

## 7 Womanhood: Female Spaces

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This chapter provides illustrative depictions of daily routines and activities of Jamaican women in empirically relevant social spaces in Montreal. Matching the actual course of the fieldwork, the written ethnography delves deeper into the life worlds of the interlocutors by passing through various places, narratives, and practices. These stages unveil individual experiences and challenges within the metropolis. Social space as a core concept highlighted by Bourdieu will serve as an entry point into this discussion. “What exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something liable but as something to be done” (Bourdieu 1998: 12). Bourdieu explains how social actors occupy certain positions in social spaces through the distribution of economic and cultural capital (*ibid.* 15), which he identifies as the central organizing component of any social space. Space is a construct, modified and structured through principles. Social actors take their positions within spaces by using their (own) capital resources and strengths. Through combining different capital of various actors, social space becomes a processual representation of lifestyles, cultural practices, choices, preferences, and economic abilities. Because of this, according to Bourdieu, individuals form groups based on their “realized” commonalities that constitute clusters or “sub-spaces” within a broader social space (Bourdieu 1998).

Bourdieu’s illustration of social space as a shared manifestation of a closely linked set of like-minded people is a useful approach for this study. However, in contrast to Bourdieu’s considerations, geographical proximity of social actors is not the main component of communal interaction and relation in this study. Hence, physical distance or closeness are not the main components to determine self-positioning or identification within a group. The key spaces of Jamaican women in Montreal are, while being scattered across town, rather constructed via social networks of various social actors spanning across and beyond the urban environment of the city. The interpretation of practices related to the everyday geographies and symbolic spaces of the interlocutors in the city highlight this differentiation between interior and exterior, as well as the self-positioning of women, which is embedded in extensive spatial and virtual socio-cultural networks. Unlike Bourdieu’s observation in Paris, these social spaces are constructed by cultural practices and

structures that go beyond spatial closeness itself, reaching out to other areas in North America, the Caribbean, and the world. In conformity with Faist's statement, "transnational social spaces are combinations of ties, [...] that reach across the borders of multiple states. These spaces denote dynamic social processes, not static notions of ties and positions" (2000: 191). In Faist's typologies of transnational spaces, he identifies 'community' as a socially cohesive, committed group of people that continue to exchange or care for each other over time, e.g., via transnational kinship networks (ibid.). Here, the strong point of his analysis lies in the concept of "border-crossing expansion of social space" (ibid. 201) that goes beyond the nation-state of the host country. Drawing on Faist, Jamaican women have agency by not only building new social links and maintain existing ties in both the host and home society, but also by further switching or dispatching links to life worlds and expanding their social space to other localities. Space, therefore, is not a basic fact; it is much more, as Clifford clarifies an ongoing composition "[...] practiced by people's active occupation, their movements through and around it" (Clifford 1997: 54).

## 7.1 The Pop-Up Shop

I met 29-year-old Elisha at a regular event of the Reggae music scene on Plateau Mont-Royal, where I experienced her as an enthusiastic dancer and music lover. Even though she was born and raised in Montreal<sup>1</sup>, Elisha feels an intense connection to Jamaica and talks incessantly about her dream of living there. She explains her engagement in the creative art and music scene with a form of spiritual consciousness: "When you live in Montreal, no matter if you are born here, you realize how Black you be. I was always an outsider because of my complexion" and further "music and art keep me alive; it gives me the energy to survive in this cold place". Elisha describes her school days as a severe period of facing xenophobia and racism through her environment, "I did not know I was different until they told me I was", she emphasizes. Therefore, Elisha's relevant relationships revolve around a small network of the local African and Caribbean diaspora. Hailing from different families and ethnic backgrounds, most of her female friends are also children of immigrants born in Montreal and similar in age group as well as educational background. Accompanying her to fashion shows and exhibitions as well as meeting her at her friends' musical events I was shown, how distinctively this network embraces their ethnic homeland ties. These attachments are not only a feature of Jamaican

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1 Her grandmother came from Jamaica back in the 1960s as a domestic worker, followed by Elisha's mother a few years later. Elisha grew up in a well-off home, bilingual, fully immersed into the local environment and studied at Concordia University.

culture and Rastafarianism, but also of a Pan-African consciousness that is geographically linked to specifically meaningful locations in Africa, e.g., Ethiopia or Egypt. In general, this network consists of women, while men were mostly present as partners or as friends at musical events. Together with her social network, Elisha is organizing fashion, health, yoga, and art exhibitions and events as well as meetings that serve to empower the young and Black (and female) generation around town. Their aim is to build communal ties against the experiences of daily racialization and exclusion, which they share, regardless of their familial ethnic origins.

Concerning the more traditional Jamaican community-based institutions that exist in Montreal, Elisha has no means of engaging with their events as she explains: “They are handed down and old-school, you know bingo nights and eighties dances. They do not speak to us as a younger generation; they stay on their grounds amongst themselves. [...] We, we want people here to see us and change something!”. One way of engaging with the younger network is visiting their pop-up shops. The shops that wander across town to different locations in periodic intervals bring together the same set of people recurrently, highlighting their creative talent and their appropriation strategies in the establishment of their own spaces for communication and cultural exchange. African, Jamaican, and Egyptian symbols and icons together with other fashionable designs handmade from African fabric, for example, inspire Elisha’s jewellery and clothing. “I am always happy to share my art with others. It is so important that people learn more about Africa or Black culture in general. Then people will have less prejudice. Sometimes it is hard to get white people to come inside the stores, but it’s better in summer when we can build up outside”, clarifies Elisha. Another “sister”, also a woman of Jamaican heritage, makes Rastafari-inspired female clothing and sells natural cosmetics. Another acquaintance of Elisha creates and manufactures Black ‘Barbie’ dolls for children. These spaces are not private, but invite outsiders to visit and take part in the socio-cultural happenings by buying clothes, jewellery, or by sharing thoughts and having a conversation. In doing so, these spaces also revitalize vacant or abandoned places through the displaying of Afro-Caribbean pop-up culture and at the same time serve as creative, income strategies against unemployment. Most of Elisha’s female friends, including herself, face a hard time gaining sufficient employment, although well educated. Similar to Clifford’s (1994: 312f.) findings on Maghrebi diasporic consciousness, here women from different African and Caribbean backgrounds unite at shared pop-up shops. These coalitions do not only ground in shared racial and economic marginalization, but also stem from a shared history of colonial and post-colonial exploitation. The positive connotation of ‘Africa’ or ‘African symbols’ thus strengthens shared diasporic consciousness and solidarity within the network.

