

TRAUMA BOND AND BLACK WOMEN IN (BLONDE) WIGS: A STUDY OF SELECTED POEMS BY UNA MARSON, OKOT P'BITEK AND DOROTHEA SMARTT

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Abstract

In postcolonial literature, the concept of a trauma bond serves as a powerful psychological and narcissistic allegory for the complex, deeply dysfunctional relationship between the postcolonial subject and the lingering structures of colonial power. This work, which explores the hair dialogue between Una Marson, Okot p'Bitek, and Dorothea Smartt, forms an intergenerational critique of how imperialism tries to influence the black body. By contrasting Western hair aesthetics with Black hair aesthetics, these writers expose hair styling as a deeply cultural act. Through their poems, we can track a profound trajectory from trauma bonding to Western aesthetics and then to the politics of ancestral reclamation of the African pride. Grounded in the theory of deconstruction, identity is not static; it evolves according to the spaces in which the black woman occupies. In the poems under study, it is sadly ironic that by defying stereotypes the black woman who is trauma bonded to western ideologies mimics Western ideals which do not quite conform to traditional African settings. This becomes problematic because preference is given to narcissistic white supremacist ideals of beauty and culture and there is a breakdown of black traditional feminine aesthetics. The hypothesis postulates that using the metaphor of (blonde) wigs on black women, the natural and authentic becomes "primitive" thereby; subjecting black aesthetics to a binary position of powerlessness conformed to pre-existing patterns of stereotypes. Black women lose ideals and quintessence of their identity when they fail to divorce themselves from cultural practices that do not conform to black ideals of aesthetics.

Keywords: women, black, white, aesthetics, hair, identity and postcolonial

Introduction

In a globalised society where the tradition of the colonised people rubs against cultural diversities, the black female presence cannot be underestimated. There is a free play of cultures and the woman feels free to cross boundaries and deconstruct structures. In this culturally diverse world, black women are continuously in the process of finding new spaces to ascribe new notions of their identity. The politics of hair in post-colonial literature provides a profound window into how white supremacy and patriarchy control the black body. By comparing the poetry of Una Marson (writing in the 1930s), Okot p'Bitek (writing from the mid-to-late 20th century), and Dorothea Smartt (a contemporary Barbadian poet), we can map a generational and geographic evolution of hair politics. For these three writers, hair is never just fibre; it is a battleground between Western assimilation and Black authenticity

According to Foucault (1974) in order to belong to a specific society obeying the physical standards that every society stipulates is a mandatory requirement. Therefore, the body is one of the focuses of interest for the high echelons of power when dominating a new place. The colonisers aim for a cultural assimilation of the body of those they colonised. This paper questions if the black woman can still maintain notions of her own culture after being assimilated into the Western space. It

aims at projecting black aesthetics through hair politics into the centre while establishing an identity that correspond with

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the Stockholm syndrome or trauma bond, how blacks idealise and standardise the power of whiteness. The second part analyses the politics of black woman and (blonde) wigs. The last part breaks the notion of trauma bond by idealising black aesthetics to bring it to the centre.

Trauma Bond or the Stockholm Syndrome

The Stockholm syndrome which is almost synonymous to trauma bond is borrowed from a Swedish criminologist and psychiatrist Nils Bejerot. It is a psychological term in Bejerot (1974) which is very ironic in nature. He describes a situation in Sweden where four hostages were held captive in a vault for six days but they resisted rescue and defended their captors. Similarly, trauma bond is a concept under narcissistic theories which was first introduced in academic literature by Dutton and Painter (1981). While both lay the foundation of the term, Carnes (1997) expanded the concept which refers to a strong emotional attachment between an abused person and their abuser, formed as a result of the cycle of abuse, control, domination or even colonialism. So just like the Stockholm syndrome, although the victim may disclose the abuse to others, both terms mean that the victim greatly wishes to receive comfort from the very person who abused them thereby, failing to detach themselves from the controller and mimicking certain ideologies from the abuser. When the notion of trauma bond or the Stockholm syndrome is transported onto postcolonial literature, this framework illuminates why characters and societies often cling to, romanticize, or replicate the very systems that subjugated them.

