Jamaica's Difficult Subjects
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INTRODUCTION

THE POLITICS OF SOVEREIGNTY IN POSTCOLONIAL WEST INDIAN LITERARY DISCOURSE

Two disparate moments of confusion bracket *Jamaica's Difficult Subjects*’ inquiry into the problems of sovereignty in the postemancipation, preindependence, postindependence, and postindependence present contexts as they are portrayed in Jamaican novels, creative nonfiction, and films from the 1960s to the present. The first is my personal experience of reading *John Crow's Devil* (2005) by Marlon James for the first time, and the second is the combination of events between August 2009 and June 2010 that led up to Christopher “Dudus” Coke’s extradition to the United States to answer charges of narcotics and weapons trafficking. On the surface, both events are united only in their late 2000s provenance. But nonetheless, each produced a multifaceted experience of confusion and dissonance that illuminated both the lingering problems of sovereignty in the Caribbean’s postcolonial present and the limitations in our critical ability to fully interpret and understand these problems. Though Caribbean writing continues to actively engage with the problems of sovereignty in the postcolonial present, these limitations make it difficult to fully interpret the oppositional and subversive priorities of more recent Caribbean writing. Taken together, my experience of reading a novel and the events surrounding Coke’s extradition inform this book’s position at a crossroad between the contemporary shifts in Caribbean literary discourses and those within parallel critical paradigms like postcolonial, diasporic, and queer discourses.
This introduction is organized into five sections that cumulatively make the case for shifts in our literary practices, as occasioned by contemporary texts and events. The first section traces the development of Caribbean writing in four waves, outlines how specific political impetuses during each wave facilitated consolidations and expansions in canon formation, and illustrates how the oppositional politics of each wave inadvertently elide some subjects and politics while validating and naturalizing others. The second section moves to a discussion of Coke’s extradition to define the contemporary problems of sovereignty that, like contemporary writing, cannot be understood within the identitarian terms of cultural nationalism through which the Caribbean literary tradition has thus far developed. It also explains how a disruption in the conflation of sovereignty and identity that occurs in Caribbean literary discourses can offer a methodology for deciphering the oppositional politics of fourth-wave writing. The third section takes up the questions of how a single-nation approach is productive in thinking about the relationship between identity politics and postcolonial problems of sovereignty and why I select Jamaica as the nation/case for this approach. Following chapter summaries in the fourth section, the introduction concludes by outlining how Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects’ analysis of shifts in literary practices according to the demand of a contemporary wave of writing is relevant to discourses beyond Jamaica and the Caribbean.

**John Crow’s Devil and Four Waves of Caribbean Writing**

The first time I read Marlon James’s novel *John Crow’s Devil*, I was so frustrated by the way it uncritically presented bestiality, pedophilia, and incest as norms of rural Caribbean life that I not only quarreled with the book out loud as I read but also threw it across the room when I finished it. I was confused by the novel’s antagonist, Lucas York/the Apostle, who used Christian rhetoric to incite an entire community to horrific acts of violence against each other. Even more perplexing, the novel uses a literal bout of syphilis to symbolically pathologize homosexuality and cast it as a predatory disease. At the time, my bewilderment meant I let the book stay on the ground where it fell after I threw it for portraying a Caribbean community in such seemingly

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irresponsible ways. The novel simply did not make sense within my established framework for reading postcolonial Caribbean literature. I could not understand it as serving any of the oppositional impetuses that have come to characterize Caribbean writing—anticolonialism, antiracism, antisexism, and antiheterosexism, for example—so I decided there was nothing useful in it and dismissed it as a narrative not worthy of my critical attention.

The visceral nature of my reaction to the novel nonetheless prompted some introspection about the many provocations of *John Crow’s Devil*, and I eventually concluded that what made me uncomfortable was that I could not easily approach James’s novel as a comprehensible allegory of community. Reading James’s novel heightened my consciousness of how my habits of reading West Indian literature are in keeping with Frederic Jameson’s controversial notion that “third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (Jameson 69). Despite criticisms of Jameson’s argument by postcolonial scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad, Caribbean fiction and, I would argue, the criticism produced in its wake evince what Roberto Strongman calls a “strong allegorical strain” that authors like James actively work against (Strongman). Since I could neither make allegorical sense of James’s dystopic vision of community nor reconcile my vision of the responsibilities of Caribbean literature with its disturbing satire, *John Crow’s Devil* must have gotten it wrong. Or not. Simply put, the novel forced me to reflect on the limitations in my critical practices. I had to acknowledge and begin to question my expectation that West Indian literature necessarily should serve the productive political purposes of fostering and edifying postcolonial Caribbean communities.

What follows thus proposes a seemingly simple but complicated set of questions: In the contemporary postcolonial context, should we as Caribbean literary critics still require literature (and its authors) to function in accordance with the political imperatives of cultural nationalism? What kind of reality and critical practices has this imperative purchased, and what kind of reality do we as critics and writers, today, now desire to purchase? The political milieu of the mid-twentieth century—when Caribbean literature and criticism is popularly understood as coalescing into a discrete field around anticolonial politics—demanded that literature be integral in establishing and fostering specific versions of community and politically sovereign identification. Writing at that historical conjuncture seemed necessarily concerned with creating the region’s own positive cultural resources for politically sovereign nation building from within the constraints of a colonial system. Contemporary novels like *John Crow’s Devil*, however, raise the question of what
happens to our ability to read critically if Caribbean narratives remain subject to the same interpretative paradigms installed by the political imperatives of the past. What have we missed in our adherence to the specific imaginative politics that define the developmental junctures in the history of West Indian writing?

In puzzling over these questions, I began to notice additional instances of thematic aberration or confusion in other novels published between the late 1990s and the present. Oonya Kempadoo’s *Tide Running* (2004), for example, troubles the traditionally raced, gendered, and geopolitical parameters of exploitation in its portrayal of a wealthy couples’ sexual affair with a poor black Tobagonian young man. That their ménage à trois is initiated by the wife (a mixed-race Trinidadian) who is indiscriminately indulged by her husband (a white Englishman) makes the novel difficult to interpret within the traditional terms of raced and gendered power, agency, and exploitation in Caribbean discourses. Likewise, Earl Lovelace’s *Is Just a Movie* (2012) has been described as absurdist in its portrayal of a Trinidadian black-power activist who shifts from one political movement to the next looking desperately for the recognition as a revolutionary and nation builder that he believes he desires. What are we to make of the narrator/poet/calypsonian being struck dumb at the same time that the PM is restructuring Trinidad, using buildings ordered from an Internet catalogue, tilting the savannah to face the sea, and piping in vapors of sadness from urban slums in lieu of fog? Kei Miller’s *The Last Warner Woman* (2012), meanwhile, literally takes the form of a struggle between the two protagonists, Adamine Bustamante and the mysterious Mr. Writer Man, to deliver the reader with the truth. Miller’s representation of the warner woman’s narrative as at odds with Mr. Writer Man’s narrative (and vice versa) symbolizes a conflict between writer and subject, which in turn conveys a disruption in how contemporary Caribbean writers perceive the work of literature and its representational role in relation to Caribbean subjectivities. I argue that these patterns of illegibility, perplexity, and challenge in contemporary Caribbean literature mark the emergence of a new wave of writing that deploys confusion or dissonance in relation to the traditional politics of Caribbean literature as a key formal strategy.

Interestingly, the meta- or counterpolitics of fourth-wave writing became clearer to me once I began to read more carefully significant characters, relationships, and themes from several classic novels across the history of Caribbean writing that have remained un- or underread critically. Important elements of classic Caribbean narratives, I will argue, have remained invisible or illegible in our literary and critical historiographies, because of an inability to comprehend them within the preferred set of political imperatives circu-
lating at the time of their appearance. What strides have we made in coming to terms with Isaac, the rapist in Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* (1962)? Furthermore, why does Elsa—Ivan’s domestic partner—in the film and novel versions of *The Harder They Come* (1972 and 1980, respectively) remain an underexplored figure, despite her instrumentality to the plot? Likewise, why does the critical treatment of the middle-class women’s testimonies in Sistren’s *Lionheart Gal* continue to reflect what Erna Brodber describes as “incomplete creolization,” despite these women’s cooperative work in the Sistren Theatre Collective (Brodber 73)? Is queer inclusion the only critical purchase of Patricia Powell’s *The Pagoda* and *A Small Gathering of Bones*, and what on earth are we to make of the sordid and prurient violence in Marlon James’s *John Crow’s Devil*?

