

‘This is the Age of Woman’: Black Feminism and Black Internationalism in the Works of Una Marson, 1928-1938

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Una Marson (1905-1965) was an Afro-Jamaican intellectual who in the 1930s became an internationally famous feminist, Pan-Africanist, poet, playwright, journalist and social activist. Between 1932 and 1936 Marson lived in London and became involved in the burgeoning Pan-African movement and a number of British and international women’s and feminist organisations. In 1936, she briefly returned to Jamaica amidst the nationalist movements of the time before journeying back to Britain in 1938, where she remained until 1946. This article builds on and differs from previous scholarship on Marson through its exploration of the changes that took place in her black feminist ideas relating to race, gender and class between 1928 and 1938, and how these influenced her intellectual view concerning black internationalism. This article puts two arguments forward. First, Marson’s engagement with Pan-Africanism and her experiences of racism and sexism in London changed her vision of black feminism. Second, this change contributed to her bringing black feminism into the male-dominated sphere of black internationalism. Thus, it calls for more recognition of Una Marson both as a black feminist and a black internationalist.¹

Keywords: Una Marson, colonialism, black internationalism, black feminism, Jamaica, London

In a small office in Kingston, in the spring of 1928, Una Marson, Jamaica’s first woman editor-publisher, proudly proclaimed: ‘This is the age of woman: What man has done women may do’.² With this statement, she announced her arrival as one of Jamaica’s most passionate black feminists. Born in 1905 in the parish of St Elizabeth, Marson, the daughter of a Baptist parson, rose in the 1930s and 1940s to become an internationally famous black feminist, Pan-Africanist, poet, playwright, journalist, social activist and BBC broadcaster.³ The Afro-Jamaican Marson was an

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¹ This article is part of a larger research project that the author is conducting on transnational black women intellectuals in the twentieth century and many of the findings are provisional pending further work. It draws on recent scholarship by Marc Matera who has called for more recognition of Marson as a Pan-African feminist and black internationalist see Marc Matera, “Black Internationalism and African and Caribbean Intellectuals in London 1919-1950” (PhD diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008). I am grateful to Marc Matera for giving me permission to cite and quote from his thesis.

² Una Marson, ‘Editorial’, *The Cosmopolitan: a monthly magazine for the business youth of Jamaica and the official organ of the Stenographer’s Association* 1:1 (May 1928): 5.

³ I am gratefully indebted to Delia Jarrett-Macauley’s biography, *The Life of Una Marson 1905-65* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) from which most of the biographical information in this article is taken.

important intellectual whose intersecting ideas centred on challenging racial, gender and class conventions in Jamaica and in England.

After finishing Hampton High School in 1922, Marson worked in a variety of jobs within social work.⁴ In 1928, Marson emerged onto Jamaica's intellectual scene with her journal *The Cosmopolitan: a monthly magazine for the business youth of Jamaica and the official organ of the Stenographer's Association* (1928-1931), which featured poetry, short stories and articles that offered a glimpse into Marson's literary talents. From this moment onwards, Marson's career grew from strength to strength. By the early 1930s, she had established her literary abilities having published two volumes of poetry, *Tropic Reveries* (1930) and *Heights and Depths* (1931). She had also staged her first play *At What a Price* (1932) in Kingston, which in 1933 became the first black colonial production in London. In 1932, at the age of 27, Marson arrived in London for what was meant to be a three-month vacation, but it turned out to be a four-year sojourn. In the metropole, Marson joined fellow Jamaican Harold Moody's multi-racial organisation The League of Coloured Peoples (hereafter the LCP) and became editor of its journal *The Keys*.

In London, Marson also joined a number of women's and feminist organisations, including the British Commonwealth League and the Women's International Alliance, and she formed close friendships with white feminists, notably Winifred Holtby. In 1935, she was the first Jamaican invited to speak at the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in Istanbul when she was asked by the Women's Social Service Club in Jamaica to attend as a representative of the organisation.⁵ In the same year, she became the first black woman invited to attend the League of Nations in Geneva. Following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) in 1935 by fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, Marson worked as secretary to Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie when he visited London, and she travelled with him to Geneva in 1936. Marson's exhaustive workload during this period triggered a brief nervous breakdown and prompted her return to Jamaica in the same year.

The social and political discontent that erupted in Jamaica and swept across other Caribbean islands in the late 1930s thrust Marson back into Kingston's intellectual scene. In her column in *Public Opinion* (1937-1942), a weekly nationalist paper affiliated to Norman Manley's People's National Party, she flaunted her stiletto-sharp journalism commenting on feminism, racial attitudes and the

⁴ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 21.

⁵ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 87. The Women's Social Service Club was based in Kingston but Una Marson was not a member. For more information about the organisation see Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith, 'Women's Work and Organisation in Jamaica 1900-1944', unpublished research study for the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands, no date.

1938 strikes and riots by Jamaican workers that criticised the poor socio-economic conditions on the island. In 1936, she helped to form the black-led Jamaica Women's Liberal Club alongside her fellow black activist Amy Bailey and in 1937, she published her third poetry collection *The Moth and the Star*, and staged her second play *London Calling*.⁶ The following year, Marson put on her most popular play *Pocomania* and continued her social activism, establishing the Save the Jamaican Children's Fund, alongside Bailey and teacher and social worker Mary Morris-Knibb. Marson also returned to London to give evidence about the riots to the Moyne Commission. Three years later, she became the first black woman to be employed by the BBC. She was appointed programme assistant for the radio series *Calling the West Indies*, which, by 1943, had developed into the literary platform *Caribbean Voices*. At the BBC, Marson worked alongside George Orwell, T. S. Eliot and William Empson. In 1945, she published her final poetry collection *Towards the Stars*. Between 1945 and her death in 1965, Marson continued to write journalism and creative fiction and engaged in social and political activism in the Caribbean, North America and Israel.

Despite her outstanding career, her contributions to Pan-Africanism, in particular, were sidelined both during her life and after her death. She was a marginalised but important member of the LCP and was involved with leading black intellectuals, such as C. L. R. James, George Padmore and Jomo Kenyatta. She is hardly mentioned in the works of these men, perhaps, in part, because she did not share their political beliefs. However, other black women activists in Britain, like Amy Ashwood Garvey and, later, Claudia Jones were also marginalised during the height of Pan-Africanism, and, subsequently, as a result also within its historiography. Historian and literary scholar Carole Boyce Davies has suggested that Audre Lorde's 'Sister Outsider' paradigm, which referred to her placement outside the mainstream heterosexual, feminist and African framework, is useful when considering the erasure of Caribbean women like the black radical Jones, Ashwood Garvey and, I would add, Marson, from Pan-Africanism.⁷

Serious research on Marson began in the 1980s alongside the rise of Caribbean feminist literary criticism. A number of works by Jamaican scholars, such as Erika Smilowitz and Honor Ford-Smith, charted the development of Marson's literary career and helped to remove her from the doldrums of history's forgotten figures.⁸ In 1998, Delia Jarrett-Macauley published her detailed biography *The*

⁶ For more details on the Jamaican Women's Liberal Club see Henrice Altink, *Destined For A Life of Service: Defining African-Jamaican Womanhood 1865-1938* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 165, 172-173.