In postcolonial texts, trauma bonding manifests through a distinct cycle that mirrors narcissistic abuse but operates on a cultural and political scale. For instance, the coloniser, strips away indigenous culture, and enforces a hierarchy that labels the colonised as inherently inferior and primitive. Then, the coloniser offers conditional rewards such as Western education, social prestige, administrative power, or the promise of civilisation. This creates a powerful incentive for the colonised to seek validation from the oppressor. Over time, the colonised subject internalises the idea that they cannot survive or possess worth without the framework of the coloniser, solidifying a deep psychological dependency.

When trauma bond transfuses onto postcolonial literature, this framework illuminates why characters and societies often cling to, romanticize, or replicate the very systems that subjugated them. In postcolonial texts, trauma bonding manifests through a distinct cycle that mirrors narcissistic abuse but operates on a cultural and political scale. Characters who exhibit intense trauma bonding often become what Bhabha (1994) terms mimic men that is, individuals who adopt the language, dress, and manners of the coloniser. This mimicry is not merely a practical choice; it is an emotional defence mechanism. The character seeks safety and love from the source of their trauma by trying to become identical to it, only to face the ongoing agony of being almost the same, but not quite. In this case, trauma bond discusses the dynamics of whiteness being the standard of beauty and aesthetics even to the African woman. In Okot P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* Ocol who is the son of a chief, well read and educated is trauma bonded to the western style and he despises his local wife Lawino. The poem opens with Lawino chronicling how Ocol abuses her verbally. He calls her an "uneducated woman" and compares her people to monkeys. This domestic tyranny is a direct symptom of the trauma bond: Ocol has been abused and humiliated by the white man, and because he cannot strike back at the master, he replicates the abuse on

the most vulnerable person in his immediate sphere—his traditional wife. In the poem, “My Husband’s Tongue is Bitter,” Lawino laments:

Ocol says he is a modern man,
A progressive and civilized man,
He says he has read extensively and widely
And he can no longer live with a thing like me
Who cannot distinguish between good and bad....
I am of the old type,
And no longer attractive.:
He says I am blocking his progress,
My husband pours scorn on Black people

He says the Black people’s eyes are stupid...

He says their heads are dense. (lines 28-38)

Ocol is fundamentally bonded to a system that will never truly accept him. He is trapped in a cycle of performing Eurocentric civility to appease a colonial ghost, completely blind to the fact that he has become the instrument of his own devaluation. He prefers to date Clementine as his modern girlfriend who is also dazzled by Western aesthetics and it becomes the ideal way in which she shapes her own identity. In the poem, “The Woman in Whom I share my Husband,” the satiric comments Lawino make about Clementine are sharp and sultry:

Ocol is no longer in love with the old type;
He is in love with a modern girl.
The name of the beautiful one is Clementine.
Brother, when you see Clementine!
The beautiful one aspires
To look like a white woman;
Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal,
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood,
Her mouth is like raw yaws
It looks like an open ulcer,
Like the mouth of a field!
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale;
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for the midnight dance.
She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face
And when little sweat Begins to appear on her body
She looks like the guinea fowl! ...
But when a black woman has used it
She looks as if she has dysentery;
Tina looks sickly ...
She is a piteous sight...
And she believes That this is beautiful
Because it resembles the face of a white woman!
Her body resembles
The ugly coat of the hyena; (lines 21-40)

The above quotation exposes a lot of ideologies in the postcolonial world. Because Ocol forces even Clementine to be trauma bonded to the western ways, she becomes a ridicule in the African space. To maintain the bond with the dominant culture, the colonised must actively loathe their natural selves. Ocol and Clementine are trapped in a tragic paradox: They cannot truly become European. They have severed their connection to their ancestral identity of the Acholi people. They are left suspended in a liminal space of cultural dysphoria, performing an identity that can never fully belong to them, solely to appease a system that views them as inherently inferior.

Like Fanon (1968) suggests that conditions like Clementine's condition arises more from the historical circumstances of colonialism. The abuser in this narcissistic model is the colonial structure—its education, its religion, and its aesthetic standards. The colonised individuals like Ocol and the heavily accessorized women Lawino describes become bonded to the very system that devalues their inherent identity. The colonial structure promises status, sophistication, and progress to those who abandon their indigenous roots. To be deemed beautiful or educated, one must adopt the oppressor's mask. In this instance, Clementine portrays the European idea of aesthetics as it relates to women's beauty.