Temporariness is another essential factor in maintaining cultural as well as commercial activity. The women practice a rotational system of responsibility as

Elisha explains: “This week it is my turn to take care of our pop-up so that I can keep a share of all things sold, next week it is somebody else’s and so forth”. The temporal and spatial flexibility of pop-ups seemingly creates networks of participation, sharing and discourse. During the fieldwork in Montreal and beyond, Elisha’s friends’ network had numerous temporary stores across the city, which assisted them in maintaining a livelihood, and a socio-cultural space that fostered community and sisterhood. While pop-ups are not a unique phenomenon to Montreal, it is valuable to acknowledge conflicting ideologies that lie in these temporary spaces. Through flexibility and resourcefulness, Afro-Caribbean (mostly female) artists such as Elisha found a way of sustaining themselves in the urban environment of the city.

After Elisha finished her Master’s degree, she made every effort to find a job in Montreal, two years long, without success. Assured at job interviews, she never had a real chance or access to an upscale opportunity because of her skin colour, affected her to view life in Montreal as negative, robotic, materialistic, and stressful; a place negatively connoted, intolerant, and filled with racial discrimination. Jamaica, in contrast, personifies anything positive: great music, fashion and food, great weather, inspired by her childhood memories and glorified as a romantic, stress-free living space. Hirsch and Miller describe the essentializing of the homeland as a practice of “spiritual familiarity” that generates a longing for return (Hirsch/Miller 2011: 112f.). For Elisha the work at the pop-up shop is an escape from the city as such, a safe environment, in which she explores her positivity about Afro-Jamaican culture and blackness in general. Besides, she can indulge in her passion for alternative art and shares communion with other Afro-Caribbean women, which creates a feeling of togetherness and stability.

Moreover, the pop-ups travel from time to time with their exhibitors to other cities, e.g., to Brooklyn (New York City) where Elisha and her arts network connect to other like-minded women who run similar pop-up shops. They exhibit together on Afrocentric or Afro-Caribbean musical events and engage in a border-crossing social network of conscious, Black women who all ‘struggle’ to make a living in North American centres. The creation of these pop-up spaces produces ‘difference’ within the city of Montreal by highlighting Afro-Caribbean culture and by giving diverse women of colour a voice and visibility in the city. A space in which heterogeneity, discourse and various self-understandings help shaping individual identity constructions and belonging of the younger generation within the setting of Montreal. As Hall states “more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of ‘Caribbeaness’, of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express [...]” (Hall 1996: 223). These young people chose to not exclude themselves, but invite outsiders to buy, to share and to ask questions about Afrocentric products and events. These spaces differentiate less between the notions of ‘othering’, but instead try to cre-

ate a dialog in the historically and politically troublesome grown relation of post-colonial Montreal with Black diversity.

## 7.2 The Salon

Though Elisha actively engages in her art network, her sister Debby's salon lastly gave her a substantial income opportunity that pays her monthly bills. Debby's beauty salon is another important locality for Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean women to participate socially, economically, and culturally. The beauty salon is a site of collective bonding and a social space of constructing professional as well as personal relationships by and for women. The small space, which is located in her sister's private home, consists of a manicure and pedicure station, a hair salon and a make-up store that also sells hair products. Debby's salon is an important community institution in Montreal, but before I realized how meaningful this place was, I firstly was astonished by the ways in which clients negotiate their styles and wants, although I assumed prices were fixed as they were listed on a poster that hangs in the entrance area. Negotiations between Debby and her clients are essential components of women's interactions at the salon. Mediation between personal preferences and potential monetary investment as well as the stylist's professional expertise, creativity, and advertising potential (meaning that clients advertise for the hairstylist by wearing her creations) intermingle. For example, women use different mimics, gestures, expressions, questions, and often jokes (or sarcasm) to communicate their preferences. Even though many of these discussions seem to show indecisiveness or lack of knowledge, i.e., the need for consultation with Debby or Elisha, customer narratives signify negotiations of identity. Because of this, different debates can occur between commonly accepted hair practices, e.g., the installation of the so-called 'good hair' and Afrocentric hairstyles such as dreadlocks or afros. The choice of hairstyle gives hints about who the person is or wants to be, for that matter. At times, the extensive counselling sessions also decide about Debby's ability to accommodate her clients adequately. Through their clever and ironic questioning techniques, proficient patrons know how to negotiate the 'real' final price of a hairstyle. One client, for example, smiled at me and said, "If you don't bargain, it's your own fault!". Debby, who took over the hair salon and clientele from their mother, is one of the popular beauticians in town. Accurate and passionate as she is, she caters to her clients by ever informing herself about the newest styles, whether hair, nails or lashes and the newest gossip about celebrities and about 'what is going on' around town. To observe Debby negotiating client demands, e.g., about material resources (how much hair, which type of hair, which additional styling products), price and aesthetic visions, offered a way of understanding women's local discourses surrounding race, class and gender.

