themselves. Moreover, if there is anything virtuous about the critique these characters stage, it is not contingent on a constructive or productive political contribution, or even on the promise thereof. They do not posit the communal good as the ultimate aim of self-regard. They are not interested in mastering their appetites or in being on their best behavior.[22] And this is only logical. For what sense would it make, really, for these women to base any project of self-*con*struction on fealty to a polis that relies on the *de*struction of (some part of) their true self? In their largely self-imposed personal solitude and political isolation, however, these women are not recoverable within

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the project outlined by Foucault, Butler, and others. Rather, their self-regard supports an ethics of sustained dissent.

In a myriad of ways, we have been instructed that to enter the fold of collectivity, be it familial or revolutionary, we must first be liberated of our sexual deviance, our politically incorrect desires.

—Juana María Rodriguéz, "Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies" (2011)

Dissent. Disobedience. Practices of refusal. Not riot, not revolution, barely resistance. The women of my corpus are solitary creatures whose affirmative nonbelonging is, in and of itself, a form of persistent critique. In this respect, these novels would seem to fit within a fascinating genre outlined by Curdella Forbes to describe prose fiction works that present "the ultimate ascendancy of personal desire as narrative strategy and aesthetic value" (2008, 20).[23] Such works, which Forbes names "individualist texts," are adamantly incompatible with communal discourses. They embrace a practice of "sly disobedience" that "seeks to remain true to itself first and foremost" (2012, 24). Although often reclaimed by "discourses such as postcoloniality, Caribbean identity, diaspora and . . . feminist resistance" (2008, 21), they "are not easily identified with the mores of collectivist terms such as nation, the folk, diaspora, women's community, collective cultural resistance," or other platforms for solidarity, "whether of the nation or globe or academy" (2008, 17). They are not narratives of alternative community and are not identifiable with progressive communal discourse.

The works I discuss here accord in many ways with these principles. However, they stop short of "negat[ing] the concept of community and privileg[ing] the individual as a form of alternative unbounded universe within and of her or his self" (Forbes 2008, 20), a crucial element of Forbes's individualist texts. The heroines of these narratives, though unquestionably preoccupied with themselves and their own self-realization, nevertheless are obliged to navigate and negotiate the explicitly gendered expectations and limitations of their social world. They at no point deny their intersubjectivity and are by no means free from their communities. Nor do they truly desire to be untethered. Rather, they have been compelled to withdraw by the fact of their incongruity. Each believes in and desires integration into a group but finds herself singularized, and most often scapegoated, with respect thereto. In their self-focused humanism, they do not (cannot) belong but want to—if only the world were better. They are not welcome in their communities but would like to be. They practice refusal in the absence of acceptable conditions for belonging.

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The question is not that of Foucauldian self-mastery or of Butlerian activism. Nor is it that of a Forbesian indifference to the communal. It is a matter of defensive self-regard. These women struggle against the "constitutive dispossession" (J. Simmons 2006, 86) that would render them opaque to themselves while leaving them to be determined by others. Their solipsistic qualities thus work to safeguard their individual psychological self as it is contained within, and to an extent constrained by, a body that is de facto at risk—a physical self all too vulnerable to humiliation, sexual violence, and other forms of predation. These women's affirmation of a desiring, desirable, and desired self is a critical component of a broader, innate self-valuation. In other words, these self-regarding female characters (come to) believe that they matter and, as such, that to love and be loved is their right. But, like the Haitian goddess Ezili so exquisitely theorized by Colin Dayan, they "demand that the word [*love*] be reinvented" (Dayan 1995, 63).

This question of love—of romance and the erotic—is central to the praxes of self-regard I point to in these novels.[24] Given that "systems of sex and gender operate at the juncture of the disciplining of the body and the control of the population" (Alexander 2005, 23) in both the past and the present-day Caribbean (and well beyond), the insistent sexuality of these female characters presents an avenue of opposition vis-à-vis a policing communal order. Their sense of their erotic self incorporates a range of "deviant" strategies and practices—adultery, bisexuality, sadomasochism, bondage. Several of these women instrumentalize their sexuality, and all are perfectly capable of dissociating lust from love. Each of these works manifests a protective, if not survivalist, principle according to which love for self serves as the basis from which to claim, or at least to imagine, nonviolent and nonviolating love from others. Each stages the sticky question of agency in the context of vulnerability or abjection. Is it even possible for the Caribbean woman to be sexual—to be sexy—without also inviting or deserving violation? As Mimi Sheller affirms, leaning on Audre Lorde, "the erotic is a kind of pervasive energy that can be a source for social and political change"; nevertheless, "it remains hotly debated whether this [kind of] sexual performance is liberatory or not" (2012, 244, 42). Thus, while these women queer both the textual and extratextual worlds they inhabit, the challenge they propose is in many ways circumscribed and therefore ambivalent.[25]