There is pensiveness that the black woman has to be like the western woman thinking that they share the same female sensitivities. In the period of cultural diversity, the black woman in quest for asserting her black womanhood, becomes an echo of the white woman. Characteristically of trauma bond, Clementine mimics the white female and picks up elements of western womanhood to incorporate into their everyday life. She flaunts this fragile echo power as opposed to the authentic black culture. The flamboyant and westernised Clementine is trapped in a Westernised ideal of beauty but her Westernised ways do not fit into the society which she now belongs.

In Marson's poetry, the trauma bond often begins with an idealized, almost romantic longing for England (the mother country). The "Little Brown Girl" arrives in London seeking the validation she was taught to crave, only to be met with cold alienation, racism, and exoticisation. *The Moth and the Star* is one of Una Marson's most poignant and culturally significant collection of poems. The poem, "Little Brown Girl" in that collection, captures the alienation, racial surveillance, and deep psychological friction experienced by a black West Indian woman navigating the heart of the British Empire. In the poem, the white metropolitan speaker expresses not only ignorance about the Caribbean, but also an inability to differentiate between non-white people more generally as seen in the poem: "From whence are you/ Little brown girl?/ I guess Africa, or India,/ Ah no, from some island/ In the West Indies,/ But isn't that India/ All the same?" The narrator keeps bombarding the little brown girl with questions born out of colonial ignorance: "Little brown girl. Why do you wander alone... /Why do you start and wince/ When white folk stare at you?" and "*Don't you feel very strange/To be so often alone/In a crowd of whites?*"

The girl's wincing reveals the psychological toll of being hyper-visible yet completely unseen. She is trapped under a microscope in a city that regards itself as a "white, white city." The trauma bond of the poem centres around language and ownership. The speaker is unsettled by how articulate the young woman is:

You speak good English.
Little brown girl, How is it you speak
English as though it belonged
To you? (9-12)

These lines target the core of the colonial identity crisis. The colonial subject has mastered the language of the coloniser yet the coloniser refuses to grant her ownership of it. Even though she is culturally tethered to England by tongue, she racially excluded by skin.

In the poem, “Cinema Eyes” Marson explores how Hollywood and Western media act as tools of narcissistic abuse. In the poem, the speaker details the trauma bond of consuming media that completely erases or distorts black womanhood. The trauma bond is forged when the colonised woman begins to look at herself through these “cinema eyes”—desiring a standard of beauty (white skin, straight hair) that inherently rejects her existence:

I used to go to the Cinema
To see beautiful white faces.
How I worshipped them!
How beautiful they seemed –
I grew up with a cinema mind.
My ideal man would be a Cinema type –
No kinky haired man for me,
No black face, no black children for me
I would take care
Not to get sun burnt,
To care for my half Indian hair
To look like my cinema stars
I saw no beauty in black faces. (lines 4-13)

The poet finally faces an ache of exclusion from the western society that she so much idolizes. The bond is sustained by the selection of dating a white face instead of a black one, as seen in the poem:

A handsome youth came
To woo me at twenty;
I did not think him handsome then –
He was black and not my fancy.
I turned my back on him –
My instinct told me he was good and true,
My reason told me he was black
I turned my back on him.
Another came to woo me –
How fair he was! How like
My ideal built up in my heart
I gave to him my heart,
My life, my soul, my all;
And how in hell he tortured me,
My dream lover – my husband –
Then you were born,
But I remained disconsolate.
He too saw no beauty in black faces. (lines 25-43)

This ironical poem captures the exact moment this illusion shatters, leaving behind an ache of trauma bond to the white ideals. The trauma bond serves as a powerful psychological allegory for the complex, deeply dysfunctional relationship between the blacks and the whites.

When analysing the poetry of Okot p'Bitek and Una Marson, the concept of a trauma bond shifts from a generalised postcolonial allegory into a visceral, intimate critique of how colonial trauma disrupts the self, the body, and language. Across their poems, the trauma bond is localised in the regulation of black bodies, admiring that of the coloniser and the painful psychological fragmentation that occurs when the colonised subject cannot fully be accepted into the white space.