Through questions like these, *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects* grew in its preoccupation with moments of difficulty or incomprehensibility across the Caribbean literary landscape. The selection of difficulty in my choice of material for this study is also informed by Alison Donnell’s selection of material from among the “awkward subjects” that were “deliberately difficult” in *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (10). Donnell’s impetus in studying works that “were almost unknowable to the frameworks and pathways that had then been established for reading Caribbean literature” offers a reconfiguration of West Indian literature’s canonical archive, with a goal of recovery (Donnell 11). The difficult subjects I cite above and examine in this study, however, are elided presences already *within* the Caribbean literary canon that Donnell’s work comprehensively expands. Thus, my focus here is not expanding the archive of texts and Caribbean subjects, but rather examining the terms within which particular subjects remain at the margins and are rendered unknowable, even in their capacities as major agents in texts that are definitive of significant moments in the development of the region’s literary tradition.

I begin by suggesting that we understand Caribbean literature since the mid-century as occurring in four identifiable waves. Methodologically, I describe Caribbean literary discourses as developing in waves not to suggest that these are mutually exclusive pockets of writing containing works that all do the same thing at the same time with no variation, but rather to highlight chronologically how various shifting political priorities throughout history are reflected in the priorities of literature and criticism and vice versa. Each wave is marked by distinct moments in the region’s history (postemancipation, preindependence, postindependence, and postindependence present), when specific politics governing the race, gender, or sexuality of citizen-subjects are put in the service of solving the problems of sovereignty. These shift-
ing strategies facilitated productive shifts in the formation of the West Indian literary tradition at each of these junctures.

They nonetheless also (inadvertently) consolidated or naturalized specific subjects or sets of political priorities as the most authentic representations of West Indian subjectivity. These consolidations around preferred senses of identity politics consequently rendered what didn't fit at each of these moments as illegible or difficult to interpret. Kamau Brathwaite's assertion of the impossibility of even a childhood friendship between Antoinette and Tia in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is an iconic example of this kind of illegibility. He contends in 1974 that “no matter what Jean Rhys might have made Antoinette think, Tia was historically separated from her” by the racist ideological barriers embedded in colonialization (*Contradictory Omens* 36). This interpretation occludes how the girls' short and contentious friendship is nonetheless instrumental in the escape Antoinette imagines from her husband's English house. Though the novel remains a consistent touchstone over the decades for discourses of raced and gendered West Indian subjectivity (Look Lai and Ramchand) and imperialism (Spivak), the collaborative possibilities inherent in Tia and Antoinette's relationship remain obscure.\(^2\)

Throughout this book, I identify similar moments of obscurity and illegibility—declared or not in criticism—as a potential framework for a methodology that can decipher the oppositional politics at work in the fourth wave of Caribbean writing.

While my attention to the history of Caribbean writing as it progresses across these waves is heavily reliant on a specific historiographical framework, this reliance is central because of the methodological approach to Caribbean texts that it enables. In practice, this book's historiographical approach to West Indian literary studies enables us to revisit moments when specific figures emerge and are naturalized as legitimate representatives of Caribbean identity, to limn the oppositional politics that work to install them as such, and to make more visible the alternative politics that also occur simultaneously—though less obviously—in the same moments. The most iconic of these naturalized representatives of West Indian identity, whose oppositional politics take center stage at particular historical junctures, include the educated (male) middle-class black nationalist in the first wave, the oppressed

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and disenfranchised black working-class rebel (predominantly male) in the second wave, and the displaced/dispossessed migrant (female and queer) of the third wave.

A merger between traditional and revisionist chronologies presents a comprehensive view of not only the constitution of the Caribbean literary canon but also the politics that have exerted influence on its formation and reformation over the last half century. In the 1960s, for example, anthologies such as Andrew Salkey’s *West Indian Stories* (1965), Kenneth Ramchand’s *West Indian Narrative: An Introduction* (1966), and Barbara Howe’s *From The Green Antilles* (1966) describe West Indian writing as emerging in 1950s London, defined by anticolonial sentiments, and exemplified in the work of a now-elite cadre of writers in exile. The names Naipaul, Selvon, and Lamming, for example, are consistently associated with this 1950s literary boom, with McKay, James, and De Lisser receiving intermittent mention as preboom outliers. As Alison Donnell’s and Belinda Edmondson’s work in particular reveals, however, situating the genesis of the Caribbean literary tradition at the mid-century boom among male writers in exile reveals a number of problematic contingencies underlying the way the history of West Indian writing is popularly presented. My attention to the challenges posed by revisionist historiographies to traditional ones is not meant to create an additional chronology of canon formation—this work has been already been done by others and done well—but instead to highlight the pivotal moments of canon formation and development as they occur at three different points in the region’s history, the ways specific identity politics are deployed within and around these moments, and the manner in which this process in turn conventionalizes specific subjects and paradigms while eliding others.

The first wave of West Indian writing, dated loosely between the 1930s and the 1960s, was in large part engrossed with agitating for and imagining political independence from British colonial rule. The ideals of the Victorian Man of Letters were central to early Caribbean writers’ efforts to articulate sovereignty through intellectual pursuits, in particular the mastery of Victorian literary conventions. First-wave Caribbean writers employed the formal elements of the Victorian literary tradition to explore the possibilities for sovereign subjectivity and nationhood within a colonized region. Though their visions of sovereign identity sometimes differed radically—Naipaul’s work in particular marked a departure from that of others—first-wave writing laid the foundation for a sustained relationship between writing and the politics of

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nation building in Caribbean literature. In discussing this first wave, my concern is twofold: how the contemporary priorities of authentic sovereign subject formation and anticolonial politics led to a literary history that imagines a tandem relationship between anticolonial resistance and political independence as the foundational ethos of Caribbean writing, and how this imagined tandem relationship consequently delinks the Caribbean literary tradition from anything in its literary past that does not suit these priorities.

For first-wave Caribbean writers, their own experiences as colonial subjects provided the fodder of identifying and defining West Indian subjectivity. George Lamming describes his series of interconnected essays in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) as a “report on one man’s way of seeing.” His “subject” is “the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero’s and his language” (13). Lamming’s “report” exemplifies not only the prominence of “exilic” perspectives in narrating West Indian subjectivity but also the autobiographical dimensions of first-wave writing. As Sandra Pouchet Paquet notes, for writers like Lamming—she also includes C. L. R. James, V. S. Naipaul, and Derek Walcott among such writers—“self-inquiry is self-imaging and self-evaluation, but it is also cultural assessment” (Paquet 359). Thus, “the autobiographical self as subject is transformed into cultural archetype,” illustrating the blending of self and collective consciousness in first-wave Caribbean writing (Paquet 359). First-wave writing is therefore preoccupied with finding and articulating an authentic West Indian consciousness to negotiate the colonials’ relationship to their island homes and their spaces as colonial subjects. In its negotiations of an indigenous sense of sovereign West Indian subjectivity, the first wave of writing solidifies the relationship between articulating self and articulating nation that continues to characterize practices of writing and reading Caribbean literature. Given these priorities, and their consolidation around the image of the writer, it is unsurprising that Sylvia Wynter’s portrayal of Isaac in *The Hills of Hebron*, as a young black aspiring writer who is alienated from his origins by his colonial education and ultimately rapes another man’s wife before escaping the island for exile in London, doesn’t garner much critical attention.