This tension is starkly rendered in all of the works I discuss here. For the disorderly women of these novels, self-eroticization functions as an instinctive, unmediated, and unplanned refusal. It does not declare any fully articulated political objective, nor does it even always look like success. Ultimately, each of these women "merely" hopes to survive and to find freedom in accor-

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dance with her own definition thereof. Every one of these characters resists the incursion of those who would temper her sexuality or reduce her to the status of gift for exchange, yet none of them generates, in any sustained fashion, productive alliance or certain allegiance. While in each case the woman's very being may be oppositional with respect to an oppressive narrative community, not one of these heroines quite manages to abandon the subjugating template that contains her. Each wants very much in fact to fit in somewhere—to belong to a community—and so none of them comes out on the other side, as it were, to embrace a wholly (self-)satisfying liberation. Their narcissism is defensive, not triumphant.[26] Although their behavior challenges various forms of injustice, these women remain in many ways marginalized within their textual communities. They are willing to reveal and even to revel in their personal refusals, but their implicit critique of normative standards does not empower others of their race and/or gender. Their pain redeems no one. In this sense, these women remain outside of, and are difficult to recover for, any "respectable" ideology, political position, or even racial category.

The matter of race is an additional site of disruption these characters produce. Without exception, the women of my corpus disorder by the very fact of their racialized bodies: beyond what they do or do not do, there is the matter of who they are. All but one of them are mixed race—born directly of the gendered forms of brutality and coercion that mark encounters between powerful men and disempowered women in both the colonial and postcolonial contexts. Their ambiguously racialized bodies signal the historical violence of the colonial past-cum-present. "Thinking metissage," argues Françoise Vergès, "requires accepting a genealogy and a heritage. In other words, the recognition of a past of rape, violence, slavery, and the recognition of our own complicity with the wicked ways of the world" (1999, 11). At the same time, the concept has been deployed also as a means of eliding this violent past by reading the *métis*—especially the *métisse*—both as the exotic product of empire's "colonial family romance" (11) and as a symbol of its more harmonious, less "Black" postcolonial future. In this respect, *métissage* risks offering resolution of the colonial past via repression of its originary antiblackness and white supremacy.

The novels of my corpus do not allow for a "withering away of the memory of slavery" (Vergès 1999, 9) through sexy or celebratory evocations of métissage. Nor do they gesture toward "*métissage* as a concept of solidarity" or as solid "racial ground on which liberation struggles can be fought" (Lionnet 1989, 9). The racial ambiguity of their central female characters instead presents a consistent challenge to communalist alliance. More often than not, in discourse about ambiguously raced beings, "what has remained constant

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has been a suspicion about the loyalty of the metis because of their 'division'" (Vergès 1999, 10). Insofar, that is, as "oppositional racial politics are an intrinsic part of black discourse" (Edmondson 1999, 86), the racial opacity of these women precludes the tracing of clear pathways for coalition. It renders them inherently suspect, of uncertain allegiance. Their racial indeterminacy provides space within which their respective authors "challenge the idea that racial and cultural identities function as stable points of reference in our unstable world" and present race "as a figuration of crossing whose patterns of meaning emerge only in light of the crossing of other categories such as class, gender, nationality, and sexuality" (Mardorossian 2005, 3, 18). Distinct from the aspirational notion that Lionnet and other postcolonial theorists propose, wherein métissage refutes hypocritical European colonial desires for racial purity, the intersectional identities of these characters produce isolation and fracturing more so than they provide points of generative articulation.[27]

The ways in which the women featured in these novels trouble and are troubled by binaries of race and sexual orientation make them obliquely political creatures. At most, they are political "in the narrower sense of the term," insofar as they hint, yes, at ways "to defend and enlarge the space of freedom practiced against and within the disciplines in our societies and against other types of domination" (Vintges 2001, 177). Their subversion is initially without intent, becoming more politically articulate only once they realize, for some rather belatedly, that the world—their world—is in fact what's wrong. The majority of them experience their marginalization first and foremost as personally unjust, and only by extension, and limitedly, do they begin to consider issues of social justice more broadly, and this to very mixed results. As such, the objectives and behaviors of these female protagonists are contestatory but not necessarily constructive; their actions are reactive rather than proactive. Each of them comes to anchor herself in individualist apprehensions of the world. She more or less radically divorces herself from the community or communities whose ethical positions and social practices have wounded her, folding back on herself and refusing even to engage in any sustained participatory counterpolitics that might offer a sustainable platform or practice from which to be in solidarity or to engender reconstituted, ameliorated community. They offer refusal without promise. A praxis of "NO," full stop.