⁷ Carole Boyce Davies, "Sisters Outside: Tracing the Caribbean/Black Radical Intellectual Tradition," *Small Axe* 28 (12: 1) (2009): 218; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom CA: Crossing, 1984).

⁸ Erika Smilowitz, "'Weary of Life and All My Heart's Dull Pain': The Poetry of Una Marson," *Critical Issues In West Indian Literature*, eds. Erika Smilowitz and Roberta Knowles (Iowa: Caribbean Books, 1984), 19-32; Honor Ford-Smith, "Una Marson: Black Nationalist And Feminist Writer," Research Project on Women and Development (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1983-1985).

Life of Una Marson 1905-65 on which this article relies for biographical and critical information. The biographer unearthed archival material and oral testimony regarding Marson's life, activism, and black feminism, and encouraged greater scholarly attention to her works. Since the start of the twenty-first century a host of literary scholars and historians have analysed Marson. Alison Donnell helpfully challenged the masculine bias of West Indian intellectual history by analysing Marson's journalism and speeches and argued that her intellectual ideas were radical in both a British and West Indian context.⁹ Donnell has also been instrumental in showing the literary significance of Marson's early poetry and has analysed her works in relation to modernity.¹⁰ Giovanna Covi has suggested that before Marson left Jamaica in 1932, she already saw herself as a feminist with a cosmopolitan outlook.¹¹ Henrice Altink analysed a selection of Marson's articles from the *Daily Gleaner* and *Public Opinion* alongside those of other black Jamaican activists and feminists, including Amy Bailey, Mary Morris-Knibb and Eulalie Domingo, in order to stress the interconnected issues addressed by Afro-Jamaican feminists and to demonstrate that 'discourse' was as much part of the early Afro-Caribbean women's movement as 'activism'.¹² Leah Reade Rosenberg suggests that Marson can be seen as a figure whose aesthetic development and cultural activism bridged the separation between the Caribbean writers of the interwar years and those of the decolonisation period, similar to George Lamming.¹³ In 2008, Anna Snaith insightfully explored the intersections of colonialism and feminism in modernist London by scrutinizing a selection of Marson's plays, poetry

⁹ Alison Donnell, "Una Marson: feminism, anti-colonialism and a forgotten fight for freedom," in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 114- 31.

¹⁰ Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London: Routledge, 2005); Una Marson, *Selected Poems*, ed. Alison Donnell (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011); Alison Donnell, 'Una Marson and the Fractured Subjects of Modernity: Writing across the Black Atlantic', *Women: A Cultural Review* 22: 4 (2011): 345-369.

¹¹ Giovanna Covi, "Una Marson: African-Caribbean New Woman Speaking Truth to Power," in *Modernist Women Race, Nation: Networking Women 1890-1950* ed. Giovanna Covi (London: Mango Publishing, 2005), 118- 153. Alison Donnell also contributed to this edited collection with her chapter, "Trans/national Dis/connections: Silenced Networks and Strained Belongings with Reference to Albinia Catherine MacKay (Hutton) and Una Marson," 84-96. Covi also discussed Marson in a previous publication, see Giovanna Covi, "'But We Not Common, We is Destant': Una Marson's Transatlantic Connections," in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History 1890-1939*, ed. Marina Camboni (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004), 413-428.

¹² Henrice Altink, "'The Misfortune of Being Black and Female': Black Feminist Thought in Interwar Jamaica," *Thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory & culture*, 5 (2006) http://www.thirdspace.ca/vol5/5_2_Altink.htm [accessed 29/7/2010] no page numbers. Altink's latest study explores the construction of African-Jamaican womanhood and includes Una Marson's writings and speeches see Altink, *Destined For A Life of Service*.

¹³ Leah Reade Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11 and 159-180. Other literary scholars have insightfully analysed Marson's creative fiction see for instance C. L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain 1700-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 198-99, 210-17 and Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and work at the BBC within the contexts of Pan-African politics, Caribbean nationalism, and Britain's colonial relationships.¹⁴ In the same year, Marc Matera's thoroughly researched PhD thesis on black internationalism in London included an examination of the life and writings of black West Indian and West African women such as Marson in order to explore their role within black internationalism.¹⁵ These works have contributed to a deeper understanding and recognition of Marson's achievements.

This article builds on this significant previous research. However, it differs from other works in its exploration of the changes that took place in Marson's black feminist ideas relating to race, gender and class between 1928 and 1938 and examination of how this influenced her intellectual ideas concerning black internationalism. Black feminism, as defined by critical race and sociology scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw and bell hooks, focuses on the intersections between race, gender, class and other forms of oppression that dominate the lives of women of African descent.¹⁶ Indeed, for black feminists the categories of race, gender and class had what Deborah K. King termed a 'multiplicative effect' in their everyday lives.¹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins also defines black feminists as 'women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society'.¹⁸ Marson's black feminism encompassed a tapestry of topics ranging from race pride, colour prejudice and sexism to the plight of black working-class women.

Marson's black feminism was also linked to black internationalism. As a political philosophy, black internationalism promoted black self-determination and sought to create links between different black populations around the world.¹⁹ It sought to understand the differences that are an important part of the heterogeneous nature of peoples of African descent.²⁰ In the early decades of the

¹⁴ Anna Snaith, "Little Brown Girl in White, White City: Una Marson and London," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 27 (2008): 93-114.

¹⁵ Matera, "Black Internationalism," 167.

¹⁶ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 14 (1989): 538-54; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs* 14 (1988): 42-72.

¹⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and The Politics of Empowerment*, first edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 22.

¹⁹ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-15. Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States 1914-1962* (London: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

²⁰ Stephens, *Black Empire*, 6.

twentieth century, literary scholar Michelle Ann Stephens argues that multiple forms of black internationalism were based on the notion of racial sovereignty.²¹ According to Davies, black internationalism became visible from international communism, though it was distinct from it and was also Pan-Africanist in practice.²² Recently, Michael O. West, William G. Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins, stated that the ideal of universal emancipation, unbound by national, imperial, continental, oceanic and racial boundaries is at the core of black internationalism.²³ In twentieth-century Britain, France, North America, the Caribbean and parts of West Africa, various black organisations promoted black internationalism and numerous black male intellectuals were associated with it, including Claude McKay, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, C. L. R. James and George Padmore.²⁴ The 'New Negro' and Negritude movement exemplified black internationalism.