In the second wave of writing, which spans the period from the late 1960s into the 1970s, canon formation shifts and is complicated by the politics of decolonization as they are informed by the black nationalist and American civil rights movements, as well as regional civil unrest associated with dissatisfaction with the realities of political independence. The moment of

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4. Among the defining moments that mark this shift are the Rodney riots in 1968 and the
canon formation in the second wave that I am concerned with is the push for more collaboration between writers and critics, in part to bridge the gap between the metropolitan writer in exile and his distant home/subject that was fostered in the first wave. In 1967, Mervyn Morris notes that conditions for Caribbean writers might be improved “by offering intelligent critical interest in his work, and by enlarging and improving, through education, the local audience for his work” (Morris 129). For Edward Baugh in 1968, “the most meaningful gesture of respect which a society can make towards its writers is to accord their work a careful and rigorous criticism” (Baugh 140). Despite this common call for critics, however, what the late 1960s and early 1970s works of Kamau Brathwaite (compiled later into Contradictory Omens and the three-part “Love Axe”), Sylvia Wynter (“Little Culture” in two parts and “Creole Culture”), and Derek Walcott (“What the Twilight Says”) all convey is that the aesthetic constitution of the West Indian literary voice, as a decolonizing force, is heavily contested along the lines of language and race in particular. The rebellious country-come-to-town singer, Ivan, from the film and novel versions of The Harder They Come is one of the second wave’s iconic representative subjects. Ivan’s tragically thwarted aspirations towards not just personhood but fame have captivated and continue to captivate our critical attention as a source for thinking about raced and gendered subjectivity in discourses of decolonization. Ivan’s common-law wife Elsa has received less attention; indeed, critics rarely discuss her, except dismissively as the stereotypically rendered agent of Ivan’s demise. Stereotyping aside, Elsa nonetheless is also a differently compelling representation of sovereign self-actualization.

The third wave spans the decades between the 1980s and the end of the twentieth century and extends the preoccupation with the relationship between literary studies and decolonization and nation building. The moment of paradigm formation in this wave that is significant for Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects is when Caribbean women’s writing arrives at and begins to articulate its own critical moment in West Indian literary history in the early 1990s. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido’s Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature (1990) and Belinda Edmondson’s Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women’s Writing in Caribbean Narrative (1999) both exemplify how African diasporic aesthetic theories are positioned as interpretative frameworks for naturalizing specific tropes of Caribbean female subjectivity during the third wave of Caribbean writing.

return in the mid-sixties of several important figures, like Kamau Brathwaite, Sylvia Wynter, and John Hearne, to the Caribbean to take up academic positions at the University College of the West Indies.
The introduction to *Out of the Kumbla* begins by invoking the now-familiar and much-deployed declaration of the historical absence and voicelessness of the Caribbean woman writer:

The concept of voicelessness necessarily informs any discussion of Caribbean women and literature . . . By voicelessness, we mean the historical absence of the woman writer's text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonization, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social cultural issues. (1)

Edmondson develops more fully in *Making Men* the utility of black diasporic frameworks for expressing and interpreting the subjectivity of women writers who are believed to have no literary ancestors. She writes,

Many Caribbean female-authored texts and reading of those texts are inevitably refracted through the prism of African American feminist theory and narrative, which jointly have provided the only theoretical framework for the engenderment of the black female subject. (Edmondson, *Making Men* 102)

Thus, if the temporal linking of anticolonial movements to the 1950s boom in Caribbean writing established the sense that the region’s literature is a metropolitan product of an elite cohort of writers in exile, Caribbean women’s writing emerging from absence and silence in the 1970s saw the possibilities of engendering Caribbean female subjectivity as located elsewhere. Studies like *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* acknowledge that the women’s writing of the 1990s has a regional history of its own—as evidenced by the work of Jean Rhys and Una Marson, for example—but conclude “that history is still largely obscured and ignored” (Chancy xix).

Like Evelyn O’Callaghan’s *Woman’s Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*, Carolyn Cooper’s *Noises in the Blood: Orality and the “Vulgar” Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (1995) is among the studies that follow up on this insight by performing locally/regionally focused versions of the feminist theorization of Caribbean women’s writing. These studies move beyond those that rely on African diasporic theoretical paradigms for Caribbean women’s writing, expanding Caribbean feminist theorization to include regionally situated, creative vernacular, and nonblack voices. The third wave of writing is thus also marked by the revisionist work of critics like Alison Donnell who comprehensively challenge the specific politics of nationalism, resistance, oppression, and displacement that have gone into construct-
ing the Caribbean literary tradition since the early twentieth century. The archival and canonical expansions that are facilitated by critical studies like these, works which contest the conventionalization of preferred raced and geopolitical theoretical paradigms, are invaluable to *Jamaica's Difficult Subjects*’ retrospective examination of the Caribbean literary canon in similarly revisionist ways.

But while my study is influenced by such work, I am less interested in expanding the subjectivities included under the umbrella of Caribbean writing than in considering how we can frame an understanding of sovereignty by focusing on the relationships between subjects. As both Brodber and O’Callaghan suggest, the undertheorized space between women of different races reflects “incomplete creolization” and presents an opportunity to think more comprehensively about how postcolonial sovereignty is imagined in Caribbean contexts (Brodber 73). The fraught yet cooperative relationships between women of different races and classes in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Sistren’s *Lionheart Gal* trouble the raced and classed priorities of both Caribbean nationalisms and the Caribbean feminist tradition and identify the limitations such prioritizations impose on our understanding of postcolonial citizenship and subjectivity.

What distinguishes fourth-wave writing is its skeptical approach to the identity politics cultivated in previous waves. Rather than dismissing existing oppositional strategies as defunct, however—as has become common in contemporary literary criticism—fourth-wave writing seeks to reinhabit and rewrite the oppositional strategies that preceded it. On the surface, it remains preoccupied with sovereign Caribbean subjectivity and hardly deviates from themes circulating around the politics of colonialism, postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and (raced and/or cultural) nationalism. The process of negotiating persistent problems of racial, gender, and sexual equality within Caribbean nations likewise continues to feature centrally in the fourth wave. I argue that by reinhabiting the oppositional strategies of preceding waves, fourth-wave Caribbean writing draws attention to how the prioritization of identity politics in particular leads to ossification in literary practices. Such prioritization locks the oppositional possibilities of contemporary work in a circular pattern that simply reproduces an official or preferred script, rather than charting new territory. The—I argue staged—incomprehensibility of fourth-wave writing through these lenses both highlights the circularity of existing strategies for negotiating sovereignty and forces the creation of new strategies.

Beginning with the first wave, each chapter in *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects* offers readings, and in some cases rereadings, that go against the popular
critical paradigm of a work’s contemporary context, cumulatively building towards clarifying how deliberately complicating indices of identity becomes an oppositional strategy of fourth-wave writing. Again, this counterwork isn’t meant to be dismissive of existing critical paradigms, but is an attempt at uncovering what their naturalization around specific political impetuses may have elided. As I have already mentioned, there are excavatory dimensions here that find company with the archival and recovery work that Evelyn O’Callaghan does in *Woman Version* as well as with the projects of Donnell’s *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), Edmondson’s *Caribbean Middlebrow* (2009), and Lee-Loy’s *Searching for Mr. Chin* (2010).

Edmondson’s *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*, for example, combines retrospective glances with an examination of contemporary popular cultural trends in a study that disrupts a significant commonly held assumption regarding class in Caribbean culture. It is a long-standing critical conclusion that Caribbean culture is split between an elite European-rooted highbrow culture and an authentic working-class lowbrow culture, with no middle culture. Edmondson’s historiographical analysis spans the nineteenth century into the twenty-first century to debunk this notion through an examination of popular magazines, periodicals, novels, beauty pageants, and musical festivals. *Caribbean Middlebrow* articulates a continuum of the creation, maintenance, and consumption of popular cultural commodities, marketed for middle-class consumption, providing a much-needed corrective to a longstanding assumption about Anglophone Caribbean class and culture: the middle-class, long believed to have no culture of its own imagining, has indeed been producing and consuming its own cultural products since the nineteenth century. Where Edmondson’s study articulates the genealogy of a creative middle-class culture, Ann-Marie Lee-Loy’s *Searching for Mr. Chin: Constructions of Nation and the Chinese in West Indian Literature* (2010) tackles another significant though marginally represented group in Caribbean discourse. Lee-Loy’s study focuses on “Chineseness” in the Anglophone Caribbean and the ambiguous and unstable space offered to predominantly male Chinese shopkeepers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Searching for Mr. Chin* joins the growing discourses on Asian experiences in the Caribbean, as the first book-length literary study of “Chineseness” in the West Indies. If Edmondson focuses specifically on middle-class leisure culture and Lee-Loy on the marginal representations of the Chinese man in Caribbean discourses, Alison Donnell’s study, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (2006), offers a more comprehensive view of twentieth-century Caribbean literature in general. This study presents a supplement to the existing historicization of
Caribbean literature and criticism by suggesting new and excluded writers, texts, and critical moments that help to reconfigure the Caribbean literary tradition. *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* presents alternative critical approaches and alternative critical moments, which allow us to revise how we have read Caribbean writing as well as the history and criticism that surrounds it.