In this, they can be frustratingly unsympathetic and equivocal beings. They make choices that are hard to get behind. Plainly put, they can be very difficult to like. They occupy varying positions along the scale from healthy self-regard to pathological narcissism. Some of them seem merely self-indulgent, others self-involved. Several, it might be argued, are problematically self-focused. For

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others still, the safeguarding of the self comes with some of the clinical attributes of the extreme narcissist: a propensity for vanity or fantastic thinking, a need to be admired and desired, a tendency to arrogance or manipulation, a sense of self-importance or entitlement. In these instances, protective self-regard is matched to varying degrees by the more classically pejorative elements of narcissism, tendencies that emerge from a profound existential insecurity that is in large part a product of the literal, physical *non*security of their individual existence.

Thus, as tempting as it might be to place all of these women in Foucault's or Butler's ethico-philosophical embrace, so to speak—to characterize their self-centeredness as the noble precursor to radical political participation—I do not want to suggest this sort of progressive movement toward a redeeming moral good. I want to take seriously these women's self-distancing from a readily identifiable and satisfying counterpolitical stance. They do not necessarily engage in purposed, conscious technologies of the self in the ways that Foucault or Butler would have it—their self-regard does not signal resistance explicitly; it is unharnessed from any clear larger project of transformation; it does not acknowledge or offer platforms for solidarity. These women's antisocial existence inevitably refuses what Jack Halberstam calls the "liberal fantasies of progressive enlightenment and community cohesion" (2008, 143). Refusing to find and embrace the happy ending of community reborn, these disorderly women point to the recuperative snares inherent in any fixed discursive stance. They embrace what Vèvè A. Clark has named a "*marasa* consciousness"—a way of countering "the binary nightmare" (1991, 45) of colonialism and its aftermath by refusing categorization and engaging in unsanctioned racial and sexual interactions.

In every instance isolated from her community, each of these women is unable to abide that which would make her a part of the collective or is unwilling to suppress that which keeps her apart. Each and every one of the narratives I examine evokes the precise social risks assumed (with varying degrees of consciousness) by the woman at their center. Each one encourages a careful consideration of the extent to which that woman's narcissism might in fact be a justifiable response to and serve as a valuable indicator of the perils and prejudices of the existing communal order. The very fact that these women can or will not be incorporated ultimately exposes the ethical lacunae of their respective communities. As such, the self-regard presented in these works and through these women does not presume the impossibility or even the undesirability of identifying with a collective. Instead, it challenges the foundations and parameters of the communal as revealed in the experiences of individuals

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
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whose presence or performance is deemed irreconcilable with existing codes of inclusion.

In their refusal to participate unambiguously in any politics of solidarity, the "inappropriateness" of these characters' behavior extends beyond the frame of the texts that contain them. They disallow any symbolic repackaging of their discontent or their individual protest as a politics of resistance and thus push at the limits of our inclusivity as scholars. They oblige a questioning of our less questioned reading practices and perspectives. They are not disposed "to easy accommodation in the liberal compact of cultural, feminist, or African-American studies" (Dayan 1995, 70). They question whether our antinormative, progressive, womanist, antiracist, anti-imperialist, postcolonialist engagements with the world and its cultural productions are capacious enough to accommodate those who make the "wrong" personal choices. Are we able to tolerate refusal that does not result in the triumph of the subject or her community? Can we resist our tendency to cast defiance by certain kinds of subjects as a progress-directed first step toward a "better" normative order? Are we capable of enacting a reading practice that embraces individuals who "misbehave," even under conditions of relative freedom? Must the novelist appeal to the register of selflessness or solidarity in representing Caribbean womanhood? Must a novel about a woman—about a Caribbean woman—present her righteousness in order for her to be counted among rights-deserving human subjects? These narratives call on us to confront the expectations we bring to our objects of study. They call on us to broaden our understandings of what freedom looks like. They present characters who struggle mightily to refuse the judgment of their community and to hold themselves only to their own standards of being human. They propose to us an ethics of self-regard.