Black internationalism has generated wide scholarship, especially in the works of Brent Hayes Edwards and Stephens.²⁵ Edwards and Stephens allude to the absence of black female intellectuals and issues of gender in the literature on black internationalism.²⁶ This article responds to Edwards's call for scholars to consider the influence of black women on racial politics in the metropole.²⁷ Unlike Matera, who focused Marson as a black internationalist, the emphasis here is on the changes in Marson's black feminism and the development of her ideas regarding black internationalism through a critical analysis of her fiction and non-fiction writings and speeches in Jamaica and London.²⁸

In order to fully understand the forces that shaped and influenced Marson's black feminism and black internationalism it is important to outline the three contexts in which she lived and worked, that is Jamaica in the late 1920s, and England and Jamaica in the 1930s. The socio-economic

²¹ Stephens, *Black Empire*, 5.

²² Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 230.

²³ Michael O. West, William G. Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins eds., *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xi. This study extends upon Edwards' analysis of black internationalism but issues of gender and sexuality are limited.

²⁴ Matera, "Black Internationalism," 5.

²⁵ In recent years radical black internationalism has also gained more historical attention see Minkah Makalani, *In The Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

²⁶ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 119-186; Stephens, *Black Empire*, 1-31.

²⁷ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 119-186.

²⁸ Matera, "Black Internationalism," 184, 164-227.

conditions of Jamaica in the late 1920s consisted of the declining sugar industry, population growth, depressed wages and the global economic depression.²⁹ It was also the era of Pan-Africanism, a sociopolitical philosophy and worldview that sought to unify Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. In the twentieth century, Pan-Africanism was linked to the global social, political, cultural and economic movement to end colonialism, racism and other types of oppression.³⁰ Pan-Africanism was a manifestation of black nationalism, which found institutional expression in the transnational black nationalist organisation, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (hereafter UNIA).³¹ The UNIA established in 1914 by Jamaican Marcus Garvey and his first wife Amy Ashwood Garvey captured the hearts and minds of millions of blacks around the globe, including Marson's. Garvey's platform highlighted the necessity of redeeming Africa from European colonists, and popularised the rhetoric of 'back to Africa'. The UNIA was the largest Pan-African organisation of the twentieth century, and later influenced the Rastafarian and Black Power movements, and the philosophy behind the Nation of Islam.³² The growth of the UNIA also coincided with the rise of Anglophone Caribbean feminism. Although Garvey attempted to reinforce patriarchal and Victorian notions of gender, his first and second wives, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey, addressed women's issues through their involvement in the organisation. Furthermore, Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith argue that 'the UNIA was the training ground for almost all the women active in feminist issues in the 1930s'.³³

In the 1930s, London was centre of the British Empire and the Pan-African movement where black internationalist groups were formed. The metropole was the key site where peoples of African descent met, networked, and forged contacts, friendships and ideas. The LCP was an important sphere for Marson's involvement with Pan-Africanism. Through it she sustained good relationships with many Pan-African activists, including Desmond Buckle, Louis Mbanefo, the founder of the West

²⁹ Altink, 'The Misfortune'.

³⁰ Ula Yvette Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 39-40.

³¹ There are serious complexities in defining the terms black nationalism, black internationalism and Pan-Africanism but they are all closely connected; see Kersuze Simeon-Jones, *Literary and Sociopolitical Writings of the Black Diaspora in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010).

³² For a recent study of the Nation of Islam, see Dawn-Marie Gibson, *A History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012). In particular, pages 13-26 detail the links between the organisation and the UNIA.

³³ Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith, *Women, Work and Organisation in Jamaica: 1900-1944*, Research Report (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1985), 226. For biographies of Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey see Tony Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist and Mrs Marcus Garvey No 1 Or, A Tale of Two Amies* (Dover, MA : Majority Press, 2007) and Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*.

African Students Union, Ladipo Solanke and a king from the Gold Coast, Sir Nana Ofori Atta.³⁴ On Marson's return to Jamaica in the late 1930s, the numerous demonstrations and strikes that began in the Frome Sugar Factory in western Jamaica and later spread throughout the island were a response to the lack of help given to the lower class by the government amidst economic challenges and reflected the popular unrest that was a legacy of colonial rule.³⁵ Much like the momentous Morant Bay rebellion in 1865, the Jamaican riots of 1938 brought political and economic developments into sharper focus.³⁶ As Bill Schwarz argues, from the late 1930s, the forces demanding independence became a powerful political reality.³⁷ This coincided with a growing number of women broadcasting their intellectual ideas in the public domain, through newspaper articles and women's organisations, like the Jamaica Women's Liberal Club.³⁸ Among them included Amy Bailey, Mary Morris-Knibb, Eulalie Domingo, Aimee Webster and Adina Spencer.³⁹ These three contexts helped usher in the changes to Marson's black feminism and black internationalism.

Marson's transnational travels across the Black Atlantic between Kingston and London contributed to changes in her black feminism, and informed her ideas about black internationalism.⁴⁰ According to Edwards, thinking of black women in Europe the possibility 'opens that in a transnational cultural context, feminism... may precede and lead to black internationalist consciousness'.⁴¹ Although Edwards referred here to black Francophone and American women, it begs the question as to whether the same may be said in regards to Marson. In Jamaica, Marson's black feminism centred on local problems, but her experiences of racism and sexism in London as well as her involvement with Pan-Africanism impacted on, and changed, her ideas regarding race, gender and class. These changes widened the parameters of Marson's black feminism to a more black internationalist perspective. This examination of Marson's black feminism and black internationalism adopts a

³⁴ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 71.

³⁵ Alink, *Destined For A Life of Service*, 5.

³⁶ Thomas C Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 397.

³⁷ Bill Schwarz, "Crossing the Seas," in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 7. For a detailed study of the Caribbean riots, see O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean 1934-1939* (London: James Currey, 1995).

³⁸ Alink, *Destined For A Life of Service*, 165.

³⁹ For a selection of these women's writings see Veronica Marie Gregg ed., *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Non-Fiction Writing, 1890-1980* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic is a historical and geographical metaphor that explores the impact of black movement across Africa, America and Europe. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁴¹ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 152.

thematic approach to analysing her intersecting ideas about race, gender and class, between 1928 and 1938, the most active decade of her career. It examines a small body of Marson's works, including editorials from *The Cosmopolitan* and *Public Opinion*, and analyses a selection of poetry from her collections *Tropic Reveries* and *Heights and Depths* and those published in *The Keys*. Marson's plays *At What A Price*, *London Calling* and *Pocomania* and her speeches are also explored.