These studies identify and challenge a range of paradigmatic settlements in the Caribbean literary canon in favor of seeing the literary tradition as “moveable, divergent, and unruly” (Donnell 1) and promoting the “‘loosening up’ of static confrontational models of representation” (O’Callaghan 12). Though *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects* is also preoccupied with “unsettling the settled settlements” in our critical practices, as David Scott suggests in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality*, its recovery of characters like Elsa and Isaac doesn’t seek to recuperate them into a common heterogeneity but instead privileges their outlier statuses and the insights their recovery provides for understanding diverse subjectivities in the postcolonial present (Scott 204). I suggest that it is through understanding complex relationships between these difficult subjects and their respective communities—both their adherences and resistances—that we can open up a space for approaching, defining, and understanding the dissonance and confusion in fourth-wave texts’ representations of problems of sovereignty in the postcolonial present.

**Dudus and Competing Sovereignties**

The incidents leading up to Coke’s arrest and extradition raise concerns about sovereign Jamaican citizenship in and out of Jamaica and the rights of politically sovereign Caribbean nations to protect the rights of their citizens in local and global arenas, providing yet another impetus to rethink our nation-based understanding of Caribbean sovereignty. On Monday, May 24, 2010, a joint military and constabulary security force launched an operation in Western Kingston to serve an arrest warrant on then-alleged drug kingpin Christopher “Dudus” Coke. Nine months prior, in August 2009, the United States had requested Coke’s extradition on charges of conspiracy to transport illegal narcotics into the United States and trafficking in illegal firearms. Coke’s indictment, issued by the U.S. Southern District of New York, alleged that since 1994, members of the notorious “Shower Posse” gang had trafficked illegal narcotics into the United States at Coke’s direction, shared proceeds of their sales with him, and also used these proceeds to provide economic support to depressed communities in Jamaica’s inner cities. These philanthropic gestures
had gained Coke his West Kingston community’s loyalty and the moniker “the President.” Despite the fact that Coke was ranked by the U.S. State Department among the most dangerous weapons and narcotics traffickers in the world, the Jamaican government for nine months resisted the United States’ request for his extradition to answer these charges, contending “that certain aspects of the request breached Jamaican laws and treaties” (George).5

The sustained noncompliance with the United States’ request was public knowledge, and over the course of nine months there was significant media comment on Coke’s alleged leadership of the “Shower Posse” and his reputed affiliation with the then-ruling Jamaica Labor Party (JLP). Between 1962 and 1972, the JLP developed Western Kingston, with Tivoli Gardens, Jamaica’s first government housing project, at its center. The JLP has always represented West Kingston in Jamaica’s parliament, and Coke had controlled the volatile Tivoli Gardens community since the early 1990s. The longstanding relationship between the community and the then-ruling JLP, along with Coke’s own standing as area leader or don (in popular Jamaican parlance) were coincidental enough to fuel widespread speculation and conspiracy theories that the Jamaican government was trying to protect Coke from extradition.6 After mounting pressure from the opposition and civil society, however, on May 18, 2010, the government finally signed the extradition request and issued Coke’s arrest warrant. Following the official announcement, thousands of Tivoli Gardens residents protested in Kingston, declaring: “He is next to God” and “Jesus died for us. We will die for Dudus.” Such sworn allegiance to Coke, and the violence that punctuated his arrest, indicates the power and control he wielded as a leader and caretaker in the Tivoli Gardens community, functioning oftentimes as a proxy government that controlled what appeared to be a sovereign state within a sovereign state. Once the Authority to Proceed with serving Coke’s arrest warrant was signed, gunmen fortified Tivoli Gardens, launched fire-bomb attacks on police stations in West Kingston, and sustained an armed resistance to the security forces’ attempt to arrest “the President.” Despite this resistance, Coke was finally apprehended and extradited without contest almost a month later on June 22, 2010.8

6. In September 2011, the then prime minister and leader of the JLP resigned as prime minister and party leader—a decision widely touted as being informed by the handling (some would say mismanagement) of the “Dudus” affair on the part of the Golding administration.
8. For an additional account of the events surrounding Coke’s extradition, see Mattathias
I recall this moment of intersecting local and international politics that resulted in the deaths of seventy-four Jamaican citizens, alongside my first reading of *John Crow’s Devil*, as retrospective starting points for asking questions about how postcolonial sovereignty is imagined in contemporary Caribbean discourses. What does it mean for the nation when a community acts in contravention to national security as a whole in order to protect itself—essentially against national security forces? What circumstances create a situation in which one community disrupts national security in order to protect its own internal sovereignty? Given the established relationship between Caribbean literary discourses and regional politics, what do literary and cultural texts offer us for understanding this incident and the actions of all involved, locally and internationally?

Because the legacies of colonization, slavery, and indentureship persist in the region almost two centuries after the Emancipation Act of 1834, and fifty years since the granting of political independence, Caribbean nations continue to face internal challenges to their sovereign existence amidst the liberalizing currents of global capitalism. Since the inception of Caribbean literary studies as a discrete field in the decades between the 1930s and 1980s, versions of identity politics informed by race, gender, class, and sexuality have remained central to how Caribbean literary and cultural critics think about the possibilities for regional sovereignty. Over the course of half a century, the achievement of identity—usually a raced national identity—has become conflated with the achievement of sovereignty. The historical trajectory of Caribbean literary discourses demonstrates this conflation in the establishment of specific identity theories as orthodoxy across the first three waves of West Indian literary discourses.

IDENTITY AS SOVEREIGNTY AND THE CRISIS OF THE POSTCOLONIAL PRESENT

My reading of difficult subjects across Caribbean literary history focuses on the politics which at each historical juncture render them difficult. Ultimately, I aim to construct a lineage between these difficult subjects and the more general dissonance and confusion of contemporary writing in order to help us begin to define the oppositional politics that informs this incomprehensibility. A key strategy in doing this is unsettling the traditional conflation of identity

and sovereignty in order to recover sovereignty as a concept that is separate from the politics of identity still predominant in Caribbean discourses. I see this disruption as a first step towards recognizing and interpreting the oppositional politics of not only fourth-wave writers like James but also the difficult subjects in the works preceding his.

Throughout this study, I use sovereignty in reference to both individual autonomy at a personal level and emancipation, enfranchisement, independence, and self-government at the political level. The term “sovereignty,” in this way, allows me to focus directly on individual subjects, agents, or acts of agency and to interpret them in relation to what is conventional. Theories of sovereignty as proferred by Sylvia Wynter and George Lamming in particular are pivotal to my use of sovereignty here, because they encompass understandings of both the challenges that continue to plague postcolonial Caribbean realities and the urgency of the disruption I attempt to make between identity and sovereignty in Caribbean discourses. This disruption is not intended to undermine or be dismissive of the gains in collective social and political consciousness that have been achieved by the work this project calls identitarian theory. Indeed, the body of work on black nationalist, cultural nationalist, and feminist theories that precede this book enables a project like mine that seeks to supplement these discourses. Throughout, however, I am interested in the ways that literary works might, intentionally or not, go beyond the bounds of “good” politics via the representation and exploration of difficult subjects.