Each of the chapters of this study focuses principally on a single author and a single novel. The theoretical interlocutors and perspectives I bring to bear on my corpus are as geoculturally diverse as my authors are nomadic. In my first chapter, "SELF-LOVE | Tituba," I argue that Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé's disconcerting heroine, the Black "witch" Tituba Indian, subverts the cohering-cum-coercive inclinations of both literal and literary community. Condé's 1986 novel paints a scandalous portrait of a historical figure whose being and behavior are on many levels antithetical to rigid constructions of selfhood and community in the Americas, past and present. As Condé has imagined her, Tituba's steady commitment to self-love, and the erotic expression thereof, transgresses the multiple paradigms that would conscript her existence—at once those that function in the context of the colonial

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Americas and those that comprise various contemporary postcolonial critical communities. This chapter asks how Tituba's disordering self-regard not only contradicts seventeenth-century Puritan religious precepts but also pushes against the puritanical leanings of nineteenth-century American abolitionist discourse, of twentieth-century Caribbean intellectual currents, and of so-called First and Third World feminism. Although in the considerable body of scholarship about the novel much rightly has been made of Tituba's empowered self-liberation through sexual adventure, I am interested in the arguably less digestible dimensions of her triply othered (nonwhite, female, foreign) narrative being. I think alongside Sheller's reflections on the circumscription of voices considered disruptive by conventionally progressive Global South perspectives—the voices of those subjects deemed marginal with respect to particular nationalist and postcolonial ideologies.

I am particularly interested in Condé's subversive engagement with the female slave narrative tradition engendered by Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs and, further, in her subtle refusal of the recuperative tendencies of both antislavery rhetoric in the colonial Americas and current postcolonial and feminist discourse. I examine the ways in which Condé's erotic and ludic take on Tituba's misadventures disrupts the slave narrative in its reticence and the contemporary Black female neo–slave narrative in its insistence on abjection. Moreover, specific elements of the novel's provocations make it a veritable cipher for the works by both Jamaica Kincaid and Marlon James I discuss in later chapters.

Chapter 2, "SELF-POSSESSION | Hadriana," takes as its point of departure the substantial criticism generated by the Haitian writer, intellectual, and militant communist activist René Depestre's 1988 novel *Hadriana in All My Dreams* among Caribbeanist scholars. I dig into the specifics of critical discomfort with the novel through my examination of Hadriana's turn to practical self-regard in the face of a very literal situation of life or death. I argue in this chapter that Depestre's manner of representing Haiti to the wider world, fraying the line between parody and unironic celebration in its foregrounding of the supernatural and the erotic, justifiably provokes the anxieties of colonial mimicry. I acknowledge the legitimacy of the critical unease Depestre's novel has generated. I also highlight the less obviously subversive qualities presented by the young woman at the center of this Creole tale—the self-sexualizing, white French zombie Hadriana. In a context wherein the aspirational codes of the Haitian bourgeoisie and the idiosyncrasies of Haitian spiritual practices compete to restrict feminine destiny, what possible opportunities exist for a woman to possess or be possessed of herself?

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In looking for answers to this question, I make use of an interpretive frame similar to that which guides my reading of *I, Tituba*, highlighting the means by which sexuality and selfhood are linked to effect a subversion of troubling communalist politics. Relying in part on Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero's exegesis of the Orpheus myth, I emphasize Hadriana's refusal of the pressures of belonging. I focus on Depestre's configuration of the Haitian zombie figure as a metaphor through which the novel dismantles—or at the very least meaningfully pokes fun at—the very gender and racial clichés it has been accused of promoting.

"SELF-DEFENSE | Lotus," this study's third chapter, calls for a critical rethinking of Haitian author Marie Chauvet's largely unexamined 1954 novel *Fille d'Haïti*. One of Haiti's most significant and mystifying writers, Chauvet has long been placed at a remove from her well-canonized predecessors and contemporaries of the mid-twentieth century. Though Chauvet is increasingly a subject of interest for scholars of Haitian women's literature and of Haitian feminism, her work is only very rarely considered alongside that of more politically explicit Haitian novelists like Jacques Roumain, Jacques Stephen Alexis, and, for that matter, Depestre. My analysis of *Fille d'Haïti*, Chauvet's first work of prose fiction, puts the author in direct dialogue with her male contemporaries yet moves away from her inclusion within a feminist version of political radicalism. I look at both Chauvet's life and her work to tease out the ways in which her disorderly feminine presence as a writer, a wife, and a citizen encourages us to think about the potential hazards of politicized intellectual community in Haiti vis-à-vis the individual feminine self.