Marson's Black Feminism in Jamaica 1928-1932

Marson's diverse early black feminist ideas about race, gender and class in Jamaica centred on problems that affected the majority of the black population on the island. In 1903, the self-styled 'talented-tenth' African American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois penned one of his most memorable phrases, that 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line'.⁴² The problems of the colour line constituted an essential element of Marson's black feminist ideas concerning race, which consisted of depicting the racial and colour divisions in Jamaican society. In Jamaica, racism was at the heart of society. The venomous seeds of racial and colour prejudice originated from the slave past and became important during the discursive battles between pro-slavery advocates and abolitionists. During the period of transatlantic slavery, most Caribbean colonies developed a social hierarchy in which a small number of whites occupied the highest tier of the social ladder, while the larger number of black slaves remained at the bottom.⁴³ The majority of those categorised as freedmen were of mixed race and light-skinned. They occupied the middle rung of the ladder, even though a number of them possessed an economic status that surpassed that of some whites. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the 1838 Emancipation Proclamation did not drastically reconfigure this hierarchy. A tripartite structure dominated Jamaican society, based on a close connection between race, colour and class. In other words, Jamaican society was a pigmentocracy.⁴⁴ As a member of the small group of dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans who had entered into the ranks of the middle-class, it was not surprising that race was high on Marson's intellectual agenda and that she explored racial and colour divisions in her creative works.

In her poem, 'In Jamaica', from the collection *Heights and Depths*, Marson portrayed the stereotype of dark-skinned Jamaicans claiming, 'O! the darkies smile on in Jamaica/And whistle or sing all the

⁴² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Penguin, 1996), 1 (first published in 1903).

⁴³ Altink, 'The Misfortune'; Gad Heuman, "The Social Structure of the Slave Societies in the Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean, Vol. III*, ed. Franklin. W. Knight (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 138-68.

⁴⁴ David Killingray, "'To do something for the race": Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples' in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* ed. Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 54.

day/There's always a song ringing somewhere/To them it is always bright May'.⁴⁵ In these sarcastic lines, Marson describes the supposedly happy, idle, ignorant black. This racialised trope proliferated throughout the Americas both during and after slavery. Notorious racist Thomas Carlyle, in his 1853 'Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question', most famously used the racialised 'lazy' stereotype to argue that emancipation had brought disaster to Caribbean colonies. At the time it was published, Carlyle was a lone voice among the intellectual establishment espousing such views.⁴⁶ However, as Catherine Hall argues, this was not the case by the 1860s.⁴⁷ By that time, the movement away from an anti-slavery ideology and towards a more overt form of racism was clear and continued to wield ideological and political power throughout the twentieth century and beyond.⁴⁸

Later in the poem, however, Marson counters the racist view by revealing that the 'darker set are striving/And facing a very stiff fight'.⁴⁹ This referred to the growing forms of discrimination that dark-skinned Jamaicans faced. In Jamaica, many dark-skinned men and women were not chosen as leaders of social or political organisations, and employers were less likely to hire them, principally because of their complexion. As Morris Cargill, the white Jamaican journalist of the 1930s once succinctly said, 'keeping the niggers out' was an important goal to which many whites and light-skinned coloureds were committed to.⁵⁰ Marson claimed that life in Jamaica was better for those whose 'skin is light', and for tourists 'there's golf...and swimming/...They call it a garden of Eden/They get such a wonderful tan!'⁵¹ The poem's ironic tone is used to highlight the significance of racial divisions, which lay at the centre of Jamaican society. The divisions between blacks, browns and whites reveal the paradise 'Eden' to be an ideal masking an island divided by colonialism and its helpmate tourism, which portrayed Jamaica as a pleasure paradise drenched in sun, sand and sex but overlooked the fierce racial rancor that existed.⁵²

⁴⁵ Una Marson, "In Jamaica," *Heights and Depths* (Kingston: The Gleaner, 1931), 82.

⁴⁶ Catherine Hall, "The Economy of Intellectual Prestige: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and the Case of Governor Eyre," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 182

⁴⁷ Hall, "The Economy of Intellectual Prestige", 182.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁹ Marson, "Jamaica," 82.

⁵⁰ Morris Cargill, *Jamaican Farewell* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc, 1978), 90. Howard Johnson, 'The Black Experience in the British Caribbean in the Twentieth Century' in *Black Experience and the Empire* eds. Phillip D Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 318.

⁵¹ Marson, "Jamaica," 82.

⁵² Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), 119.

Marson's *At What a Price* depicted the colour tensions that existed within heterosexual relationships. The plot revolves around the dark-skinned Ruth Maitland who leaves her village for a job as a secretary in Kingston. Incidentally, Ruth leaves behind a young man, Robert, who loves her. During the play, Ruth is seduced and impregnated by her light-skinned employer, Gerald Fitzroy who is already engaged to another woman. Out of guilt, Fitzroy proposes to Ruth. But Ruth refuses his hand, stating, 'I told him he offered me marriage because he thought he had wronged me...in time he would only remember that I, his wife, was... not of his colour... he would hate me'.⁵³ The use of the emotion-laden 'hate' is illustrative of the feelings of contempt between the light-skinned middle-class and dark-skinned working-class Jamaicans, which was tied to the racial and class hierarchy within the Afro-Jamaican community. As Altink has commented, many light-skinned middle-class Jamaicans tried to separate themselves from the dark-skinned working-class by associating more with English than Afro-Jamaican culture and by not interacting with dark-skinned Afro-Jamaicans.⁵⁴ When Ruth returns home she initially refuses to marry Robert, but he persuades her and it is on this note that the play ends.⁵⁵ Marson's narrative illustrates how the virulent colour prejudice on the island played a crucial role in determining the outcomes of relationships between dark and light-skinned Jamaicans. This was an important revelation at the time. Frantz Fanon and other theorists later analysed this phenomenon in studies relating to colonialism and racial psychopathology.⁵⁶

Marson's feminist ideas about gender saw her attempt to encourage Jamaican women to be more active in society. In her 1929 article, 'Jamaica's Victory', written in response to a male critique of women's fashion and appearance, Marson criticised women for not using their voices in society, posing the pointed question, 'Do the women of Jamaica today form a strong body with a voice that can be distinctly heard from the platforms where service, progress, improvement, and advancement are being preached?'⁵⁷ It must be remembered that most of the women's organisations in Jamaica during this period, like The Social Purity Association of Jamaica, concerned themselves more with maintaining the subordination of women than elevating their status.⁵⁸ She discussed the changes that had occurred in Jamaica since the nineteenth century, stating, 'Eighty years ago there were no business women in our metropolis; today there must be nearly a thousand...the phenomenal growth and prosperity of the Island is a marvel to visitors, and yet can we say that women are keeping abreast of the times'.⁵⁹ Marson chastised women who were more concerned with consumerism

⁵³ Una Marson, "At What A Price," Unpublished playscript, British Library Manuscript Collections, London (1933) LCP1933/47, Act IV Scene II at 39.

⁵⁴ Altink, 'The Misfortune'.

⁵⁵ Emery, *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature*, 126.

⁵⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

⁵⁷ Una Marson, "Jamaica's Victory," *The Cosmopolitan*, 2 June 1929, 66-67.