Many of her clients prefer artificial looks, i.e., long pointed nails, fake lashes, and colourful weave-ins (a technique of sewing in hair extensions), while others want to have a “natural look” with hair colours and textures matching their individual type. Furthermore, she also caters to clients who do not wear any artificial hair at all and come to take care of their ‘real’ hair, e.g., interlocking locks. From the beginning of fieldwork, I was spending hours at Debby’s salon and involved in helping whenever a hand was needed. It felt more ‘natural’ to Debby to incorporate me in small-scale activities as, e.g., unwrapping hair, sorting in newly arrived products or making coffee, than to have me sitting around and “stare at people” in an already over-crowded shop. In general, people do not like to be stared at, which is prevalent in Euro-Canadian culture. In Jamaica, however, I experienced staring as a quite common practice, whether people try to figure out where someone is from or if they know the person. Maintaining eye contact is therefore not a taboo. This was definitely different in Debby’s salon as I was a total (and white) foreigner. Debby was keen to keep the distraction as low as possible. During the time at the salon, she engaged me in activities, so I would not attract unnecessary inspection. If someone asked about me, which happened a few times, she usually referred to me as “some extended family member visiting from the USA”. When final arrangements regarding the preferred styles are made, conversations turn around to topics such as living conditions in the city, fashion, events, food, men, children and homeland ties to Jamaica from a female perspective. No one sits facing their mirror, all chairs point sideways or towards the centre of the room, which makes it easier to engage in conversations. After a two-hour nail-procedure or a daylong hair braiding session, one hears quite a lot, from the latest gossip to personal stories. Even though the initial ‘negotiation ceremonies’ give reason to believe otherwise, Jamaican women stay with their hair and nail stylists as they do with their tailors or favourite pastors. In Jamaica, women wait for hours or go far distances to see their valued beautician. However, disappointment in a ‘style’ can lead to not returning. Consequently, the salon tries to keep patrons coming back with a high level of service, excellent work and of course music, the newest gossip, talk of fashion and men. Maintaining an active client base is a complicated affair as the business structure is highly informal and works through recommendations. Here, Debby’s salon benefits from a “supply and demand” structure in Montreal where fewer locations are available compared to English-speaking metropolises such as Toronto or New York City.

At the beauty salon, Elisha encounters all different types and generations of immigrant women who come from various social classes and origins and have differing migratory experiences. Unlike her Afrocentric arts network, but indicative of the majority of Jamaican women, here various ideals of beauty –highly influenced by the looks of fashion models in the media or stars like US-singers Beyoncé or Rihanna– are at work. “Nobody here wants to hear something about ‘back to the

shops' that is stale and the men wouldn't find it great either." Elisha says sighing. To get one's hair done 'properly' (meaning, i.e., weaving, braiding or straightening it) is a commonality amongst both Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean women. While some do it every week, others only do it on special occasions. The salon in Montreal is a simple continuation of this tradition in a new locality.

Every hour inside the salon has its distinct feel and a different crowd. When the shop first opens in the morning, retired women in their golden years make up the crowd. The salon offers a socio-cultural space, where females can encounter understanding, sympathy, and like-minded people. The salon facilitates female bonding without interference. Debby generally likes to speak about her childhood memories with her clients, about her mother having the little, unregistered hair salon in their old apartment in Little Burgundy nearly 40 years ago. The older women who used to go to Debby's mother back in the days then rekindle into memories about the "good old days" in Little Burgundy. Times when the neighbourhood had "soul" (mostly by referring to music and working culture), "the community was less criminal", and "less divided between rich and poor", Anglophone and Francophone or different cultural groups. The elders especially are concerned with the fact that fewer and fewer spaces are available to gather and socialize. The low economic development in the Little Burgundy district and the lack of community services is a big challenge, primarily for older women who, as one of these regular patrons' states, "have to go far for a bag of rice". The devaluation of the community is an outcome of many violent incidents that happened in the past years and the fact that Black youths cannot find jobs inside or outside of the area. For Debby and Elisha's mother, who now is retired, doing hair was one of the ways to survive without relying on an employer. "She could build up a clientele, we could live [...] and I followed in her footsteps", she says, skilfully sewing curled strands of hair on a woman's head by using a long half-moon shaped needle.

During the day, many people pass through the shop to either have a short conversation with Debby, make appointments, deliver food from Jamaican restaurants for clients or drop off flyers and tickets for events and parties, which are also sold in the salon. Over time, I understood that Debby not only lived in the same house above her salon, but also engaged several Jamaican people, besides her employees (delivery people from restaurants, music personnel and Uber taxi drivers) into her daily work routine. When the afternoon arrives, many workers come from their shifts to have a little "after work" chat or have their nails done while talking over coffee. "You got to have that feel for your people, you have to meet them at their respective phase and place", explains Debby. Doing hair is far more than merely negotiating styles, mediating prices or sharing gossip; it is instead a location-based or rather a 'hair-based' community work. Through her beauty work, advice and 'open-ear' Debby has created a sanctuary space in the city and an anchor point for many Afro-Caribbean women. "Montreal is a small place when it comes to getting your

hair done”, one client explains. “Sometimes on my way from work, I stop by here to get the latest news”, she continues. The statement indicates that the salon is also a significant site for the sharing of local information. In a city where activities can be limited for immigrant populations and senior citizens in particular, with most activities commonly being offered in French (therefore inaccessible to Anglophones) or solely being offered at too expensive prices for less affluent residents, Debby’s salon presents an exception. The beauty salon is an example of the maintenance of cultural practices in a new locality that is within itself, inside the shop – in the composition of the furniture, of music played, of hairstyles created, of nails designed or of conversations spoken – a social space equal to other hair salons in Jamaica. Women looking for a great style and treatment or the fellowship come to Debby. As a result, the beauty salon offers an open and inclusive socio-cultural space, where women can encounter understanding, sympathy, and like-minded people.