BLACK WOMEN IN (BLONDE) WIGS

Mauss. (1971) a member of the French Society of psychology posits that the black female body does not simply exist but it is treated as a text to be read, categorised, and judged by colonial standards. He creates the original notion of techniques of the body, which refers to the different forms of using the body that imply a learning process and an awareness of tradition. With this concept, Mauss transforms aspects of the physical body into a malleable and altering reality expressed indirectly by symbols and cultural codes. Postcolonial literature has been able to explore different dimensions of female corporal representation within the ambits of physical representations. Focusing on the notion of aesthetics, Tate (2007) argues that “white privilege has set the standards of beauty as she discusses how “the influence of whiteness as a yardstick for beauty has a history which extends back to slavery” (301)

In contemporary global culture, blonde hair on Black women is a major aesthetic statement. It has been popularized by iconic artists, models, and influencers who use hair as a fluid medium for reinvention and artistic expression. Hair, which is a signifier in every culture, occupies a sacred position in black cultures. Postcolonial literature exposes the symbolism of hair to explore how hair is socially and culturally embedded and represented by black women in contemporary society where there remain colonial undertones. Hairstyles significantly inform cultures which serve as a powerful marker of identity, age, ethnicity and even religious beliefs. The way especially women style their hair can communicate important information about their cultural background or belonging. Reflecting on the black image in the white mind could possibly be a dark in complexion woman with large hips and coarse black hair, which was like an apt description of black women in history. Today, black women have the liberty to cross boundaries, deconstruct structures and adopt different forms of cultures and identity.

Picturing a black woman with very long bone-straight strands of (blonde) hair portrays a picture of a contradictory representation of the black African woman. Many questions come to mind with this situation. Because the physical appearance of these black women in wigs or in (blonde) wigs also presents metaphorical interpretations of certain situations. The culturally diverse world pushes people to do many contradictory things. Ironically, we see that very often because many contemporary black women spend resources to import wigs, buy body creams to transform their skin complexion, which changes their very essence of appearance and aesthetics. Thereby, threatening the power of the future black female generation by adopting forms of visual identity that pose specific threats to ideals of beauty, aesthetics and culture. Every culture has its own blue prints of appearance but the contemporary black woman loses that notion when choosing to appear artificial. They feel free to *play around* with visual symbols of identity. Importance must be placed on the black woman's appearance and aesthetics because it could also reveal certain contexts of nationalism and pan Africanism. The black woman loses her value and integrity when copying unnecessary alien things from the west.

Black women in (blonde) wigs could also be a metaphor for flawed feminist, heterosexual females and lesbians as portrayed postmodern societies. Because liberty offered by (blonde) wigs constitutes many and different dimensions of freedom, sexual liberty and economic independence. The blonde wig is also a metaphor of ignorance as well as the social roles that black women wear as masks of identity in order to be socially and spiritually accepted by the white society despite a latent desire to rebel against narcissistic colonialist ideologies. The (blonde) wig does not still give the black female the same “female unity” on the world stage as the white female.

Western hegemony operates by establishing a strict racial hierarchy shows how this hierarchy is mapped directly onto hair texture. In Una Marson’s “Kinky Hair Blues” The speaker internalizes the colonial binary that equates straight hair with goodness and kinky hair with lack and ugliness surrounding the black aesthetics. Because she has kinky black hair, she says, “ I ain’t a lovely belle/ the boys pass me by/ they say I ain’t so swell(lines 4-6) By contrasting the nice and sweet straight hair of white women with her own kinky hair that causes her blues, the speaker reveals how deeply she has swallowed the imperial discourse. Western hair politics successfully convince the colonised subject that her natural features are a personal failure and an aesthetic deformity. At the end of the poem, she decides to transform herself by bleaching her skin and changing the texture of her hair, “Now I’s gwine press me hair/ And bleach me skin./ I’s gwine press me hair And bleach me skin.” (27-29) Even though the speaker in this poem doesn’t speak coherent English like the little brown girl, she is still adamant to adopt western notions of aesthetics to deconstruct the negative colonised labels