⁵⁸ Donnell, "Una Marson: feminism, anti-colonialism and a forgotten fight for freedom", 126

⁵⁹ Marson, "Victory," 66-67.

than with exercising their social and political rights, asking, 'what is the thrill we women get out of life? Is it leaving the office, a new dress, a car, dancing, playing the fool, making our own whoopee?'⁶⁰ Marson's use of sarcastic humour enhances her fundamental point that Jamaican women did not use the opportunities available to them.

Later in the article, Marson stated that 'there are crying needs in our fair Island home to-day[. W]e need an Elizabeth Fry to help the prisoners, a Dorothea Dix for the lunatics, a Harriet Beecher Stowe to help the masses, a Florence Nightingale for the sick and a Josephine Butler for the prostitutes'.⁶¹ This illustrates the extent to which Western social and feminist movements influenced her early black feminist ideas. Marson believed that 'when it is seen what we are doing and can do for one another and for our country men will not even have time to notice how short our dresses are...We plead an awakening among women; for women of vision to take up the gauntlet and vow sacrifice, love and service to fair Jamaica'.⁶² Here, she evokes nationalism in her rallying cry for Jamaican women to help further the development of their island.

Critiquing patriarchy was another aspect of Marson's black feminism, as expressed in her poem, 'If', taken from *Tropic Reveries*, in which she parodies Rudyard Kipling's original and attacks matrimony. In the four-stanza poem, Marson condemns the oppressive nature of domesticity, and lists the sacrifices women made in order to fulfil their duties as wives, including:

If you can make him spend the evenings with you
When fifty Jims and Jacks are on his mind
... If you can bear to hear the truth you tell him
Twisted around to make you seem a fool.⁶³

At the end of the poem, she states that if these and other sacrifices can be made, 'you'll be a wife worth while'.⁶⁴ The poem unveils some of the stark realities of idealised romance within patriarchal heterosexual relations.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Marson, "Victory," 66-67.

⁶¹ Ibid., 66-67.

⁶² Ibid., 66-67.

⁶³ Una Marson, "If," *Tropic Reveries* (Kingston: The Gleaner 1930), 83-4.

⁶⁴ Marson, "If" 83-4.

⁶⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s Marson's ideas about marriage changed and while living in the United States she briefly married Peter Staples, an African American dentist. For more information about her marriage see Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 203-205.

Although not as prodigious as her ideas about race and gender, class nevertheless featured as an important component of Marson's black feminist ideas. In Jamaica, Marson's ideas about class focused on advocating policies that would help redress the problems that working-class women faced. In her 1929 article 'The Age of Woman', she calls for a 'minimum wage for our working girls, to form an unemployment bureau, to start a sickness and out of work benefit'.⁶⁶ However, Rhoda Reddock argues that Marson's and other middle class women's relationship with working-class women was based on the need to improve the standing of their 'race', and tried to uplift poor women to a lower standard where they believed they should be.⁶⁷ Reddock describes Marson's feminism as a kind of liberal feminism that attempted to integrate working-class black women into the existing social and political order rather than a more radical politics, such as advocating universal suffrage.⁶⁸

Changes in Marson's Black Feminism in London 1932-1936

Marson's journey across the Black Atlantic to London in 1932 altered her black feminist ideas in a number of ways. Her experiences of racism and her involvement with racial politics and Pan-Africanism were central to the change in her black feminist ideas about race. In London, Marson recounted the everyday forms of racism she faced in her eight stanza polemic poem 'Nigger', published in *The Keys* in 1933. Marson retells an incident about a group of white children shouting the racist moniker 'Nigger' at her as she strolled along a street:

They called me 'Nigger'
 ...They laughed and shouted
 ...Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!⁶⁹

These lines highlight the impact of the racialised gaze and Fanon's famous phrase in *Black Skin, White Masks* of 'dirty nigger!' and 'Look, a Negro!'⁷⁰ Marson defiantly repudiates the word by drawing on its origins from the slave past, stating:

We will not be called 'Niggers'
 Since this was the favourite curse

⁶⁶ Una Marson, "The Age of Woman," *The Cosmopolitan*, 1 March 1929, 68.

⁶⁷ Rhoda Reddock, "Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies A Journal of Caribbean perspectives on Gender and Feminism* April (2007): 11.

⁶⁸ Reddock, "Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism", 11.

⁶⁹ Una Marson, "Nigger," *The Keys*, July (1933), 8-9.

⁷⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin*, 109.

Of those who drove the Negroes
To their death in days of slavery⁷¹

The fact that Marson draws on the slave past is illustrative of the way in which the legacy of slavery has a powerful and pervasive omnipresence in the Caribbean. From one perspective, the poem demonstrates how the hostility she encountered in London significantly affected her. From another, it reveals the strengthening of Marson's racial consciousness and awareness of herself as black. Marson's renewed racial consciousness was inexorably tied to her involvement with the LCP.

Through her role as editor of *The Keys*, Marson's knowledge about racial injustices in Britain and throughout the African diaspora developed. The journal documented incidents of racial exploitation in the empire, attacked Britain's colour bar and created transatlantic links by publishing the writings of Harlem Renaissance figures like Zora Neale Hurston and Countee Cullen.⁷² In 1935, Marson gave voice to her burgeoning race politics as she stressed the importance of racial unity, claiming that

the whole world is coming closer together...and the Negro world must come together...nationality makes it more difficult for American negroes to join Negroes in the British Empire...we must unite...if every educated Negro will feel the burden of his brother - then things will be done. Then and only then will the Negro race be a race contributing richly to the world.⁷³

There is a certain classicist and phallogocentric nature to this extract, but it offers evidence of Marson's awareness of how nationality fostered divisions between blacks from different parts of Africa and the diaspora. Marson's comment also illustrates how she was beginning to adopt a transnational black diasporic consciousness by seeing herself as part of a black global community.

In many ways, Marson's experience of racism and involvement with racial politics and Pan-Africanism in London underscore Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley's explanation that the African diaspora is more than a dispersal of people; it is also a process by which identity and community are formed.⁷⁴ Both scholars address the formation of a 'diasporian consciousness' that is essential to understanding the African diaspora and the race consciousness of Marson and other colonials in London. This consciousness led to the creation of new metropolitan identities that were formed out of the realisation of how they were perceived in the 'motherland'.

⁷¹ Marson, "Nigger," 8-9.

⁷² Matera, "Black Internationalism", 54.

⁷³ Una Marson, "Editorial," *The Keys* v2 n.3. (January-March 1935), 45-46.

⁷⁴ Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World," *African Studies Review* 43 (2000): 11-45.