Elisha’s daily work at the salon and the continuous listening to the clients’ discourses also continue to influence her perception about Montreal and Jamaica. “They constantly complain about Montreal and talk about Jamaica here and Jamaica there, but none of them would go back home”, she assures me. On a Tuesday afternoon, Elisha asks the 40-something woman whose hair she is working on, about going back to Jamaica and triggers an immediate discussion in the salon: “Go back where, girl? Yuh cyan go back with nutten!”<sup>2</sup> The woman, who is one of her patrons, receives great agreement in the salon. “If you go who will do my hair?” the woman asks sharply, turning the indistinct chatter into a burst of collective laughter. Debby looks at Elisha with a mimic of wide-open eyes, bites her lips and shakes her head barely noticeably in an effort to set Elisha to stop this undesirable topic from going any further. Here, Elisha faces considerable opposition against her wish of living permanently in Jamaica as most of the regular customers tell her that she is ‘foolish’ in thinking she as a foreign-born ‘pickney’<sup>3</sup> could go back and navigate herself on the island without facing problems. While Elisha is firmly holding on to her dream of going back to Jamaica, the “negativity”, as she calls the comments of her customers, at times affects her. Elisha’s social network of art friends, peers from school days and the university is, in comparison to her sister’s, that of a younger, diverse generation, hence, more extensive in terms of, e.g., origin, occupation or education level. In contrast to her sister Debby, Elisha not only stayed within the “zone” and therefore has individual, yet varying images and aspirations that go beyond the common perspectives of the women she encounters at the salon. Africa or Jamaica as idealized and valued places amongst her peer group, i.e., concerning identity concepts, reveals the younger generations’ grappling with identity politics and cultural symbolism. However, ‘back to the roots’ seems to serve in many

2 Translation: You cannot go back to Jamaica without any economic stability!

3 Translation: Jamaican Patois for child/ children.

instances more as an idealized identity umbrella or image and less as an actual materialization.

Later that day, during a break, Debby scolds her younger sister in the small salon kitchen: “You know how far this lady comes each time to get her hair done, stop chat foolishness in mi shop!”<sup>4</sup> Debby created a social space that nurtures her not only economically, but also socially and culturally. She is resourceful, successful and gets recognition for what she does from other Afro-Caribbean people, men and women alike. Her daily life and work experiences combined with the history of her mother’s hair salon strengthen her belonging and feelings of attachment to Montreal and her “people” as she calls her clients and employees. With her salon, she built a community institution that nurtures people socio-economically, and that ranks her in a high social position within the wider community. Even though the sisters come from the same family background, their present-day economic and socio-cultural realities shape ambiguous perspectives of ‘being and belonging’ to Montreal and the Jamaican homeland. As Stuart Hall describes: “Cultural identity, [...], is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, [...]” (Hall 1990: 225).

### 7.3 At Home

When Ms. Brown opens the door, she surprises me with her appearance: Dressed in home wear, without any make-up, without one of her wigs and barefoot, she looks completely different from our first meeting. When I take off my shoes in front of her doorstep, she rushes back inside her two-and-a-half room flat where everything is prepared for my visit. “Nothing fancy”, she points out while inviting me into her living room, which I later identified as the largest and most representative room, furnished extensively with heavy dark wooden furniture, a plastic-wrapped, checkered sofa, bulky golden silk curtains, colourful Caribbean décor and pictures of her children and family members. The oval dining table with its four small, upholstered chairs standing along the outside wall, which is adorned by a large, coloured ‘sacred heart illustration’ of Jesus Christ. Being at Ms. Brown’s I always felt as if I had transitioned into another world and time. The moment I entered through the front door, I felt as if I was in a “little Jamaica” in Montreal.

Initially, I met Ms. Brown at a Sunday church service in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, where I ended up going with an insisting friend. Christian religion or church service is an integral part of Jamaican society and everyday life, particularly among women. The Guinness Book (of World Records) declared that Jamaica

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4 Translation: Do you know from how far this woman comes each time to get her hair done, stop talk about these crazy issues in my salon!

has the highest number of Christian churches per square mile with more than a hundred different denominations, e.g., Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal or Church of God. Hence, taking part in the Anglican Church service was highly informative for me. The attendance was small (maybe 60 attendees) for the 11 a.m. service, and Ms. Brown was among other well-dressed Afro-Caribbean women of her own age group. The congregation was a mix of diverse people many hailing from Jamaica, Bahamas, English Guyana, or Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, a smaller number of elderly and middle-aged white people were present. The entire service was held in English and was joyful worship of call and response with an enthusiastic minister; singing and clapping, which resembled church services I had previously attended in Jamaica. During our following meetings, it became clear that participation in the local worship community played a significant role for members of the West Indian community. Especially for older women who, like Ms. Brown, have many friends and activities based in church. For example, many recreational activities, such as day trips and women's gatherings, but also community-based events are organized or at least discussed through the friends' network at church. A strong faith played a significant role in Ms. Brown's upbringing. Especially the Christian nurturing of her grandmother and mother were sources of support and endurance throughout her entire life. Her childhood socialization in Christian values, e.g., attending church service every Sunday, studying the Bible, participating in the youth choir and youth meetings helped to instil important religious morals that are substantial for her life today. Church and education were the cornerstones of her upbringing in Jamaica's countryside. Ms. Brown's grandmother not only made sure that she attended church services, but also that she excelled as a student in school. Even though material assets were small and lunch money and textbooks were a rarity, the commitment her grandmother made for Ms. Brown's schooling served as a powerful motive for her to become a voluntary worker and a geriatric nurse. "My grandmother taught me one important thing that I still live by today 'reap what you sow my child, reap what you sow'", Ms. Brown remembers.