Sylvia Wynter’s notion of ontological sovereignty is critical to this project because it associates the challenges of sovereignty faced in colonial and postcolonial contexts with how much we know about the challenges posed to our notions of being. The sovereignty of being has always been a central struggle for the Caribbean region, not the least because of colonization and the way it bolstered the sublimating capacity of European Enlightenment discourses. Ontological sovereignty requires direct confrontation with such compromising sublimations. Identities rooted in alternate cultural heritages (often African) are posited throughout Caribbean discourses as significant tools of such confrontation. Wynter tells David Scott in a 2000 interview, however, that ontological sovereignty remains a challenge for the region. She notes: “We know about economic sovereignty . . . We do not know about something called ontological sovereignty” (Scott, “The Re-Enchantment” 136). While the political and economic implications of self-governance are obvious and known to postcolonial subjects, knowledge, power, and control over our sense of being is still under negotiation. In order to “speak” ontological sovereignty, an admittedly complex concept, “we would have to move completely outside
our present conception of what it is to be human, and therefore outside the
ground of the orthodox body of knowledge which institutes and reproduces
such a conception” (“The Re-Enchantment” 136). In the context of this inter-
view with Scott, the “orthodox body of knowledge which instituted such a
conception” of what it is to be human is installed by the secular humanism
of Enlightenment philosophy. Today, there is little over half a century’s worth
of Caribbean literary and cultural theory that I would argue now itself con-
stitutes an “orthodox body of knowledge” of its own, one which contributes
significantly to what it means at the current (postcolonial) historical juncture
to be human and West Indian.⁹

For George Lamming, the business of sovereignty in the Caribbean
also remains a fraught and highly contested undertaking internally (intra-
regionally and within individual nation-states) and externally (intra-island
and globally). The Caribbean region, Lamming writes in 2004,

has been staggering slowly and painfully to resolve the contradiction of
being at once independent and neocolonial, struggling through new de-
initions of itself, to abandon the protection of being a frontier created by
nature, a logistical basin serving some imperial necessity, struggling to
move away from being a regional platform for alien enterprise to the status
of being a region for itself, with sovereign right to define its own reality and
define its own priorities. (The Sovereignty of the Imagination 9)

The region’s specific blend of history, geography, economics, and politics
makes sovereignty a significant challenge for its nations. The contradiction
of being “at once independent and neocolonial” in the aftermath of centu-
ries of colonial control and the present reality of neocolonial control is at the
crux of many of the region’s difficulties with “the sovereign right to define its
own reality and define its own priorities.” Continued growth and expansion
in the body of work that is postcolonial discourse illustrates that the grant-
ing of political independence from colonial authority is only the beginning
of decolonization and sovereign existence. My argument combines Wynter’s
notion of the sovereignty of being that is attainable by moving outside ortho-
dox bodies of knowledge with Lamming’s notion of sovereignty as the ability

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⁹ A parallel to this notion of disrupting orthodoxies might be found in Michelle Row-
ley’s discussion of Caribbean feminists’ engagement with the limitations imposed by the term
“gender” on modern Caribbean politics—social justice in particular—because of the term’s
contradictory relationship to the liberal humanist tradition. See Michelle Rowley, “Whose
Time Is It? Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Advocacy,” Small
to “work toward an environment which could manage stability as a state of creative conflict” (Lamming, The Sovereignty of the Imagination 36).

In its embodiment of a combined acknowledgment of movement beyond orthodox bodies of knowledge, Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects deploys sovereignty as an index for analysis that can broaden our existing critical frames into the relationships between the diverse raced, classed, and gendered subjects in Caribbean citizenries. Evelyn O’Callaghan employs a similar gesture in her approach to West Indian fiction by women in Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women. Her defense of “outsiders’ voices” is an instructive account of how West Indian literature’s perennial concern with specific kinds of identity inevitably excludes some, considers others as failures, and consequently frames readings of Caribbean subjectivity in narrow ways.

In her readings of Jean Rhys, Eliot Bliss, and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, O’Callaghan employs Dick Hebdige’s conception of versioning as a methodology for “attending to the dynamic of interrelating sources and influences” in conceiving the West Indian voice (O’Callaghan 13). O’Callaghan’s discussion of nineteenth-century white women writers points to the ways their writing mutually reflected the lives of black and white women. While I push back against gestures of inclusivity here, O’Callaghan’s impulse to read these women and their writing beyond their relegation to the fringes, for what they reveal about interrelationality as characteristically West Indian, opens up new methodologies for reading Caribbean writing generally and writing by women in particular. Nonetheless I’d like to shift the critical endgame away from inclusion. If our critical impulse isn’t to recoup or include, but rather to understand how agents interrelate, what new frameworks become available for understanding the oppositional politics of contemporary West Indian realities?

In a special issue of Social Text titled Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender, Phillip Brian Harper and colleagues suggest a similar course of action for contemporary social analysis and cultural criticism:

By considering the interrelations of sexuality, race, and gender in a transnational context, [Queer Transexions] attempts to bring projects of queer, postcolonial, and critical race theories together with each other and with a feminist analytic that itself has been a key factor in the critique of social identity. (1)

Queer theoretical interpretive practices offer a useful model for resisting critical impulses to recover marginalized identities for the sake of inclusion, and for seeing how contemporary writing also resists this urge. The eschewing of
definition that is at the heart of queer studies in particular is instrumental to this project’s shift from individual identitarian theoretical practices to peering in between subjects at their relationships and what these in turn reveal about their realities of sovereignty. Queer theory’s “constituent characteristics” are its “definitional intermediacy,” according to Annamarie Jagose, and as such it provides an apt model for thinking about the spaces between identity that are examined relationally in this book (Jagose 1). My impulse, like that of queer theorists, is to challenge the visions of subjectivity naturalized by various forms of identity politics and focus instead on the ways these visions provide unstable, contradictory, and incomplete renderings of sovereign subjectivity in the postcolonial present. The methodology that I outline in this book neither displaces nor forces notions of identity into redundancy, but instead queries the field of identity politics to challenge the fixity of such politics.

Present-day events like the Tivoli incursion and Christopher “Dudus” Coke’s extradition convey how problems of sovereignty reside not only with citizens of a particular state but also in the state’s ability to govern its populace according to a single vision of national citizenship. In Jamaica, decades of political predation andclientelism, along with structural adjustment programs imposed by multilateral lending agencies, have stimulated the economic neglect of impoverished communities by local government, leaving these communities vulnerable to those who offer to provide extra-governmental communal order, as is the case with Coke and Tivoli Gardens. But does this sufficiently explain a community’s reliance on a weapons and narcotics kingpin and an armed incursion by the state’s security forces, at the behest of the U.S., to remove him? My inquiry throughout this book suggests that interpreting contemporary literature necessarily involves engaging with present-day understandings of sovereignty, and that we can locate strategies for understanding current expressions of sovereignty, particularly in moments of crisis, by looking at similar unconventional responses to crises in the literary past.

THE CRISIS OF THE POSTCOLONIAL PRESENT

In Refashioning Futures, David Scott insists that it is critical to understand the current moment as one of crisis and to adjust our practices of postcolonial theorizing accordingly. Scott identifies a fundamental crisis in the Third World in which the very coherence of the secular-modern project—with its assurance of progressive social-economic development, with its dependence upon the organizational form of
the nation-state, with its sense of the privilege of representative democracy and competitive elections, and so on—can no longer be taken for granted. (14–15)

Because the coherence of this specific imagining of postcolonial realities in Third World nation-states can no longer be taken for granted, “this crisis ushers in a new problem-space and produces a new demand on postcolonial criticism” (Refashioning Futures 15). As the “Dudus” affair shows, this “new problem space” reflects an internal depletion of the mid-twentieth-century vision of national subjectivity and the perceived threat posed by various constituencies of indifferent postcolonial subjects now affiliated with the global economy as much as or more than with cultural nationalism.

Foundational studies like Rex Nettleford’s Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica (1970) and Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica (1980), as well as more recent works such as Deborah Thomas’s Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica (2004) outline how the project of mid-twentieth-century Jamaican nationalism pursued the establishment of a common identity that signified consensus among the pluralities of the Jamaican population, organizing the country around a single vision of national citizenship designed to help usher in political independence. As these studies show, despite an ethos of egalitarianism and unification, middle-class values of Christian conservatism and heteronormative propriety heavily informed the official notion of Jamaican national citizenship. Official national designations of “citizen” inevitably carry with them a mark of belonging that can be inaccessible or even unattractive to some, particularly members of the working class and those who are nonheteronormatively identified. As such, the process involved in consolidating official national identities problematically reproduces hierarchies and exclusions reminiscent of the colonial period in politically independent contexts.

In Jamaica, the exclusionary politics of the official national identity also meant dire economic consequences for some citizens, particularly those of the working class. Advanced educational opportunities were limited, and where they existed, employment opportunities for the working poor were in large part menial. As such, throughout the late twentieth century, informal (and sometimes illegal) economic ventures flourished in impoverished communities. Participation in these informal economic ventures allowed those alienated from official notions of nationalism and neglected because of austere economic policies to insert themselves into legal and illegal markets beyond the control of the state. The viability of informal economies (particularly those
circulating around popular musical culture) created autonomy among members of the once dispossessed and alienated working class. Existing alongside values of Christian conservatism, sexual propriety, responsibility, and civic decency and decorum, there is the value of the dollar, which can render the excluded or neglected no longer alienated from official notions of national citizenship and subjectivity, but as David Scott suggests, “indifferent to them” (Scott, Refashioning Futures 194; Scott’s emphasis).