Marson's growing racial awareness informed her Pan-African activism during the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Mussolini's invasion attempted to avenge Italy's defeat at the 1896 Battle of Adwa and re-establish the Italian Empire in Africa. It had a cataclysmic impact throughout the African diaspora.⁷⁵ Abyssinia's position as the last independent African nation meant the country had established associations with black freedom.⁷⁶ In Britain, a number of Pan-African, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist organisations, like the International African Friends of Ethiopia, led by Padmore, James and Ashwood Garvey, spoke out critically against the League of Nations' ineffectual sanctions against Italy.⁷⁷ Marson was heavily involved in the aftermath of the invasion providing administrative assistance to Dr Charles Martin at the Ethiopian Delegation in London and responding to newspaper reporters' calls for information about Abyssinia.⁷⁸ As secretary to Haile Selassie, she followed him to diplomatic meetings in both London and Geneva. The crisis had a significant impact on Marson both personally and politically. According to Jarrett-Macauley, Marson underwent,

an enormous transformation: now she distrusted 'Europe' and looked to 'Africa'... Britain's role within the League of Nations had sustained a vital emotional currency for Una, and the reality of its failure to save Abyssinia (Ethiopia) carried an inflated value for her... Her personal age of innocence about the 'Mother Country' was over.⁷⁹

Jarrett-Macauley's observations address two significant issues. First, Britain's failure to help Abyssinia drove Marson's search for her African identity. This not only affected her politics, but also her self-image. After arriving in London, for example, she stopped straightening her hair, preferring to wear it in a natural style, reminiscent of her African roots. Indeed, her poems 'Kinky Hair Blues' and 'Black is Fancy' in *The Moth and the Star* incorporated Marson's self-fashioning and her ideas about African hair and black beauty. Second, Marson's experience in London shattered her innocence about the superiority of the 'Motherland'. Her fellow Jamaican novelist and poet Claude McKay and other postwar Caribbean writers shared this experience, as reflected in works such as George Lamming's *The Emigrants*, Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Donald Hinds' *Journey to an Illusion: The West Indian in Britain*.

⁷⁵ Schwarz, 'Crossing the Seas', 6.

⁷⁶ Snaith, "Little Brown Girl", 103. For more information about the invasion see S. K. B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941* (London: Longman, 1977) and Sidney J. Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley eds., *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London: Verso, 1994).

⁷⁷ The International African Friends of Ethiopia later transformed into the International African Service Bureau. For more information on this group see Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 195-224.

⁷⁸ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 100.

⁷⁹ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 104-105.

In London, Marson's ideas about gender changed from her previous efforts to encourage women to be more involved in society and critiquing patriarchy, which she voiced in Jamaica, to expressing the marginalisation and alienation she faced in white dominated London. In contrast to Du Bois's concept of the double consciousness of being a 'Negro' and an 'American', which he explored in his groundbreaking 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, Marson faced a triple consciousness based on her race, gender and national identity as a Jamaican and British subject.⁸⁰ Her poem 'Little Brown Girl', written in England but published in *The Moth and the Star*, highlighted this triple consciousness. The poem depicts an unnamed black woman, who perhaps can be seen as Marson, being bombarded with questions by a white Londoner. S/he asks, 'Why do you wander alone/...Why do you start and wince/When white folk stare at you?'⁸¹ Throughout the poem, the white speaker directs staccato questions at Marson's racialised gaze, and create a sense of intimidation. S/he probes Marson's racial identity asking, 'would you like to be white/Little brown girl?'⁸² This question is fraught with the underlying connotations of white supremacy. However, the Londoner answers his/her own question by noticing how Marson 'tosses her head' and s/he soon realises that she is 'proud/To be brown'.⁸³ When the voice of the girl emerges she says,

...the folks are white, white, white,
And they all seem the same
As they say that Negroes seem⁸⁴

Here, Marson reverses colonialists' and travel writers' oft-cited inability to distinguish between the different nationalities and ethnicities of Africans. 'Little Brown Girl' is an eloquent exposition of Marson's outsider-within status in London. She is the extreme 'other' outsider because of her race and gender, but as a Jamaican who sees herself as a British subject she is also an insider. Yet, as Collins, hooks, Homi Bhabha and others have shown, being a marginalised outsider can also be seen as a position of power.⁸⁵ In Collins' words, outsider-within positions 'can produce distinctive oppositional knowledges that embrace multiplicity yet remain cognizant of power'.⁸⁶

Marson's triple consciousness and outsider-within status informed her knowledge of the multiplicity of black women's experiences. She voiced this in her April 1935 speech under the topic of, 'East and

⁸⁰ Du Bois, *Souls*, 5.

⁸¹ Una Marson, "Little Brown Girl," *The Moth and the Star* (Kingston: Published by the Author, 1937), 11-13.

⁸² Marson, "Little," 11-13.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

⁸⁵ See, bell hooks, *Feminist Theory* and Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁸⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 8.

West in Co-operation’, which she gave at the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in Istanbul. In this, Marson drew on her Pan-African identity, declaring, ‘I talk on behalf of all the Negroes...Although I don’t know much about Africa, I consider it a part of my being because my forefathers came from there’.⁸⁷ She called on colonial powers in Africa to protect the rights and status of Africans, demanding ‘they must do this in all spheres, social, religious and educational’.⁸⁸ Marson proceeded to draw her audience’s attention to the racial oppression that blacks in the diaspora faced:

Negroes are suffering under enormous difficulties in most countries of the world...in London one sometimes sees discrimination against black people, even those that are British subjects... You know the situation of American Negroes... the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People demands a law which shall put an end to the barbarous habit of lynching.⁸⁹

She went on to declare to her international audience, ‘we must count upon all countries where there are Negroes – for women always possess a better developed sense of justice – to obtain for them a life more pleasant and less severe’.⁹⁰ This speech illustrates how Marson’s feminist activism was interconnected with her Pan-African racial politics in Europe. She stressed the gendered differences between men and women and called on her international audience to challenge racial discrimination as part of their feminist activism.⁹¹

In many ways, the experience that Marson faced in London mirrored that of her Francophone Antillean counterpart, the Martinican journalist, Paulette Nardal. In the 1920s, Nardal and her younger sister, Jane, moved to their motherland’s metropole, Paris, to study at the Sorbonne. Paulette and Jane were important but forgotten female figures of the Negritude movement who established the ‘Clamart Salon’ where the three so-called ‘founding fathers’ of Negritude, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Damas regularly attended.⁹² In 1931, Paulette Nardal

⁸⁷ This extract of Marson’s speech is taken from Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 89-90.

⁸⁸ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 89.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹² For detailed studies about the Nardal sisters see T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Emily Kirkland McTighe Musil, ‘“La Marianne Noire:” How Gender and Race in the Twentieth Century Atlantic World Reshaped the Debate about Human Rights’ (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2007) and Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 133-169.

founded the bilingual journal *La Revue du monde noir* (1931-1932) and in one notable article she declared that black women,

living alone in the metropolis, who until the Colonial Exposition were less favored than their male compatriots, who have enjoyed easy success, felt long before the latter the need for a racial solidarity that would not be merely material. They were thus aroused to race consciousness. The feeling of uprooting... was the starting point of their evolution.⁹³

For Nardal and Marson, their uprooting from the Caribbean and their experiences across the Black Atlantic reveal the gendered nature of black women's movement in changing their intellectual ideas. It is unknown if Marson and Nardal knew of each other, yet they epitomized Davies' theory of the 'migratory subjectivity' of black women writers as their migrations transformed their gendered and racialised identities in the early twentieth century.⁹⁴ London and Paris were the respective cosmopolitan cities where Marson and Nardal's racial politics and Pan-Africanism altered their black feminism and developed their black internationalism, which Marson expressed further on her return to Jamaica in 1936.