This chapter argues that Chauvet's configuration of a changeable, self-interested heroine obliquely evinces the specific mechanisms and mistakes inherent in the rigid and divisive politics of 1940s and 1950s Haiti. Writing at a historical moment when community-based polarization was the order of the day, Chauvet's novel pushes against the binaries embedded in collective constructions of race, class, gender, and other totalizing systems. Beginning with a meditation on the constraints of both Black radicalism and elite feminism in 1950s Haiti and an analysis of Chauvet's self-telling correspondence with French feminist Simone de Beauvoir in the 1960s, I read *Fille d'Haïti* as a sharp denunciation of the gendered strictures of her time. What options does a woman have, I ask, within the militarized, masculinist context of nation-building? How must she—how can she—possibly defend herself against the incursions of both the state and its revolution-minded opponents? I engage queer studies, feminist, and critical race theorist Amber Jamilla Musser's insightful considerations of gender and power within the context of bondage/

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discipline and sadomasochism; feminist political theorist Carole Pateman's perceptive unpacking of the "sexual contract"; sociologist Carolle Charles's analyses of gender realities under Duvalier; and postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of the "in-between" to make plain Chauvet's audacious critique of the Haitian private and public spheres.

Chapter 4, "SELF-PRESERVATION | Xuela," presents Antiguan novelist Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), arguably the most subversive work in the author's highly controversial corpus, as a work of philosophy—an extended meditation on the risks and perils of being nonwhite and nonmale in the Atlantic world. The chapter takes up Kincaid's fraught relationship to several prominent colonial, anticolonial, and postcolonial narratives of the self in community. Responding to Sylvia Wynter's call for vigilance regarding the presumed immutability of the postcolonial global order, I look at how Xuela's disorderly textual being and the novel's unsettling extratextual presence posit philosophically grounded possibilities for navigating an untenable social reality, contesting a traumatic history, and mounting a generative critique of contemporary community. With its supremely self-regarding Afro-Carib heroine Xuela, the *Autobiography* in many ways resembles Forbes's "individualist text." Yet the novel's deep engagement with community affirms the individual's inescapable attachment to the collective.

Examining this bind via Halberstam's theorization of the antisocial, I posit Xuela as a queering agent within the socio-ideological landscape of the Caribbean. I pay particular attention to Xuela's effort at the literal preservation of her self that claims indigenous American belonging to the island. Taking up Kincaid's engagement with the question of indigeneity, I argue that the *Autobiography* proposes a magnificently provocative intertextual response to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*—a response that foregrounds the complex position of the indigenous Caribbean subject at the extreme margins of postcolonial studies. I consider how, by underscoring the vulnerability of the native person as distinct from that of the Afro-diasporic subject, Kincaid marks her commitment to exposing intramural conflicts among nonwhite peoples of the American postcolony.

In my final chapter, "SELF-REGARD | Lilith," I turn to the 2009 novel *The Book of Night Women*, Jamaican writer Marlon James's harrowing deep dive into the experience of an individual, female, enslaved person struggling to survive in the Caribbean plantation universe. Among all of the novels I consider in *A Regarded Self*, James's narrative takes up the question of regard—self- versus external, internalized versus reflected—in a way that most explicitly outlines its attendant survival stakes. James's novel presents

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a heroine, suspected of possessing supernatural powers, whose ambivalent connection to both Blacks and whites renders her dangerously unreadable and unreliable with respect to both communities. That this enslaved woman somehow manages to conjure a space for passion and even romance in a context of abjection speaks, I argue, to the specific purchase of self-regard in the plantation context, wherein patriarchal white supremacy sets the terms of human value.

James's narrative insists that the reader come to terms with the complex subjects who experience antiblack violence as part but not all of who they are or will themselves to be. How, I ask, does this premise oblige consideration of what is perhaps the most fraught ethical question we pose about the Atlantic slave past: notably, whether it is possible, from the ostensibly removed space of slavery's long wake, to uncompromisingly represent the limitless violence of this history without becoming spectators to that violence or reproducing it through our narratives. Is it possible, that is, to tell the truths of slavery's horrors without tacitly facilitating transcendence, desensitization, or catharsis? Thinking with African Americanist scholars Stephen Best, Hortense J. Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and Christina Sharpe, among others, I consider the ways in which James's heroine disallows unethical spectatorship and refuses the potential for pornotroping the experiences of the enslaved.