Deborah Thomas, though not on board with the wholesale pronouncement of this indifference as a crisis, coins the term “modern blackness” to describe it. According to Thomas, “Modern blackness is a subaltern aesthetic and politics from which to make claims upon the earlier forms of nationalism that gained state power in Jamaica . . . modern blackness and creole multiculturalism are always side by side, jockeying for a position” (13). Bearing this jockeying in mind, Thomas encourages us to be more precise in our thinking about for whom the “ascendance of modern blackness within the public sphere” constitutes a crisis (13). Indeed, “modern blackness itself constitutes a crisis only for the maintenance of a particular color, class, gender, and culture nexus that reproduces colonial relations of power and hierarchies of value” (13). The recognition of coincidence in the declining dominance of creole multiracial nationalism and the increasing economic mobility of modern blackness, however, is nonetheless a watershed moment in thinking about sovereignty in the Caribbean, regardless of who exactly experiences it as a crisis. The various responses to Coke’s arrest and extradition attest to the depletion of Jamaican cultural nationalism as an authoritative orthodoxy of communal identification and organization. It is also indicative of the necessity for a shift in how Caribbean discourses account for acts of sovereignty in the postcolonial present.

This tense context of internationally influenced economic and political crisis provides the occasion for this book’s analysis of postcolonial Jamaican literary and cultural discourses. Throughout, I reference this postcolonial moment of crisis, as it is defined by social scientists like David Scott and Brian Meeks, critiqued by Thomas’s theory of modern blackness, and illustrated by the incidents surrounding Coke’s extradition, to consider what has come to constitute a postcolonial orthodoxy for subjectivity and citizenship in Caribbean discourses. I argue, for example, that nationalism’s impulse to organize diverse citizenries into a homogeny structured by space, race, gender, class, and sexuality installs orthodoxies of privileged identities reminiscent of colonialism. I suggest that these orthodoxies also infiltrate our literary practices and complicate our ability to interpret what falls outside of them. Central here is the relationship between the crisis of the postcolonial present, sustained
problems of sovereignty, and the ability of contemporary literary discourses to make sense of this relationship.

I do not foreground this crisis to join the chorus that heralds the end or irrelevance of nationalism. Like Shalini Puri, Robert J. C. Young and others, I am hesitant to pronounce the death of any concept or paradigm that continues to make a variety of inequities between the First and Third Worlds or the enfranchised and disenfranchised more visible. I concur with Puri’s assertions that in the global village “space is not being collapsed; it is being reorganized,” and that the term “global village” itself “projects a false notion of inclusive community and international equality . . . [and] represses the pivotal point of conjunction and mediation between the global and the local: the nation state” (Puri 9). To properly critique the functioning of nation—especially within the inequities produced by neo-liberally fueled globalization—the nation as an organizing entity must remain visible because it maintains the visibility of inequities between the First and Third Worlds, or developed and developing nations. Maintaining the visibility of nation as a concept for organizing sovereign subjectivity, I argue, isn’t undone by internally critiquing how nations define themselves. I do, however, evoke the problems with our critical model to make a case for new politics that are fully conscious of the drawbacks of cultural nationalism as the primary strategy for achieving sovereignty.

The crisis of the postcolonial present, where cultural nationalisms are depleted and internally competing citizenries contest the stability of such imaginings of collectivity, heralds a temporal conjuncture where our models of criticism can either install another dominant identitarian orthodoxy or attempt to enact a different kind of shift. A number of recent studies have similarly responded to this conjuncture in ways that shift the discourses from identitarian orthodoxy and seek alternate terms for imagining West Indian subjectivity across the region. Among the most recent of these are Donette Francis’s *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature* (2010), Raphael Dalleo’s *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* (2011), and Faith Smith’s edited collection *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (2011). Francis’s study charts an alternative history of racial and sexual formation in the Caribbean by exploring the forms of the anti-romance that appear in Caribbean women’s writing. Dalleo combines anglophone, francophone, and hispanophone Caribbean studies to construct a literary archive that comprehensively presents a new set of

possibilities for imagining writers’ relationship to their public spheres. Dalleo’s final chapters also “detail the sense of crisis over literature’s public role” in our current postcolonial moment (17). Smith’s multi-authored interdisciplinary volume simultaneously speaks from within and challenges the assumptions of feminism, literary and cultural studies, and queer studies; explores the contradictions inherent in conceiving of the Caribbean as a backward, homophobic, tourist paradise; and addresses the regional purchase of equating postcolonial sovereignty with heterosexual citizenship.

This relationship between literature, the wide-ranging constitution of Caribbean public spheres, and the conceptualization of citizenship via sexuality regionally and internationally is also central to Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects, which in turn approaches this relationship through the lens of sovereignty in a specific nation space in ways that foreground illegibility in order to bypass the conventionalization of identity politics. Amidst this discussion of shifts, prompted by contemporary moments of crises, Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects presents illegibility as an opportunity to ask by what means, practices, and modes our current reality of postcolonial subjectivity is shaped. It suggests that this shift could bring about a critical yield that isn’t defined by (or confined within) quarrels about exclusions, but rather raises new questions about plural forms of community that already exist in Caribbean nation states. Rather than installing a new point of orthodox identification around which a collective plurality can or should organize itself, the goal of this study is to use the specificity offered by a single nation space to explore what David Scott calls “different ways of being-in-common” (Refashioning Futures 220).

The Case of Jamaica

While the introduction has thus far engaged with the historiography of Caribbean literary discourses generally, it is not a coincidence that both framing moments center on Jamaica. That the texts studied here are predominantly preoccupied with Jamaica is instrumental in theorizing in specific and focused ways on the problems of sovereignty within a developing, politically independent, and increasingly globalized Caribbean region. It does this deliberately to suggest both that West Indian countries have a common history of colonization and share problems of sovereignty as a result and that they have developed as independent nations in distinct ways, and there are nuanced insights to be gained from individual consideration. In essence, what I present is a case study of sorts that queries what becomes available for thinking about how community is imagined, organized, and policed in the postcolonial
Caribbean. I argue that looking at a single country offers a usefully concrete but ultimately generalizable model for thinking about internally competing notions of subjectivity, community, and nation in the contemporary Caribbean. That said, many of my texts occasionally extend—in authorship, in setting, in theme—beyond Jamaica, and that too is part of the story they tell.

This singular focus also facilitates a locally anchored contribution to how we negotiate the fissures between local and metropolitan or settler and migrant that have characterized Caribbean discourse since its inception in the early twentieth century. “Locatedness,” as Alison Donnell argues—specifically in reference to Olive Senior’s work—“enables us to think about the diaspora paradigm in new and interesting ways” (Donnell 95). Furthermore, “the nation is not the opposite of transnational” (Donnell 95). The locatedness of a singular national frame of reference prioritizes an inward focus on the problems of sovereignty within a developing, politically independent, and increasingly globalized Caribbean state, but as I also insist, it does not stymie looking outward. For example, we may never see where Isaac in Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* ends up after he leaves Jamaica, but the fact of his leaving, the circumstances that lead up to it, and the consequences for the people he leaves behind all contribute to the complex vision of individual subjectivity, community, and self-sustainability that Wynter’s novel conveys. In this way, the self-exile of the rapist and symbol of middle-class, educated black nationalism presents a specific context for reflecting comprehensively on the politics surrounding how common community is imagined between those who feel compelled to leave and those who remain (and in the nonfictional cases of Sylvia Wynter and E. K. Brathwaite, those who eventually returned).

Moreover, Jamaica has long functioned as a metonymic trope for the Caribbean, and more generally, this makes it a well-suited iconic space for constructing theories of postcolonial sovereignty that privilege locatedness. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, for example, that Bertha Mason is from Spanish Town doesn’t qualify her Jamaicanness per se (as a national construct this did not yet exist), but instead qualifies her West Indian otherness in relation to Jane. This otherness is signified by the popular recognizability of Spanish Town as a prosperous British colonial outpost. Indeed, it is Jean Rhys’s engagement with Brontë’s depictions of West Indian otherness via the West Indian heiress from “Spanish Town” that in part explains *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s inclusion in this study.