Black Internationalism and Black Feminism in Marson's plays in Jamaica 1936-1938

Once back in Jamaica, the important position of Pan-Africanism within Marson's black feminism intersected with and influenced her black internationalist ideas, which she expressed in *London Calling* and *Pocomania*. *London Calling* was written in London and set in the winter of 1934. The plot follows the characters of siblings Rita and Sydney Fray, who are students from Novoka, an imaginary non-African British colony. In the opening act, Rita and Sydney are invited to perform a 'native sketch' for the International Students Society and aristocrat Lady Burton asks them to visit her home in Kent. Rita and Sydney, along with fellow colonials Alton and Frank, ask their African friend, Prince Alota Bayo, a law student, to dress them as Africans because Alton claims they 'have only English customs in Novoka'.⁹⁵ In the first Act, Marson makes a number of references to Pan-Africanism. For example, in response to Alton's comment, Prince Alota pities the Novokans saying, 'it is very sad that you have no language...and no customs...but I will help you', to which Alton

⁹³ Paulette Nardal, "L'Éveil de la conscience de race chez les étudiants noirs," *La Revue du monde noir* 6 (April 1932): 25-31; translated as 'The Awakening of Race Consciousness among Black Students' in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 122.

⁹⁴ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁹⁵ Una Marson, "London Calling," Unpublished playscript, MD1944A-D, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston (1937) Act I Scene I at 11. All quotations from the manuscript of Marson's "London Calling" are quoted courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.

replies, 'that's kind, and after all we are cousins'.⁹⁶ Alton's reference to 'cousins' echoes their African ancestry and can be read as Marson highlighting the unifying aspects of race in forging black internationalist connections.

In order for the students to perform their sketch, Alota dresses his friends in old clothes and blankets, which illustrates the students' comedic performance. However, it also reflects the students' positive desire to self-fashion and style themselves as Africans, given the possibly limited availability or high price of African textiles in London. Marson also stresses the positive impact of the African costumes for Rita as Alota compliments her stating that she looks 'very charming in the dress of an African Princess'.⁹⁷ This can be read as Marson emphasising the beauty of black women, which challenged racist and sexist stereotypes of black women's appearance. When Frank enters and sees his friends dressed as Africans he asks, 'Prince Alota taking you back to Africa?' to which Alton responds 'Yes... and this time we are going to get there'.⁹⁸ Here Marson hints at black internationalism through Garvey's 'back to Africa' message. Alton's comment, however, is complicated due to the difficulty and contradiction in trying to find the African past of a denied ancestry, which Jamaican poet Louise Bennett later touched on in her poem 'Back to Africa'.

Marson also highlights aspects of black internationalism through her representation of Alota in *London Calling*, presenting him as a modest, intelligent and yet proud African, whose character is modelled on Sir Ofori Atta. In 1934, Atta visited London as head of a delegation to the Colonial Office to demand changes to the Gold Coast constitution, but their demands were refused.⁹⁹ Her characterisation of Alota, perhaps drawing on her relationship with Atta, challenged negative representations of African men as effeminate, childish and docile.¹⁰⁰ This resonates with Marson's message in her 'Racial Feelings?' article in *Public Opinion*, where she states that 'some of the finest and bravest men that ever lived came out of Africa, and the coloured people of America are the most progressive in the world because they have accepted themselves... let us not be ashamed to be linked on the chain of dark skinned peoples'.¹⁰¹ By praising the virtues of people of African descent in Africa and America, Marson uses a Pan-African message to call on Jamaicans to not only take pride in their African heritage but also to see themselves as part of a transnational racial community.

⁹⁶ Marson, "London Calling," Act I Scene I at 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Act I Scene I at 13.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Act I Scene I at 12.

⁹⁹ Snaith, "Little Brown Girl", 97.

¹⁰⁰ It was rumoured that Marson and Atta may have had a brief affair, see Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 69-70.

¹⁰¹ Una Marson, "Racial Feelings?," *Public Opinion*, 17 July 1937, 10.

In Act Two, following their performance at the International Society, Alton, Rita and Sidney arrive at the Burtons' residence in their African attire and present themselves as Mr Quamin, Miss Quamina and Mr Quatro. Lord and Lady Burton and their staunch right-wing Tory son, Douglas, reveal a plethora of racist stereotypes regarding their guests.¹⁰² The Burtons and their domestic servants, for example, are deeply concerned that their guests will leave black marks on the sheets.¹⁰³ Douglas is worried that they will 'bring their idols and make funny noises and burn things in their rooms' and, according to Lady Burton, the fact that her guests have already eaten before arriving at her home is indicative of their 'uncivilised' nature.¹⁰⁴ However, the play ends on a romantic note with Rita agreeing to marry Alton.

Critic Elaine Campbell dismisses *London Calling* claiming that the play was 'basically a romantic comedy'.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, Anna Snaith argues that Campbell's analysis is simplistic.¹⁰⁶ This is because Campbell minimises the important themes in the play, including the decline of the British empire and interracial interaction.¹⁰⁷ Most importantly, Marson used *London Calling* as a mirror to reflect to her predominantly Afro-Jamaican audience the racist attitudes of British colonials and conservatives, who viewed African and Afro-Caribbean subjects as little more than small backward children. In this respect, Marson attempted to draw her audiences' attention to the commonality they share with Africans rather than their white British counterparts. Whilst she had Irish ancestry, she chose to privilege her West Indian and African identity and made little reference to her Irish heritage. However, *London Calling* did not offer a simple notion of black internationalism or unity. The author also highlighted the difficulties of an essentialist identification with Africa. At the end of the play, Rita and Alton have leading roles in a colonial film entitled *The Bronze Idol*. Marson provided little information about this film, which is perhaps a popular pro-empire film set in Africa that stereotyped African subjects. Rita and Alton's participation in the play suggests their involvement in perpetuating stereotypical portrayals of Africans that extolled the virtues and significance of imperialism. The play's ending demonstrates Marson's understanding of the complexities of black internationalism, which did not always promote racial solidarity, sovereignty and unity, and at times also reinforced the divisions and hierarchies amongst blacks.

¹⁰² Snaith, "Little Brown Girl", 98.

¹⁰³ Marson, "London Calling," Act II Scene I at 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Act II Scene I at 9.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Campbell, "The Unpublished Plays of Una Marson," in *Anglophone- Karibik-USA*, eds. H. M. Hoenisch and R. Capelleveen (Hamburg: Redaktion Gulliver 30, 1991), 111.