A Regarded Self, like the characters and the texts discussed throughout, lays out no new ideological program or political solutions. It does, however, propose opening up to reading old stories in new ways. It proposes a critical consideration of self-regard as a lens through which to rethink long-standing academic touchstones and ideological perspectives. Reading the five fictional women of this corpus in one another's company makes visible the provocation issued by marginalized individuals who negotiate national and transnational spaces. It does so, I hope, without consolidating their practices of refusal into newly constituted communities of activism or identity. The disorderly presence of these women in these texts provides a rich opportunity to query and to queer twentieth- and twenty-first-century constructions of a liberationist communal spirit in Caribbean literature as well as among Caribbeanist scholars. The insistent self-regard of these protagonists draws our attention to the constraints and insufficiencies of what we often presume to be radical or expansive categories. These women remind us that any commitment to inclusivity and justice must make room for wayward subjects.

Disorder implies an order. It reveals a norm that has been interrupted by behavior deemed pathological—that is, endangering of that order. Disorder

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is necessarily perverse. It commits to unsettling all things endlessly. In a critical context, disorder can be the means and the product of persistent vigilance regarding our own tendencies to resediment limiting notions of virtue. The socially, racially, politically ambivalent women characters I consider throughout this study encourage such vigilance. They struggle mightily to refuse the judgment of their community and to hold themselves only to their own regard. In so doing, they fruitfully upset understandings of the Caribbean and the human—understandings of the human from the space of the Caribbean.

Now, let us meet them.

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NOTES

Introduction

1 My project enters into conversation with a constellation of theorists all concerned with community as a fraught model for social being. "This rethinking of community not only marks a turn in the way we might conceive of the constitution of the idea of community, but also a shift in the way in which we might mobilise community as a means of rethinking the terms of solidarity" (Devadas and Mummery 2007).

2 Since 2015 I have had the opportunity and great privilege to be in sustained conversation with an interdisciplinary cohort of scholars as part of the Practicing Refusal Collective, convened by Tina Marie Campt and Saidiya Hartman. Our reflections in the context of this group have turned around an effort "to think through and toward refusal as a generative and capacious rubric for theorizing everyday practices of struggle often obscured by an emphasis on collective acts of resistance" (Campt 2019a, 80). "The practice of refusal invoked in the collective's name," Campt explains, "signals a rejection of the status quo as livable. It is a refusal to recognize a social order that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible. It is a refusal to embrace the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented and to use negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise. The practice of refusal is a striving to create possibility in the face of negation" (Campt 2019b, 25). Campt's own theorizations of refusal underpin an ethos of community-building in the overlapping domains of Black feminist art, activism, and study. However, as she notes, refusal is a "capacious rubric" and, as such, usefully frames less overtly political modes of defiance like those I discuss throughout this book.

3 "behold (v.)" Old English bihaldan (West Saxon behealdan) "give regard to, hold in view," also "keep hold of; belong to," from be- + haldan, healdan. Online Etymology Dictionary. "behold (v.)." Accessed April 11, 2020. https://www.etymonline.com/word/behold

4 The formulation "healthy narcissism" was first coined in the 1930s by Austrian American psychologist Paul Federn, who believed narcissism should be recognized as a potential source of "positive investment in the self" (Lunbeck 2014, 104). Kohut brought this idea into the mainstream, condemning the conventional clinical-cum-moral presumption that object-love is good and

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self-love is bad. Further, although at odds with Kohut on many specific points, psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg similarly recognized narcissism as a matter of "self-esteem regulation" (Lunbeck 2014, 108). All this being said, even though clinical understandings of narcissism move beyond Freud's largely misogynistic and homophobic condemnation, the popular association of this "disorder" with pathology has persisted.

5 "And there we are, in a hand-to-hand struggle with our blackness or our whiteness, in a drama of narcissistic proportions, locked in our own peculiarity" (Fanon [1952] 2008, 45).

6 Pointing specifically to Udé's "defiantly naming narcissism not only as healthy, but even heroic," and to photographer and videographer Lyle Ashton Harris's coining of the term "redemptive narcissism," Miller (2009, 245) acknowledges the permeability of the border between destructive and constructive self-focus.

7 Merriam-Webster Thesaurus, s.v. "self-regard (n.)," accessed April 11, 2020. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-regard.

8 For a deeply researched and compelling analysis of the latter phenomenon, see Vergès (2017), especially chap. 5: "Cécité du féminisme: Race, colonialité, capitalisme."