Deconstruction is a powerful ideology used black women to debunk certain stereotypes on ugly black aesthetics. The use of wigs occupies a dual space when deconstructing the politics of hair. The act of putting on a wig mimics western way and a negotiates a new sense of self for the black woman. In Okot p’Bitek’s epic poem *Song of Lawino*, the wig is one of the most potent and biting symbols used to critique the postcolonial embrace of Western culture. But Clementine decides to use it as a choice to be a modern and contemporary woman that Ocol likes. She breaks down structures and moves across to the western culture to put on wigs to look like white women. She rejects African aesthetics and the text uses physical appearance, particularly hair, to explore the psychological damage of cultural fragmentation and colonial assimilation. She abandons their traditional form of plaiting or hairdo called “afro” and mimics the white hair through wigs. In the poem, “The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become Monkey,” Lawino describes black hair as, “A black woman’s hair is thick and curly.”(60-64) Meanwhile, “A white woman’s hair/ Is soft like silk;/ It is light/ And brownish like/That of the brown monkey,/ And is very different from mine.” (43-45) There is great contrast between Lawino who foil each other as Lawino says: “Of hair of the Acoli,/ And the occasion./ Listen,/ Ostrich plumes differ From chicken fathers,/ A monkey’s tail Is different from that of a giraffe/. The crocodile’s skin Is not like the guinea fowl’s.” (39-47) While Lawino maintains Acoli hair, Clementine chooses different forms of the western world which even ridicule her to the level of an animal. The contrast between Lawino and Clementine is not only shown at the levels of their hairstyles but in their lifestyles and cultural representations. Clementine chooses assimilation to deconstruct fixed stereotypical cultures of Acoli tradition.

The Legacy of Assimilation in postcolonial contexts looking at the adoption of (blonde)wigs on black women as well as other hair textures or colors can be analysed as a symptom of cultural assimilation, where colonised individuals felt pressured to

wear a mask of the dominant culture to achieve social mobility or validation. Clementine in *Song of Lawino* fully assimilates into the English cultural space through her disguise to pose as a white woman through her hair choice. In the poem, “The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey” the modern women like Clementine wear their hair like, “The Indians’ hair/ Resembles the tail of the horse;/It is like sisal strings/ And needs to be cut/With scissors.” (67-70) For the postcolonial elite, straight, managed, is a visual passport to modernity. In the course of the epic narrative *Song of Lawino*, Clementine struggles to fry her hair but that doesn’t give her the desired results so she resorts to wearing wigs. Which distances her from her roots. By rejecting her traditional forms, Clementine becomes modernised and increasingly bound to the coloniser’s aesthetics of beauty.

Placing Okot p’Bitek’s fictional Clementine alongside Michelle Obama decades after, there is a similar cry for a place in the contemporary society when hair becomes a marker for social status. As the first African American First Lady, Michelle Obama occupied a hyper-visible, unprecedented space. She was acutely aware that her body, her clothing, and particularly her hair would be scrutinized not just for aesthetic appeal, but for political and racial subtext. The Intersection of Michelle Obama, African hair texture, and the politics of appearance is one of the most culturally significant case studies in modern political iconography. During her eight years as First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Obama wore her hair exclusively in silk presses, blowouts, and structured bobs—a choice that she later revealed was a deliberate, highly calculated response to the rigid, Eurocentric expectations of the American public. When analyzing this dynamic, her hair choices reflect a deep understanding of structural stigma, protective styling, and the performance of identity in the public eye. In Obama (2022) she candidly addresses why she never wore her natural hair, braids, or locks while in office, explaining that the American public “wasn’t ready” for it.

While today’s use of (blonde) wigs is often celebrated as an empowering choice of personal style, the phenomenon cannot be completely divorced from historical discussions surrounding global beauty standards. Clementine’s choice of wearing wigs just like the persona in Uma Marson’s “Kinky Hair Blues” goes with bleaching of the skin to look and feel really western just what Fanon describes as lactification which is the desire to whiten oneself to escape the perceived stigma of blackness.

Breaking the Trauma Bond

For a postcolonial narrative to move toward true liberation, characters must undergo the painful process of breaking the trauma bond narcissistic bond. Carnes, (1997) notes that is rarely clean or easy to break the bond. It involves severe withdrawal symptoms, including identity crises, existential dread, and sometimes even social exile. Breaking a trauma bond requires confronting the painful truth that the abuser will never love you back. Characters must acknowledge the internalized harm and stop seeking validation from colonial structures. In postcolonialism by breaking the trauma bond, this paper questions Western modern traits by revalorisation of colonised identity and overturning the Manichean ladder. Breaking the trauma bond does not only require deconstructing the colonial Manichean allegory but also by reclaiming the self, re-centring black aesthetics, languages, and histories; not through colonial discourse but through counter discursive strategies.