¹⁰⁶ Snaith, "Little Brown Girl," 98.

¹⁰⁷ Snaith, "Little Brown Girl", 98.

Black internationalism was a central theme in *Pocomania*, which was based on the Afro-Jamaican religion Pukkumina. The play attempted to challenge the idea of African backwardness and promote the celebration of African culture. In Jamaica, over centuries of colonial rule, Christianity prevailed, although Africans brought over as slaves came with their indigenous and animistic religions.¹⁰⁸ These religions did not disappear but merged with elements of Christianity. Pukkumina combined the Afro-folk spirituality of Myal with the Christianity of Jamaica's Great Revival that grew in the early 1860s.¹⁰⁹ Pukkumina emphasised spirit possession and accepted members who lived in concubinage.¹¹⁰

Briefly stated, the plot of *Pocomania* concerns the relationship between Pukkumina and the middle-class Afro-Jamaican protagonist Stella Manners. From childhood to adulthood, Stella is fascinated by the religion, but her father, the local Baptist parson, opposed it. Throughout the play, Stella builds up a close relationship with the working-class revivalist leader, Sister Kate, and secretly attends Pukkumina meetings. In the final scene, Stella attends the Nine Night wake for the now deceased Kate. Hiding in the bushes, she watches as the evening degenerates into a brawl. The play ends with Stella swapping her interest in Pukkumina for love with her fiancé, David.

In the play, Marson countered the negative connotations of Pukkumina and chose to laude the religion as an example of Jamaica's African roots. *Pocomania* is peppered with the celebration of African drums, dance and worship.¹¹¹ The significance of the drums is explicit in the prologue where the six-year-old Stella excitedly exclaims, 'to the drums, the wonderful drums'.¹¹² The sound of the drums speaks to the child, calling her to dance to the rhythmic beats.¹¹³ Stella's retention of her passion for Pukkumina from youth to adulthood symbolises the abiding spiritual call to Africa within her mind, body and soul. In Act II Scene I, Stella enquires about the man who beats the drums asking, 'Who taught him to beat it like that?' Sister Kate informs her that '...him puppa, dat is Josiah gran fader come here a little boy pon slave ship from Africa'.¹¹⁴ The direct link that the drummer has to Africa highlights the ways in which Marson attempted to stress the link between the slave past

¹⁰⁸ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 130.

¹⁰⁹ Emery, *Modernism, the Visual and Caribbean Literature*, 137-8; Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 165.

¹¹⁰ Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 166.

¹¹¹ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 134.

¹¹² Una Marson, "Pocomania: A Three Act Play," in *Anglophone-Karibik-USA*, eds. H. M. Hoenisch and R. Capelleveen (Hamburg: Redaktion Gulliver 30, 1991), 117-147; Marson, "Pocomania," Prologue at 118.

¹¹³ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 131.

¹¹⁴ Marson, "Pocomania," Act II Scene I at 131.

and 1930s Jamaica. David captures the fascination of Pukkumina for Afro-Jamaicans, claiming, 'our people are full of emotion, vitality, rhythm – that's why Pocomania appeals to them'.¹¹⁵ His apt assessment of the appeal of Pukkumina, based on emotion, illustrates the importance of African bodily forms of expression to Jamaicans, which were not entirely severed by the horrors of the Middle Passage. Essentially, Marson's *Pocomania* encompassed a racially uplifting message, calling on Afro-Jamaicans to accept and embrace their African heritage and to see themselves as connected to the larger African diaspora, itself a key aspect of black internationalism.

Through the character of Stella in *Pocomania*, Marson also brought issues of her black feminist ideas about gender and class into black internationalism. Stella's character is the embodiment of the motivated but confined New Woman.¹¹⁶ In the opening act she confesses to her elder sister Dawn, 'I am sick to death of the quietness here. Sometimes I feel I want to scream'.¹¹⁷ Stella's frustration with the monotonous life she leads within the strict Baptist church draws her closer to the search for her African identity through Pukkumina. It is through Stella's relationship with Pukkumina that Marson insisted on the feminist assertion of woman's right to power, pleasure and control over her body and sexuality.¹¹⁸ But Marson also highlighted the difficulty Stella faces in her attempt to find feminist freedom and delve into her African roots, since by the end of the play she says there will be 'no more Pocomania'.¹¹⁹

Honor Ford-Smith argues that white and black members of the middle class vilified middle-class black women who sought the secret knowledge of Afro-Christian religions in the 1930s and saw them as slightly ridiculous.¹²⁰ This is echoed when Dawn's fiancé, Parson Craig, claims, 'it is very unusual for a girl of Stella's upbringing and education to fall in with such an obviously obnoxious cult'.¹²¹ Snaith suggests that the play's ending mirrors Marson's belief that black middle-class women faced difficulties in connecting with feminism and reconnecting with their African ancestry,

¹¹⁵ Marson, "Pocomania," Act II Scene II at 136.

¹¹⁶ Jarrett-Macauley, *Life*, 132.

¹¹⁷ Marson, "Pocomania," Act I Scene II at 127.

¹¹⁸ Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 165.

¹¹⁹ Marson, "Pocomania," Act III Scene II at 147.

¹²⁰ Honor Ford-Smith, "Unholy Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing engendered nationalism in the UNIA in Jamaica," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6 (2004): 31.

¹²¹ Marson, "Pocomania," Act II Scene II at 136.

encouraging racial pride and expressing black internationalism, given the burden of respectability that was central to Eurocentric middle-class morals.¹²²

Conclusion

The years Marson spent in London fundamentally contributed to the alterations that occurred in her black feminist ideas regarding race, gender and class. These changes widened the scope of her black feminism, which included a more nuanced Pan-African perspective. They informed and intersected with her intellectual ideas concerning black internationalism. Yet, Marson's ideas about black internationalism were not simplistic; they also addressed its inherent complexities. Scholars need to expand the notion of black internationalism to include black women's feminism within the context of the imperial metropolis as well as the colonies. Marson's experiences both differed from and were similar to her contemporaries, including Paulette Nardal, Jane Nardal, Amy Bailey, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, Maida Springer, whom she met in the 1940s, and Claudia Jones.¹²³ In many ways, Marson is part of this group of transnational and cosmopolitan black Caribbean and American women. There is a pressing need for more research to be conducted on the connections between Marson and her American and Caribbean contemporaries, which could help to shed new light on transnational black women's intellectual history and world history.¹²⁴ What makes Marson a unique and contemporary figure is that her ideas continue to be pertinent in our own time. Undoubtedly, she was a worldly-woman who can be seen as both a transhistorical and transnational figure. It is time for more public and scholarly recognition of her significant contribution as a leading black feminist and black internationalist to both politics and culture in London and Jamaica.

¹²² Snaith, "Little Brown Girl," 105-6.

¹²³ For more information on Springer see Yvette Richards, *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

¹²⁴ The author of this article is conducting such research at present.