9 Bénédicte Boisseron writes insightfully about the (self-imposed) isolation of Caribbean authors who write outside of Caribbean community. Her study includes two of the authors whose work I consider here, Condé and Kincaid: "Though all these Creole figures have received international acclaim for their work, they also all share a noticeably ambivalent relationship with their background. . . . Their communities (broadly defined) have accused them, in one way or another, of being traitors, sellouts, or simply opportunistic writers who are oblivious to their origins. . . . All of these authors have been held accountable for their individual positions of enunciation, for allegedly thinking about themselves first, their freedom, their survival, and their autonomy. Their works, lives, or actions have occasionally been characterized as unsympathetic to their islands, individualistic, or plainly selfish and opportunistic" (2014, 5–6, 18).

10 Britton presents Condé as something of an outlier or foil in this schema.

11 Here Hall (1989, 75–76) cites Benedict Anderson and Edward Said, respectively: "Africa must at last be reckoned with, by Caribbean people. But it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered. It belongs irrevocably, for us, to what Edward Said once called 'an imaginative geography and history,' which helps the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatising the difference between what is close to it and what is far away (Said, *Orientalism*, p55). It 'has acquired an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel.' (Said, ibid.) Our belongingness to it constitutes what Benedict Anderson calls 'an imagined community.' To this Africa, which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can't literally go home again."

12 The Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) was a significant cultural phenomenon that emerged in London, England, and was active from about 1966 to 1972. Initiated by West Indian writers Edward Kamau Brathwaite, John La Rose, and An-

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drew Salkey, the movement focused on the work of Caribbean writers, visual artists, filmmakers, and performing artists.

13 In a sharp critique of the literary culture of the French-speaking Caribbean published a year after Condé's essay, theorist A. James Arnold provides a thorough delineation of the literary lineage that produced the rhetoric of créolité: "The créolité movement has inherited from its antecedents, antillanité and Negritude, a sharply gendered identity. Like them, it is not only masculine but masculinist. Like them, it permits only male talents to emerge within the movement, to carry its seal of approval. And, like them, it pushes literature written by women into the background. This characteristic is not, however, unique to the French West Indies. It can be found, mutatis mutandis, across the Caribbean archipelago" (1994, 5).

14 Davies and Fido likewise posit first-person narration as a direct counter to the phenomenon of women's voicelessness that preoccupies so many of the contributors to their volume of essays (it is worth noting that only two of the seventeen contributors to *Out of the Kumbla* are men).

15 Here, I am thinking of Valérie K. Orlando's "Writing New H(er)stories for Francophone Women of Africa and the Caribbean" (2001).

16 Edmondson also notes that the "formulations of a feminist aesthetics vary greatly among its advocates: the American school presupposes a specifically female consciousness in its reading of canonical and noncanonical female-authored works while the French school privileges formal and linguistic experimentation. Nevertheless, the premises on which the formulations are based are the same: namely, that an essentially female/feminist discourse exists or can be created" (1999, 85).

17 Expectations of textual-to-extratextual/character-to-reader community-building are bound to the phenomenon wherein "voice is celebrated as the means through which an alternative truth can emerge through spontaneous expression and replace the lies of dominant representations. By extension, the character in possession of a narrative voice in fiction is traditionally the one with whom the reader identifies and the one who consistently moves closer to an 'authentic' self as the story progresses. We expect the narrator to work toward achieving full autonomous subjectivity as she successfully bridges the gap between speech and thought, representation and emotion" (Mardorossian 2005, 19).

18 For an insightful and wide-ranging study of the trope of madness in anglophone Caribbean prose fiction, see Kelly Baker Josephs's *Disturbers of the Peace: Representations of Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (2013).

19 In "Narcissism as Ethical Practice? Foucault, Askesis and an Ethics of Becoming" and in "'Must We Burn Foucault?' Ethics as Art of Living: Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault," Elaine Campbell (2010) and Karen Vintges (2001), respectively, provide thorough accounts of the theorists who condemn Foucault's refusal of engagement as deeply unethical. Both Campbell and Vintges take issue with such characterizations of Foucault's

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philosophy, suggesting that his engagement with askesis—the practice of self-formation—and autobiographical impulse must be understood as, if not political, then humanist and ethical.

20 Feminist theorist Adriana Cavarero formulates this concept of obligatory interhuman empathy as follows: "To the experience for which the I is immediately . . . the self of her own narrating memory—there corresponds a perception of the other as the self of her own story" (2000, 34).