The nursing profession is historically and at present in high demand in the province of Quebec; and besides the domestic work sector, it has been the easiest way for female workers from the Caribbean to obtain permanent residency since the 1960s. The *Canadian Nurses Association* (CNA 2009) predicts that, if healthcare demands continue to rise, the country will need 60,000 nurses to fill its labour shortage by 2022<sup>5</sup>. One of the main reasons cited for this shortage is an ageing population that is increasingly in need of health services. As one of Ms. Brown's

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5 Note: Although this study was written before the worldwide outbreak of Covid-19, this labour shortage in the healthcare sector became an increasing and persistent problem during the pandemic.

work colleagues puts it: “These people here, they rather take care of their dogs and cats [...], none of them want to take care of their elders, they just put them in old folks’ homes, so we do the work [...]. We fill the gap!”. The moral dimension beyond this brief, but essential statement shows a strong component of Jamaican culture –the morally accepted, hence, “proper way” of dealing with family– that transcends into their local lives in Montreal. In Jamaica, taking care of elderly parents or in-laws is still mostly done in the private sphere of the home. “Once a man, twice a child” Jamaicans say and caring for the elders in the family is a common practice, which many believe will be highly rewarded through blessings from God or ‘good karma’. Caring commitments, according to Reynolds (Reynolds/Zontini 2006: 8f.), cross the boundaries of blood, marriage, culture, residence, and country and are significant components of successful migration stories of geographically dispersed families. Even though Ms. Brown worked in her profession throughout her entire life and often stresses her gratitude for having a secure job that pays well (especially compared to often ‘semi-legal’, private domestic care), she hardly speaks about work in general. The discrimination she suffered at work during her life is a vulnerable spot in her biography. Therefore, Ms. Brown prefers to remain silent about specific events and often gives only meaningful hints that suggest racism as the main problem. Alternatively, she makes use of Jamaican proverbs such as, “If yuh cyan get turkey, satisfy with John Crow”<sup>6</sup> or makes a gesture as if she were locking her mouth with a zipper to stop the topic from being discussed.

After two marriages and raising three children –her two sons migrated to the USA, and her daughter lives with Ms. Brown’s paternal sister in London– Ms. Brown managed to return to Jamaica in 1993 through one of her church projects. Even though her children are independent and moved to different countries, she is in close contact with them via digital communication (mainly WhatsApp or Skype). She has been living alone since her second husband died and her social network primarily consists of her female friends and colleagues in Montreal. Additionally, she is in constant contact with extended family in North America, the UK and in Jamaica. Despite great distances or phases of not seeing them, the care and preservation of transnational kin ties represent not only an emotional connectedness to family and friends but also a socio-cultural insurance policy that facilitates return migration in the event of, e.g., old age or sickness (Levitt 2001; Burman 2002).

While waiting for Ms. Brown in her living room, I notice an older, slightly yellowed photograph, which shows a typical two-story Jamaican residential home in a lush green garden. Before I had a chance to ask about the picture of the house, she continues to utter her despair over the closure of her beloved church. “It is really

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6 Translation: If you cannot get turkey to eat, satisfy with vulture (John crow is a vulture bird indigenous to Jamaica). Meaning: Make the best of a bad situation, and be content with what you have.

time now you know [...], no after dem have the nerves to lock down our nice church, no what a shame, what a shame”<sup>7</sup>. Eating at Ms. Brown’s apartment became a crucial part of our regular meetings. In her apartment, she was able to unwind and for example, show me private photos of her children and family. One time she even took her old wedding gown out of the wardrobe while reminiscing about her second marriage. Ms. Brown’s second husband, who was the love of her life, passed away shortly after her daughter was born and left her with his life insurance from which she could live and raise the children. After his death, she never married again and drew substantially on her female networks to help raise the children and engage in community activities. Not being able to grow old with him also adds to her reasons of leaving the city. Ms. Brown further preferred to meet at her apartment since she felt more comfortable talking about her life in her private space without the interference of others. By serving food, she could not only engage in being a great host to her guest, which is a common experience for anyone visiting Jamaican households, she was also glad to talk to someone “outside of the box” as she called it. “Since you say, you nah eat no meat [...]” she chuckles, while talking from her kitchen, “mi cook some food fi yuh still”<sup>8</sup>. I mutter something like ‘thank you’ while I cannot take my eyes off the photograph of the house. I try to ask again, while she puts a fully loaded plate of Jamaican food and a glass of reddish fruit punch in front of me. “Eat! Enough questions for now”, she commands.

Practically, Ms. Brown never went out to the city to spend her leisure time, e.g., in a coffee shop. The only exception was when she would go to the salon to get her hair done occasionally or purchase something, which rarely happens since Ms. Brown does not want to spend a lot of money. Every move inside the city has a purpose, e.g., going to church, meeting friends somewhere specific, going to work or buying groceries, specifically in winter when “it is so horrible outside” as she once said. After meeting Ms. Brown in church, I was invited to her bingo and quiz nights, where I spent long hours of leisure time with older people, learning about the 1970s in Montreal, but also about hard work, achievement, endurance and social networks based on the religious community. At the beginning of November, we had another get-together at the women’s club, a Jamaican Canadian community project founded in the late 1990s by a friend of Ms. Brown’s mother. This friend, an over 90-year-old woman, decided to retire as its head and dissolve the organization in 2016 after she was unable to find a successor. The organization, which had received multiple awards, encouraged the full participation of women from “visible minorities” into everyday Canadian society. Despite the closure, the women still meet and organize events on an irregular basis. Since most of Ms. Brown’s ‘girlfriends’ are

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7 Translation: The time to leave and go back to Jamaica has come, especially after they decided to close our church, what a shame.