In this paper, the black natural hair is used as a metaphor for originality, honour, cultural authenticity and decolonisation. Breaking the trauma bond in this context does not make us less interested in the heterogeneity of cultural and ideological expressions. For the African woman to take back control from the narcissistic trauma

bonded white perspective of life, she must put in boundaries that must not be crossed to the other side of cultures. She must maintain certain aspects of her black womanhood and originality like the natural black hair to be able to stand out as authentic instead of a diluted black woman. By doing so, the black woman rereads history and reshapes herself in the culturally diverse world. By shopping for authentic African cultures in the shelves of cultural supermarkets, the black woman should be able to ascribe notions of her identity which are commodities in the world cultural supermarket that do not relegate her to the background.

In *Song of Lawino*, Ocol who is trauma bonded to the western style demands that Lawino look like modern, Westernised women, but Lawino argues that this modernity is actually a form of cultural mutilation. Lawino in the poem “The graceful giraffe cannot become a monkey” says:

My husband tells me
I have no ideas
Of modern beauty.
He says I have stuck
To old-fashioned hair styles.
He says I am stupid and very backward,
That my hair style
Makes him sick
Because I am dirty.
It is true
I cannot do my hair
As white women do. (1-12)

From the above quotation, while Ocol develops a trauma bond with colonial ideology, Lawino acts as the voice trying to break the bond. Her song is not just a complaint; it is a desperate, psychological intervention. Lawino constantly tries to strip away the illusion of the coloniser’s superiority. She is trying to show Ocol that his “abuser” is not a god.

Lawino functions as the external voice of reality testing. She refuses to see the wig as civilized or the straightened hair as smart. Instead, she strips away the prestige of colonial assimilation and exposes the raw, underlying trauma: the profound loss of self-love, the physical pain of conforming, and the tragic irony of loving a culture that demands self-destruction. She describes the process of straightening hair and wearing wigs as painful, unnatural, and ultimately desperate. The (blonde) wig represents a mask worn to achieve social mobility in a postcolonial world that validates European beauty standards, but Lawino exposes it as a source of deep cultural shame and a distorted sense of self.

For P’Bitek, writing from a post-independence Ugandan context, the Black aesthetic is deeply tied to ecology and tradition. Lawino proudly describes traditional Acoli hairstyles that use local oils and intricate braiding patterns as seen in the poem “The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey:”

Ask me what beauty is
To the Acoli
And I will tell you
If you give me the chance!
You once saw me,
You saw my hairstyle
And you admired it,
And the boys loved it.

At the arena
Boys surrounded me
And fought for me.
My mother taught me
Acoli hair fashions;
Which fits the kind
Of hair of the Acoli,
And the occasion. (25-39)

From the above quotation, for Lawino, her hair does not need to be altered because it is already complete. The real African men find her attractive with her natural hair and it connects her directly to her ancestors and her community. By maintaining her natural black hair, she retains her cultural autonomy, refusing to split her psyche to appease a Eurocentric gaze. She breaks the trauma bond and deconstructs the centre and colonial discourse. She uses a counter discursive voice to buttress her argument about black aesthetics overpowering the white standard of beauty. This black aesthetic values the hair's natural relationship to the environment. Specific styles communicate a woman's age, status, and honour within her society. It is an aesthetic of vitality, contrasting sharply with what she views as the "dead," fried hair of Westernized women.

Ultimately, the politics of hair in *Song of Lawino* illustrates that true decolonization cannot stop at political independence or the changing of flags. If the citizens of a newly liberated nation still look into the mirror and despise their own reflection, the colonial project has succeeded. For p'Bitek, reclaiming the beauty of African hair is a vital step toward reclaiming political and psychological sovereignty.