21 Paraphrasing Theodor Adorno's claims in his 1963 lectures, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Butler foregrounds the suspicions regarding community that I am arguing are at the philosophical core of the works I look at here. She evokes Adorno's concern "that the collective ethos . . . postulates a false unity that attempts to suppress the difficulty and discontinuity existing within any contemporary ethos" (2005, 4).

22 Foucault asserts that "with the Greeks and Romans . . . it was necessary to care for the self, both in order to know one's self and to improve one's self, to surpass one's self, to master the appetites that risk engulfing you" ([1984] 1987, 116). He continues, "Liberty is then in itself political. And then, it has a political model, in the measure where being free means not being a slave to one's self and to one's appetites, which supposes that one establishes over one's self a certain relation of domination, of mastery" (117).

23 Forbes builds her discussion around two novels, Jamaica Kincaid's *Mr. Potter* and Colin Channer's *Waiting in Vain*, of which neither protagonist is an "I" or a woman.

24 The works I consider do and do not accord with Donette Francis's concept of the "antiromance." While these narratives similarly counter many of the coercive tropes that mark the literature and cultures of the Americas, they do not share the explicit political project Francis convincingly identifies in the texts she places in this category. According to Francis, antiromances "seek to bond an imagined transnational community of Caribbean people wherever dispersed. These multiple iterations of intimate violence call forth a radical, Caribbean, feminist agenda to understandings of female sexual citizenship for the new millennium . . . a cohesive literary project." To the extent that the novels of my corpus fundamentally question communalist agendas, they fall somewhat outside of Francis's description of "a cooperative project for literary critics and social scientists as well as novelists and social activists" (2010, 22).

25 Here I am thinking of Teresa de Lauretis's contention that "a queer text carries the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex" (2011, 244).

26 I am referring here to Freud's assertion regarding humor as a strategy of self-defense wherein "the grandeur clearly lies in the *triumph of narcissism*, the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer" ([1927] 1957, 162; emphasis mine).

27 Here I mean to invoke Brent Hayes Edwards's and Stuart Hall's characterization of articulation as, respectively, "a process of linking or connecting across

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gaps" (Edwards 2003, 11) and "the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity" that permits "a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference" (Hall 1994, 402).

1. SELF-LOVE | Tituba

1 Translations of quotations from Condé's preface are mine.

2 Let it be noted that *Hérémakhonon* presents a self-regarding feminine refusal of masculine social and literary orders and would be fitting for inclusion within the corpus of this study. I find, however, that I have little to add to Curdella Forbes's masterful reading of the novel in her 2012 essay "Between Plot and Plantation, Trespass and Transgression: Caribbean Migratory Disobedience in Fiction and Internet Traffic."

3 In her compelling essay "Postmodernizing the Salem Witchcraze: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," Jane Moss qualifies Condé's novel as a "historiographic metafiction," a term she borrows from Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon. Paraphrasing Hutcheon, Moss describes the genre as one in which the author "lays claim to historical personages and events at the same time as it manifests a theoretical self-awareness of History and fiction as human constructs and questions historical discourse as a discourse of power (chs. 6–7)" (1999, 6). Moss goes on to argue, however, that the very premises of Condé's project are in fact misleading: "From 1692 on, Tituba does indeed figure in the historical record and also seems to have captured the imagination of some of our most prominent writers. . . . In short, Tituba is not the forgotten victim Condé makes her out to be" (9). To be clear, though, while Tituba's role in the witch trials has been documented by historians subsequent to the events of 1692, it is only in the fictional context that her post-Salem life—her historical future—has been imagined.

4 The cultural and political import of Puritanism, or the New England Protestant ethic, has been widely acknowledged by scholars, most famously by Sacvan Bercovitch, whose *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* convincingly "reveal[s] the complexity, the intricacy, the coherence, and the abiding significance of the American Puritan vision" (1975, ix). As the editors of the 2001 volume *The Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality, and National Identity in American Literature* assert plainly, "the view that American history and culture must be viewed in relation to the rhetoric, ideology, and culture of Puritan New England articulated by *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* has become a dominant critical paradigm" (Fessenden, Radel, and Zaborowska 2001, 3).

5 The "New England Way" refers to the principles of communal religious governance outlined in John Cotton's *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England* (1645), which was later retitled *The New England Way*. As Harry S. Stout has explained, "By locating power in the particular towns and defining institutions in terms of local covenants and mutual commitments . . . which combined economic and spiritual restraints, New England towns achieved extraordinarily high levels of persistence and social cohesion" (1986, 23).

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