8 Translation: Even though you said that you do not eat meat, I prepared a meal for you.

in their late fifties to early seventies and retired<sup>9</sup>, soon to be retired or have left Montreal, she is now more than ever concerned with plans of leaving the city for good. She reignited her decision in October when rumours became public, and her beloved church closed in the following year (2017). These incidents, together with the dissolving of the women's club, ultimately forced her to plan a trip to Jamaica to find out if she would be able to return there in the near future. Another necessary closure took place at the beginning of 2016 when the long-term chairperson of the local Jamaican Canadian association retired after over 30 years of community service and a younger director took over.

One afternoon, Ms. Brown explained how she came to Montreal. She was one of the so-called "barrel children"<sup>10</sup>, knowing her mother mostly from presents and occasional phone calls from overseas while she remained in Jamaica with her maternal grandmother. In the 1970s, after her mother had finally made enough money to send for her and her sister, Ms. Brown had to obey, even though she never wanted to leave her grandmother and the little farm that she recalls as paradise. The unwanted migration to a foreign land and to a mother who had become a stranger to her was a significant break in Ms. Brown's life course and an essential point in our conversations because she talked about it often. In Montreal, her mother had a small one-room apartment in Little Burgundy, surrounded by Jamaicans and other immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. Without any previous knowledge, she had to learn French in school<sup>11</sup> and was engaged in the household as well as work responsibilities to help her mother as best as she could. By that time, her mother worked as a domestic, nanny, and housekeeper in three different Canadian families. The women's club back then was an active association, which helped especially single women with children through a "food-clothes-shelter" and organizing of communal events. Despite Ms. Brown's desire to leave the hard-working hours and a feeling of unfamiliarity with the environment, she describes the early 1970s as a glorious time in Montreal. The Black Power movement from the United States had found a second home in the city, propelled by the *Sir George William protests* at Concordia University in 1969, while at the same time a dazzling Jazz music scene evolved. Beats crossed with other forms of Afro- Caribbean music, and Jamaican sounds enveloped the city. In the mid-1970s, her younger sister turned eighteen and immediately returned to Jamaica since, according to Ms. Brown, "She could

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9 Note: Typical retirement age of registered nurses in Canada is at 65 years.

10 Note: Barrel children is a term that describes children who stay behind with close family members, mostly grandparents or aunts/ uncles until they get the call from their parents to migrate after a certain amount of time. Over the years, they often receive material presents and goods (food, clothing) sent in barrels by their parents from North American metropolises. These barrels often replaced 'direct' care (see further Crawford-Brown 1999).

11 Note: In Jamaica, English and Spanish are taught in school.

not deal with the cold”. At that time, she started to be an active member of the local Jamaican association (founded in 1962) and other church and community projects, while working several different jobs to survive and starting her professional training as a geriatric nurse. Simmons and Plaza (2006) suggest that in the metropolitan areas especially the second and third generation form socio-cultural communities based on their shared identification with certain music, traditions or religious belief systems from the Caribbean region.

Hence, the female bonds formed in church are not just loose ties. These women are not just acquaintances; they are long-term companions who worked, prayed, and lived together. Church serves as a social space where they met, where they became friends and benefitted from the community outreach back in the days when they had a small income. Particularly church networks and the social connections into the local community institutions and her later engagements in local projects with other Jamaican and Caribbean women gave her, as she describes, a feeling of belonging and home in Montreal. Additionally, the simultaneous care for her family and the remittance sending to Jamaica kept her personally closely and simultaneously tied to the island, not only in terms of an emotional, imaginative connection, but also in terms of financial and social obligations and belonging (cf. Levitt 2004). King and Christou argue in their transnational framework that migrants keep a combination of “economic, affective, and symbolic ties usually based on principles of reciprocity and solidarity” (King/Christou 2014: 5). The communicative connections to her family and her remittance sending practices kept her homeland linkages alive and nurtured her desire to return home, while at the same time, being engaged and fully settled in her local life in Montreal gave her a sense of belonging. Here the idea of ‘being and belonging’ (Glick Schiller/Fouron 2001) in various localities at the same time is again relevant.

Moreover, the local involvement in Montreal embedded her into a diasporic community with various Afro-Caribbean people. Besides her job, Ms. Brown never had much or even avoided intimate contact with people from Quebec. Hence, she conserved her Jamaican cultural values and belief systems over the years. The current changes in Montreal, especially in terms of critical spaces for the older, more traditional Jamaican community reveal a phase of transition with past generations retiring or dying out and new generations taking over or mediating their own socio-cultural spaces and belonging. Since the 1990s, a large number of Anglophone elders in Montreal faced the out-migration of young Anglophones to other parts of Canada or North America. Many ageing individuals such as Ms. Brown wish to return to their homelands, where they built or bought properties, after receiving their Canadian pensions. Since the late 1980s, Ms. Brown had been sending remittances to support her family back home and to rebuild the house that she inherited from her grandmother. This form of “cultural remittances”, a term coined by Reynolds (2008), is a means of developing ownership structures in Jamaica. The

practice of accumulating social capital in the homeland strengthens not only ethnic identity while residing in another country, but also shows the importance of moral obligation and ongoing commitment to family and kin and to leave paths open for temporary or permanent future returns (Plaza 2008: 5).