Writing as a contemporary Black British poet of Barbadian descent in her collection *Connecting Rooms* Dorothea Smartt moves past the tragedy of Marson and brings ancestral healing, reclamation, and subversion. Smartt provides the ultimate evolution of the black aesthetic. Writing from a contemporary Black British stance, she views black hair as an architectural marvel and a living historical archive. Smartt celebrates the versatility of black hair; twists, locks, braids, and afros while treating them as complex, beautiful structures that defy Western gravity and uniformity. The act of styling hair becomes a sacred, ancestral ritual passed down through generations as we see in the poem, "I'm in the Market For Hair:"

I'm in the market for hair
I, head down and under wraps,
make for the hair express convenience,
a place to market changes to maps
routing their way to Africa. With reverence
for style, innovation, re-creation, I am heir
to products for my fleece's convalescence
She says, We're all women and we all share
this deep-rooted concern to secure and shape
Beautiful Beginnings for our children's hair. (1-11)

In the texture of the hair lies the memory of survival, the Middle Passage, and diasporic resilience and the hope for tomorrow for the children to emulate. Smartt reclaims African aesthetics and transforming them into markers of luxury and pride.

Western discourse has historically pathologised black hair, equating dreadlocks or tight coils with dirtiness or monstrosity. Smartt brilliantly subverts this by reinterpreting figures like Medusa. Where the Western gaze sees dangerous, snaky locks that turn men to stone, Smartt reclaims the image as a symbol of untamed, coiled,

feminine power in the poem “Medusa? Medusa Black!” she deconstructs as a black woman, “Medusa was a Blackwoman,/ Afrikan, dread.” 1-2) In the rest of the Medusa poems in her book *Connecting Medium* Smartt masterfully utilises the mythological figure of Medusa to deconstruct the trauma bond. In Western myth, Medusa is a monster with snakes on her hair whose gaze turns men to stone. Smartt flips this dynamic. The trauma bond forces the black woman to look at her own reflection through the colonial mirror and see herself as a monster. The snakes of Medusa become a metaphor for locs, twists, and natural Afro-textured hair. To break the trauma bond, the speaker must stop fearing her own reflection. She must embrace the very thing the oppressor labeled “monstrous” or “dreadful” and claim it as a site of immense, sovereign power as seen in the lines, “He takes out a mirror to see what he hopes for/ and butchering her image captures her head, / spectacle to dishonour... that night, changing winds had blown. Medusa could not see” (12-15) herself the way the coloniser wanted. And in the course of the Medusa poems, she describes Medusa as, “an Afrikanwoman full of sheself/...natural roots Blackwoman/ loving Blackwomen/ serious.” (59) Medusa prioritises the beauty and aesthetics of the African woman with full confidence that radiates to all other black women. Smartt’s speakers stop seeking validation from a system built on their erasure. Her poems become a space where natural hair ceases to be a site of colonial trauma and transforms into a home—an architectural testament to survival, memory, and self-defined beauty.

Conclusion

The so-called encounter of two worlds was not only cultural but also corporal; so that studying the body as an object on which the vision of the *other* was built, represents an interesting starting point in order to understand how identities were shaped in the colonial world. In this research, colour difference was the point of departure for the construction of otherness in the colony; some physical differences, for example, hair, helped to construct the images and representation of the other.

When these writers define a distinct Black hair aesthetic, they move away from the rigid definitions of the metropole and ground the body in history, nature, and communal identity. All three poets illustrate that true decolonization is not merely a political transition of power; it is an intense, agonizing psychological intervention. To break the trauma bond to Westernized ways, the postcolonial subject must be willing to endure the terrifying withdrawal of losing the narcissistic western abuser’s approval in order to finally reclaim their own mind, language, and body.

When read together, these three authors create a powerful dialogue across time and space. The transition from Marson to P’Bitek to Smartt illustrates a shift in ownership of the Black female body. Una Marson diagnoses the deep psychic wound inflicted by the Western policing of Black hair and the trauma of trying to meet the Western aesthetic. Okot p’Bitek provides a fierce, satirical defence from the continent, warning that chasing Western aesthetics requires the literal and metaphorical “burning” of one’s identity. As well as weaponizes the indigenous aesthetics to fight off Western culture. Finally, Dorothea Smartt provides the modern remedy: an unapologetic embrace of natural texture as a site of historical resilience, communal healing, and autonomous beauty. She creates an autonomous space where Black hair aesthetics are celebrated entirely on their own terms and not as a reaction to the white gaze, but as an act of self-love and ancestral healing. Together, these three writers demonstrate that the transition from Western hair dominance to Black hair reclamation is a journey from subjugation to liberation.

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