Jamaica maintains versions of this tropic iconicity across the history of colonization and postcolonization, as Patricia Saunders confirms: “Jamaica, in particular, has become a trope for the entire region, a signifier that is both loaded and empty” (Saunders, “Buyers Beware” 22). Like Saunders, I am not
concerned with disputing the accuracy of this kind of encompassing signification. Countless recent transnationally focused Caribbean studies have worked tirelessly to define the terms within which we can and cannot generalize about the region (Page, Francis, Smith, and Dalleo, for example). What I attempt here is to harness what becomes possible for investigating the internal and external dynamics that inform expressions of sovereignty within increasingly globalized, developing, and internally competitive Caribbean states through the specificity of Jamaica's tropic representations.

Finally, at each of the four historical junctures explored here (preindependence, independence, postcolonial, post-postcolonial), Jamaica maintains a prominent position among the discordant literary contexts out of which the shifts characteristic of each wave of writing occur. Civil and social unrest regionally run consistently parallel to canon-forming paradigm shifts in Caribbean literary discourses, from the 1930s labor riots to the 2010 Tivoli incursion. To be clear, my use of Jamaica as the context for this investigation is not an elevation of Jamaica above other Caribbean nations, nor is it an endorsement of nationalism as a framework for Caribbean citizenships to achieve and maintain sovereign senses of subjectivity. Instead, I take advantage of Jamaica's historically preceded iconicity as a tropic representation of the region and use it as a focused point of entry into critiquing the centrality of cultural nationalism to Caribbean states in general. Such an investigation, I propose, in turn makes more legible other expressions of sovereign subjectivity that are illegible within frameworks that privilege cultural nationalism.

**Jamaica's Difficult Subjects by Chapters**

The demands that criticism in the postcolonial present must meet have changed because the realities we explore have changed. Our present is altered by additional historical events, which are not restricted to slavery, emancipation, and independence. We have seen the collapse of the democratic socialist experiments in the Third World and socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and we have also seen the resurgence of a more victorious sense of liberalism’s claim as our only possible framework for a successfully sovereign future. Who we are as a region of independent nations at this current historical conjuncture is different from who we were at emancipation or independence, and therefore the adoption of new models of critical practice is necessary. *John Crow's Devil* is among a new cohort of novels written in the twenty-first century that challenge the ways we read West Indian litera-
ture and reflect how the demands criticism must meet have changed. What I outline in this book are examples of subjects that are difficult for our existing critical practices and that thus require similar shifts in our critical practices. Ultimately, I offer a model of critical practices that will enable us to make sense of narratives like James’s within the context of the political imperatives of our present postcolonial reality and that will also reveal a prehistory of such narratives in the existing canon. To do this, each chapter peers into critical elisions to critique postcolonial discourses that equate sovereignty with identity. This book is preoccupied with the ways criticism in the contemporary postcolonial context often remains exclusively engaged with questions of emancipation, anticolonization, decolonization, and cultural nationalism through the vectors of race, gender, and/or sexuality. It questions whether the identitarian focus of these questions continues to yield answers that are useful in our contemporary context. If freedom was the demand of emancipation, political independence the demand of anticolonization, and inclusive cultural nationalism the demand of postcolonization, this book reads Jamaican texts to begin the work of defining the critical demands of the post-postcolonial Caribbean present.

The texts that Jamaica's Difficult Subjects examines portray characters and contexts that pose challenges to established traditions of literary criticism because they feature difficult subjects that disrupt essentialized notions of identity as automatically equivalent to sovereignty. I ask, for example, what can the products of sexual violence in Sylvia Wynter’s only novel, The Hills of Hebron, tell us about the possibilities of a plural sovereign reality? What can Elsa from the film and novel versions of The Harder They Come tell us about unconventional forms of gendered self-actualization in postcolonial contexts? Likewise, what does the critical silence surrounding the testimonies authored by middle-class women in Sistren’s Lionheart Gal and Jean Rhys’s continued unsettled positioning in the West Indian literary canon tell us about the rhetorical capabilities of our existing critical discourses? How do Patricia Powell’s The Pagoda and A Small Gathering of Bones and Marlon James’s John Crow’s Devil complicate queer politics of inclusion? What do these texts have to tell us about the possibilities of different kinds of sovereignty in postcolonial Caribbean communities, which are not defined solely by national identification? I structure my answers to these questions into four chapters, each of which tackles how texts are read according to the political imperatives of a particular historical juncture (colonization, independence, the postcolonial period, and the post-postcolonial period) and offers an analysis of their imagination of plural and sovereign citizenship that considers, but ulti-
mately moves beyond the raced, gendered, or heteronormative constraints of national identification.

Chapter one analyzes Sylvia Wynter’s novel *The Hills of Hebron* to seek a path beyond the impasse between nationalism and feminism that preoccupies much of the critical attention paid to Wynter’s only novel. Despite being primarily read within the terms of this impasse for decades, Wynter’s novel offers a potential means out of it. I argue that the novel’s depiction of sexual relationships across racial and heteronormative lines challenges the raced and gendered priorities of existing postcolonial critical discourse and presents a more useful way of exploring the problems of sovereignty and the processes of creating sovereign selves and communities in postemancipation contexts. I thus foreground the relationship among the characters Obadiah, his wife Rose, and her rapist Isaac to propose a relational theory that exemplifies how a shift in critical focus from the politics of identity to the relationships between actors, without the goal of celebrating or recovering a single preferred identification, may bring us closer to addressing some of the problems of sovereignty that remain from colonial times, as well as new ones formed in postcolonial contexts.

Where chapter one articulates how a critical focus on identity as sovereignty elides *The Hills of Hebron’s* depiction of more plural possibilities for sovereignty through the characters’ sexual interaction, chapters two and three both focus on the watershed decade of the 1970s and its impact on the ability to read and articulate postcolonial subaltern plurality. This pivotal decade saw the flowering of national identity built on popular cultural (black) nationalism, but it also paradoxically saw the deepening of fissures created by longstanding power imbalances, which ultimately undermined the project of a single sense of national unity and identification as the solution to problems of sovereignty. Chapter two considers Michael Thelwell’s novelization of Perry Henzell and Trevor Rhone’s film *The Harder They Come,* asking a question that is simple only on the surface: Why is the male protagonist’s common law wife all but dismissed in accounts of both the film and the novel? The 1972 film *The Harder They Come* offers one of the more iconic representations of the dispossession, disenfranchisement, and disillusionment among Kingston’s urban poor in the first decade beyond political independence. Its popularity led Grove Press’s editors to commission Michael Thelwell to write a novel version of the film, a rare reversal in the relationships between novels and screenplays. Both texts’ grappling with the sovereign reality of the urban poor continues to engage critics decades after the film’s release and the novel’s publication. Nonetheless, criticism for the most part is dismissive of Elsa, who is
instrumental to the plot of both narratives as the agent who betrays the hero to the authorities. By unsettling the critical practice of focusing solely on the narratives’ exploration of postcolonial masculinity, I trouble the consistent and unvaried ways of reading modes of subaltern self-actualization almost fifty years beyond political independence. I argue that the critical sideling of a central agent in the protagonist’s demise reflects not only a gender bias but also a limited model of how subaltern self-actualization functions in postindependence Jamaica. I suggest that this treatment of Elsa is indicative of a desire to purchase a sovereign reality built around a specific kind of rebellious, resistant, and working-class black masculinity—one that endures in our current critical contexts—which nonetheless is exclusive and remains steeped in residual colonial ideology. Where David Scott focuses on the ruud bwai self-actualization in *Refashioning Futures*, this chapter turns its attention to a parallel mode: ruud gyal self-actualization. It incorporates a discussion of Donn Lett’s film *Dancehall Queen* to present ruud gyal self-actualization as a parallel mode of sovereign subjectivity present within the Jamaican popular modern sphere. This enables the unsettling of both the nationalist modern vision of the postcolonial state and its reliance on a single conception of citizen/subject, as well as theories of subaltern resistance that install their own versions of singular raced and classed notions of ideal subjectivity.