## 7.4 Montreal or Toronto?

Carol, a university graduate in science, filled with enthusiasm and hope for her new life abroad, arrived in Canada from Jamaica in 1966. Immigration was an option for her. “There was no personal force in my homeland”, she explains, and if she had chosen to remain, she probably would have had a high position, living a very comfortable life as she puts it. After almost 40 years of living in Canada, she still reflects on her place in her so-called “adopted country”. At first, she lived in Mississauga for several years, but another job offer brought her to Montreal in the late 1980s, before she decided to move back to Toronto’s suburbs in 2015. In Toronto, Carol and I met in early December 2016. “I was determined to accept any fair challenges that came my way, and to make a positive contribution to society. [...] I started working as a teacher, continued my education, and settled down to raising my son. I felt at ease with my choices. Some years later, a professional friend visiting from Jamaica expressed that although she thought life for me was good in Canada, she could not live here as a ‘second-class citizen’. I denied that I lived as a second-class citizen, but every so often I think about her remarks”.

As Carol continues talking about her experiences in Montreal, she primarily reflects on overt and covert acts of racial discrimination. The act of racialization is a way of ‘othering’ through giving racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group in terms of exclusion, marginalization or discrimination (Omi/Winant 2014: 105-106). Omi and Winant argue that despite the problematic nature of the process of racialization “it should be apparent that there is a crucial and non-reducible visual dimension to the definition and understanding of racial categories” (ibid. 111). As one example, the first apartment she had rented in Westmount had to be sublet to a local Canadian and white friend. After she filed an official complaint about the situation, she received a letter of apology from the owner who, after five years, finally offered her the flat. Another time she faced a problem with her son’s schoolteacher who was failing him in English. After she offered to review his English assignments, being a teacher herself, her son’s marks immediately changed from ‘F’s’ to ‘B’s’. As a college instructor, she recalls several incidents of Black students telling her of discriminatory acts in and outside the classroom, especially bullying and receiving lower grades although fulfilling the same requirements as other white students. “These things happen. I never gave up my professional career because of discrimination, but I often felt that since I was

not part of the ‘old boy’ network, being an outsider, a Black immigrant woman, I am at a disadvantage and doubly denied certain opportunities. Some people think that being female and Black, I have twice the opportunities. [...] I disagree with this”, she states. While living in Montreal, Carol frequently faced hurdles due to career and work-related racism. The existence of institutional racism and the experience of the devaluation of her economic achievements by members of the host society were prevalent. “I remember I lived in Montreal and just purchased a new car; I was constantly stopped by the police asking me ‘who owns this car’ like I cannot afford a car by myself. Several incidences like that happened, to friends and to me. Racial profiling by the police is real in Montreal. [...] They think all Black people, especially Jamaicans, are criminals”, Carol explains. Because Jamaicans were connected to many violent gang- and drug-related acts that were happening in the 1990s in Montreal, for example in Little Burgundy, Carol understands that most Quebecers stigmatized Jamaicans, men and women alike, as criminals afterward. “Earlier when I came to Montreal, it was just language. People thought all English-speaking Black people are Jamaicans and all French-speaking Black people are Haitians, that is no longer so. Racial profiling according to certain features and what the police think of as the ‘standard image’ of a Black person prevails. A lot of us have good jobs and can afford to buy a new car, [...]” Carol clarifies.

A newly published report (2018) by Concordia University highlights that problems of racial profiling and systemic racism prevail until today and enhance feelings of distrust due to traumatizing experiences with governmental institutions, especially for immigrant people of colour. While the report mainly focuses on youths and their experiences with racial profiling by the police in public spaces, the overall outcome of the study concludes that the longstanding problem provides little hope of abating. One of the main criticisms in the report is the constant law enforcement policies and programs that perpetually target racial minorities (Livingstone 2018: 10f.). A recent article in Montreal’s English newspaper *Gazette* (2019) informs that efforts began by a local commission founded months after the release of the Concordia study to tackle administrative departments such as the police who disproportionately arrest and ticket racial minorities in the city of Montreal. However, as the executive director of the *Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association* states in the newspaper article, “The intention of people of colour is to ensure that we are recognized for the systemic discrimination, profiling and excessive use of force against us [...]”. As I am unable to delve deeper into the discussion of police-based racial profiling in my study, please find, in addition to the report from Concordia, other relevant studies about the context of racial profiling and police-related violence against racial minorities in Canadian cities as follows (e.g. Wortley/Marshall 2005; Tator et al. 2006; Wortley/Owosu-Bempah 2011; Chan/Chunn 2014<sup>12</sup>).

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12 Note: This list is based on a selection process and does not claim to be comprehensive.

Racial profiling and the feeling of exclusion were reasons why Carol finally chose to move back to Toronto, where she feels fewer tensions and more at home. Although Carol learned to speak French fluently and tried to integrate as much as possible in Montreal, from her point of view, Toronto offers more opportunities for outside and recreational activities.

Unlike Elisha or Ms. Brown, Carol feels at ease living in Canada and does not plan to make a (final) return back to Jamaica, even after receiving her pension. Instead, she frequently goes on holiday trips to her country of birth through which she reconnects with family and also socialized her children in Jamaican cultural values. "It was important for me that they learned about Caribbean upbringing and culture when they were younger and that they see how I grew up [...]" Hence, many women such as Carol or Ms. Brown retain contacts with a home society, whose members they hope, value their sacrifices and achievements. When it comes to child rearing practices, school education and future-oriented life and career plans, women –respectfully mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts– hold much of the decision-making powers over the future generation. Many initiate the migration of their children to North America, e.g., for studying, from early on to improve their living conditions in the future. Knowledge about migration as well as learning about cultural values and traditions rests on women's shoulders and the narratives they share with their children. Hence, their economic success, social networks, and kinship relations highly determine and are responsible for the coming generation. Still, there is no binary opposition between home and host country. The shared experiences of racialized differentiation also connect Elisha, Debby, and other women from the local Afro-Caribbean and Jamaican diaspora. Thus, permanent residency in Montreal as such is a dissuading factor for many Black women. Fittingly, Grenier and Nadeau state:

"A main reason why the employment rate gap between immigrants and Canadian born individuals is larger in Montreal than in Toronto is language (...); immigrants in Montreal are significantly less likely to know French than their Toronto counterparts to know English and their knowledge of French is less rewarded than their Toronto counterparts' knowledge of English. Another possible reason is labour market discrimination. However, this discrimination would be French language related as opposed to being ethnicity/place of birth related" (2011: 19).

Even though this research explicitly focuses on the French-English language binary, there is an acknowledgment of discrimination in the labour market. However, from the standpoint of this study's interlocutors', the language issue is not solely the main restriction anymore. For example, Elisha who speaks both languages fluently explained what happened to her a few times when she was invited to job interviews. Although she pre-confirmed the appointments via friendly phone calls, the moment she stepped into most of the offices, the situation changed. In one of our

meetings she explains one of the racial experiences she had: “I went into the meeting room, and they were all surprised by my appearance, telling me that I sounded so ‘different’ via the telephone and that they thought my last name indicated another ‘heritage’, asking me a couple of times ‘Vous êtes de quel pays?’<sup>13</sup> [repeats three times]. They could not believe I was born in Montreal, in Quebec, like themselves”. For Elisha, those conditions ended her attempt to find a job that was in line with her education and led her to create a life surrounded by people with the same experiences. Similar to Elisha, Ms. Brown, Carol and many other Afro-Caribbean women in Montreal, maintain themselves in spaces where tensions and traumatic experiences with oppression and systemic racism are less intense. “When we were living in Montreal we didn’t really go out on the road as much as we do it now. In Montreal, you rather stay amongst your peers, your friends and homes or only go to certain places where you know people... [...]. Here in Toronto it’s more ‘normal’ to be Black, at least that’s my opinion”, so Carol. Although she sees Toronto as her home, she draws heavily on her regular holiday trips to Jamaica, her socialization and her understanding as being Jamaican, e.g., using musical icons of her country of birth, especially when combating exclusion. “The most important thing is to speak up against racist people, like Bob Marley said, ‘get up stand up, stand up for your rights’, I always used Jamaican music as a tool in my classes”, she remembers. Even though she does not speak of herself as Canadian, she has a strong sense of belonging to a broader Canadian society to which she contributed a lifelong process of work, education and Black liberal thinking. Carol’s reflections show how far Canada still has to go to turn a politically propagated ‘multicultural’ or ‘intercultural’ society into a harmonious reality. In addition, her reflections on life in Montreal also show that ‘being and belonging’ in/ to the city is a process of simultaneous entanglement of various, locally and globally connected spaces, people and practices that counteract exclusionary tendencies of Quebec’s ‘distinct’ society. The longer discrimination and racism continue to be a constant in people’s daily lives, the more positive images, narratives, and memories of Jamaica seem to be sustained or recreated from inter- and intra-generational narration.

Many years have gone by since Carol came to Montreal; now that she is retired from her workplace and the children are grown up, she has time to reflect on life in Quebec. Her recent decision to move back to Toronto was a process that she put much thought into, but ultimately, she knew that she would feel more at ease in Toronto. Carol, who grew up quite similarly to Ms. Brown, namely in a rural town in Jamaica’s countryside, with a grandmother and a grandfather, a strong faith in Christian values and “proper manners” as she says, always had a pragmatic attitude in dealing with racist behaviour. Though feelings of insecurity and vulnerability occurred, especially in her early years in Canada, she combated and dealt

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13 Translation: Where are you from?

with workplace-related racism in her strict and determined way. “You can’t let them see you sweat”, she states her life theme. However, the reasons why the women and their ‘foremothers’ initially left Jamaica loses value or relevance in the light of prevailing experiences. Frustration with the environment fortifies their identification with the Jamaican homeland as well as an opposition to the main society, which ultimately prompted Carol to leave the city despite her ideals and though stands. Above all, the wish to return to Jamaica (seasonally or permanently) strengthens over time. Here, the mind takes journeys back to a glorified homeland with nostalgic memories and tales that often envision Jamaica as a harmonious paradise.

This chapter aimed to show that Jamaican female spaces in Montreal are not only socio-cultural sites of building a diasporic community and fellowship, but also social spaces of resistance and resourcefulness to the restrictions and failures of Quebec’s integration policy. Ongoing power struggles associated with economic marginalization, nationalist tendencies as well as racialization are the major difficulties that so-called “visible minorities” from different generations, and ethnic backgrounds are confronted with. Further, and more importantly, the spatial undertaking of women creating alternative representations and their own spaces in a diverse city was prevalent. The pop-up shop, the salon, the church and their homes are different kinds of “safe spaces” created to offer an escape from the ‘main’ society and to reduce the pressure from outside. Claiming these spaces is an act of agency against multi-layered processes of ‘othering’ (Spivak 1985) and a way of building up a resistance against social differentiation and racialization. While not being located in a typical ethnic enclave but scattered across the city, Jamaican female spaces found a distinct way to foster and build community inconspicuously. These spaces are not enclosed entities merely existing as alone standing ‘hotspots’, rather they create a dialog with each other as well as with other localities and outsiders, and show the life worlds and experiences of Jamaican women in- and outside of these spaces.