If chapter two works to unsettle the nationalist modern vision of the postcolonial state, chapter three highlights the deficiencies in our critical languages’ ability to articulate the relationships among pluralities delineated by race, class, or gender within postcolonial communities. Chapter three takes *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s early moment of the creole protagonist Antoinette, looking at her black playmate Tia as through “a looking glass,” as a point of departure for exploring interracial relationships between women and how they reveal the nuanced complexities of representing Caribbean female subjectivity. By focusing on the fraught yet cooperative relationships between women of different races and classes in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Sistren’s *Lionheart Gal*, this chapter further troubles the raced and classed priorities in the establishment of both Caribbean nationalisms and the Caribbean feminist tradition and identifies the limitations such prioritizations impose on our understanding of postcolonial citizenship and subjectivity. Both Sistren’s and Rhys’s works belong to specific historical conjunctures that are characterized by radical social changes enacted by social movements engaged in fighting colonialism, racism, and sexism. Rhys began writing in the early twentieth century, with the first wave of Caribbean writers who sought to establish an authentic and indigenous literary tradition for the representation of sovereign West Indian subjectivity. Likewise, the 1970s context of Sistren was a period
of social change that informed the critical impulses behind Caribbean writing (creative and critical) and saw the development of what can be characterized as an indigenous literary tradition. Both these moments, this chapter argues, make it difficult to see the nonblack women central to Wide Sargasso Sea and Lionheart Gal. More than an argument for including the voices of nonblack middle-class women in literary and critical discourses, this chapter shows how the dual imperatives of black cultural nationalism and Afro-Caribbean feminism in postcolonial contexts leave few critical tools to talk about the ubiquitous yet unarticulated spaces of interaction in between race and class that appear within the Caribbean literary tradition. The successful and unsuccessful interaction between women in these texts is thus crucial to reimagining sovereignty as the ability “to manage stability as a state of creative conflict” (Lamming 36).

In chapter four, I bring together two authors with seemingly opposed relationships to the representation of queerness. Patricia Powell’s central consideration of themes of queerness through homosexual, transgender, and transsexual protagonists ranks her among the first authors to depict queer subjectivity as a lived part of Caribbean reality; Marlon James’s depictions of queer Caribbean subjectivity, on the other hand, are puzzling, grotesque, violent, and disruptive portrayals of pedophilia, incest, and bestiality. I bring them together in order to focus less on how representations of queerness in literature work to reveal ruling nationalisms’ reliance on heteronormative institutions and essentialized notions of gender and sexuality, than on how these novels replace nationalism’s emphasis on recovery and inclusion with a stress on mediating among competing accounts of gender and sexuality. Thus, while each text challenges the negation of queerness within Jamaican collective imaginations (including the official national imagination) by problematizing the epistemic grounding of categories like gender and sexuality, their queer thematics do not reflect so much a desire for inclusion within the national postcolonial reality as an outright rejection of the heteronormative nation. I argue that while the exclusion/inclusion impulse of postcolonial criticism shapes how queerness is read, it occludes otherwise clear calls made by these texts for dismantling and reforming problematic notions of gender and sexuality. I suggest further that representations of queerness in twenty-first-century Caribbean literature nonetheless provide one of our best sites for understanding how plural Caribbean subjects negotiate problems of sovereignty. Each text’s inability to represent a settled existence for the communities and protagonists it depicts parallels our own lack of critical languages that can articulate the ways pluralities exist alongside each other within and outside of the boundaries of national identification. The crisis of the postcol-
nial present also reflects the crisis of being rendered critically speechless when encountering difficult subjects that do not adhere to the political imperatives of specific sovereign realities. I also present in this chapter the first extended analysis of twenty-first-century Caribbean literature as a discrete period of literary development, to suggest that James and Powell represent a new cohort of Caribbean authors—indeed, a distinct and fourth wave of Caribbean writing—whose work explores problems of sovereignty that go beyond anticolo-
nial struggles and nation building. This chapter and *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects* overall contend that such writing compels Caribbean literary critics to rede-
fine the priorities of critical practices in ways that also clarify the political imperative of the postcolonial present.

**After the End of the End**

As already suggested, through my consideration of the crisis of the postco-
nlial present, *Jamaica’s Difficult Subjects’* analysis of shifts in literary prac-
tices according to the demand of a contemporary wave of writing is not a phenomenon isolated to Caribbean discourses. In 2007, for example, *PMLA* published *The End of Postcolonial Theory*, in which Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel jointly deduce that postcolonial theory had reached its limits. Later that same year, *Twentieth Century Literature* also weighed in, albeit in more measured ways, on the passing of theoretical paradigms with a special issue titled *After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary Ameri-
can Fiction*. More recently, in 2012, Kenneth W. Warren asked what was Afri-
can American literature—thereby positing it as a finished phenomenon in a book of the same name.

Critics like Robert J. C. Young caution us against the “aspiring mortician” elements of such declarations of ends and death. In the case of postcolonial theory, Young presents valid reasons for the maintenance of a suspicious stance to these declarations, especially for those theorists with continued investments in critiquing inequality:

The desire to pronounce postcolonial theory dead on both sides of the Atlantic suggests that its presence continues to disturb and provoke anxiety: the real problem lies in the fact that the postcolonial remains. Why does it continue to unsettle people so much? The aspiring morticians of the postcolonial concur in scarcely relating it to the world from which it comes and for which it claims to speak: that outside Europe and North America.
The desired dissolution of postcolonial theory does not mean that poverty, inequality, exploitation, and oppression in the world have come to an end, only that some people in the U. S. and French academies have decided they do not want to have to think about such things any longer and do not want to be reminded of those distant invisible contexts which continue to prompt the transformative energies of the postcolonial. (Young 19–20)

Moreover, in thinking about literature that no longer looks like what came before it—aesthetically and oppositionally—Andrew Hoberek’s introduction to After Postmodernism suggests that the essays in the issue do not inaugurate a sweeping new post-postmodern theory, but instead “begin to assemble the kinds of concrete evidence for its existence that may someday make such a theory possible” (241–42). His assertion that “periodization is a valuable goal” is as significant to my understanding of the progression of Caribbean literary discourses as is his caution that the properly pursued periodization is the one that “builds on rather than preempts such specifics” (242).

Kenneth Warren’s declaration of the end of African American literature presents a productive paradox for considering the necessity for paradigmatic shifts alongside the potential pitfalls Hoberek suggests are involved in periodization. Throughout this book, I imagine the exploration of difficult subjects across Caribbean literary history as an evidentiary compilation that can be used in theorizing the oppositional politics of fourth-wave writing. No one has yet ordered a postmortem for Caribbean literature, and my use of waves as a metaphor intentionally signifies a kind of fluidity antithetical to a jarring break. This sense of fluidity is important because contemporary oppositional writing by Oonya Kempadoo, Patricia Powell, Marlon James, and Kei Miller, for example, nonetheless attempts to make sense of their oppositional politics from within the context of the literary traditions that precede them.

I thus feel a sense of caution when Warren argues that “African American literature as a distinct entity would seem to be at an end, and that the turn to diasporic, transatlantic, global, and other frames, indicate a dim awareness that the boundary creating this distinctiveness has eroded” (Warren, What Was 8). While I do see the erosion of specific political impetuses across African diasporic discourses in particular, because of changes in the political realities of people living in diaspora (the end of Jim Crow and colonization, for example), I am not as convinced that this is tantamount to the end of the oppositional literatures that developed within them or that the presence of other frames occasion the dismissal of specificity.

Without necessarily accepting Warren’s claim that African American literature is “at an end,” however, we can acknowledge his point that it is not an
The idea of periodizing Caribbean writing in waves to begin organizing difficult subjects across Caribbean literary history in a way that can illuminate incomprehensibilities in contemporary writing. I situate this work within contemporary discourses of paradigmatic mortality to suggest that though end declarations alert us to the presence of new things, such approaches offer no practical framework for grasping how contemporary writing actually works. Thus, though Warren provocatively outlines African American literature's bracketing within the specific political temporality of Jim Crow segregation that no longer exists, this critical strategy takes us only so far in interpreting the satirical underpinnings of Mat Johnson's *Pym* (2011) and other contemporary African American writing. Indeed, though Warren notes that “the late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen the publication of many very fine novels and poems by writers like Thomas, Colson Whitehead, Paul Beatty, Danzy Senna, Andrea Lee, and Carl Phillips, to name a few,” it is only to make the point that “by the criteria we use to determine matters of racial identity, all of these authors may indeed be African-American. The works they’ve written, however, are not” (Warren, “Does African-American Literature Exist?”). Perhaps Warren’s goal here is not to define what this contemporary literature by African Americans is, but instead to make clear what it is not. Rather than declaring an end on the basis of nontranshistoricity of a particular tradition and leaving it at that, however, I find more productive value in the metaphor of waves that allows for the mutually informing traffic of fluidity between the past and the present.