Hilary McD. Beckles and Heather D. Russell, eds. *Rihanna: Barbados World-Gurl in Global Popular Culture*. Kingston: U of the West Indies P, 2015. Pp. v, 211. US$32.

Hilary McD. Beckles and Heather D. Russell cite Rihanna's "uncompromising articulations of national belonging coupled with her unprecedented transnational success" (she is arguably the most commercially successful Caribbean musical artist in history) as the impetus for their edited volume focused on the Barbadian performer (2). The volume's eight chapters approach Rihanna's artistry and persona from a variety of disciplinary perspectives including history, literature, political science, and cultural, feminist, and gender studies in order to redress the ways in which "black diaspora subjects and their art have historically been (mis)appropriated and (mis)represented by others" (Beckles and Russell 2). Keenly aware that Rihanna's defiant sexuality is subject to critiques from local and global audiences, the volume aims to "decentre and destabilize the primacy, and thus potency, of the Euro-American gaze, positing instead considerations of the Caribbean artist and her oeuvre from a Caribbean postcolonial critical/theoretical corpus" (4).

This decentering of the Euro-American gaze is one of the volume's greatest strengths, and the challenges of navigating such a destabilizing mission are finessed by the contributors' commitments to positioning Rihanna as at once "100% Barbadian" and a borderless daughter of the Caribbean (her mother is Guyanese) whose genre-defying dance/pop/reggae/R&B/hip-hop music has topped global charts. Beckles and Russell's introduction positions Rihanna's fame as carving out artistic cultural space for the Caribbean and for Barbados in particular, yet the volume's theoretical thrust is also in critical dialogue with the important work of scholars such as Carole Boyce Davies who have

explored the multivalent ways in which the rhythmic, aesthetic, corporal, and migratory dimensions of Caribbean diasporic spaces expand conceptualizations of the Caribbean beyond its geographical confines.

This notion of reading the region as a historically integrated space within modernity is a central thread in Beckles' highly original chapter, "Westbury Writes Back," which puts Rihanna's upbringing in conversation with the childhood of Everton Weekes, a top-ranked cricket player who grew up on the same ghetto street, Westbury Avenue. Beckles historicizes the two Barbadians' backgrounds to purposely conflate the global and the local, thus pitting the economic placement of Barbados in the global South against his argument that "the West" began, in financial terms, in Barbados "because it was here that Africa, Europe and the Americas met in unholy slavery" (28). Beckles makes a compelling case for expanding the path of inquiry into the postcolonial Caribbean by mounting a community-centered reading of how Westbury shaped Rihanna in order to break the conceptual traps of the "big island/small island and island/continent dichotomies that inhibit effective postmodern readings of the archipelago" (15–16). His approach reveals Rihanna's "good girl gone bad" image as forged in "Bajan badness" from the start.

Questions about Rihanna's "badness" reappear in Don D. Marshall's richly argued chapter, "Rihanna as Global Icon and Caribbean Threshold Figure," which deconstructs local debates about Rihanna's sexually explicit lyrics and "rude girl" posture in order to intervene in broader discourses about youth culture, nationalist sentiment, and the social construction of gender in the Caribbean. Marshall argues that "Rihanna's ethical drive and her erotic drive may pull in contrary directions, but daring to point up an unbidden dimension in her psychic life as a Caribbean female subject allows for an upping of the 'anti' in anti-colonialism, leading to a more complex level of analysis" (55). For Marshall, that more sophisticated reading involves applying Rihanna's example as a window into "the resistance vernaculars of [Caribbean] youth" (67), whose use of technology, he argues, represents a refusal to be objects of global culture.

The volume also broadens readers' knowledge of the music industry in the Caribbean. With much attention historically placed, for example, on Jamaica's musical contributions, Mike Alleyne charts a new course in "International Identity: Rihanna and the Barbados Music Industry." Exploring her commercial impact, Alleyne argues that "Rihanna's ascension, often viewed as imbuing Bajan music culture with a missing identity, has in fact further complicated the process of discerning and defining the island's international musical identity" (83). Alleyne's weighing of whether Rihanna's sound is dis-

tinctly Bajan underscores the editors' contention that the essays constitute more than a "facile endorsement of [Rihanna's] celebrity" (4). Indeed, the collection, like its subject, grapples with the complexities of identity formation, a struggle evident in Esther L. Jones' chapter, "'What's My Name?' Reading Rihanna's Autobiographical Acts," which takes up Rihanna's identity as a survivor of domestic violence and examines her artistic productions in the wake of the infamous abuse she received at the hands of American singer Chris Brown. Jones' analysis complements the thoughtful treatments this subject has received from scholars such as Nicole Fleetwood while situating Rihanna's self-narration alongside complex issues of cultural belonging (102). Jones interprets Rihanna's appearance in tourism advertisements for Barbados and notes: "It would seem that the nation-state, in its use of Rihanna as a commodity that 'sells' the nation for global consumption, wants to have it both ways: it wants to sell her sexuality at the same time that it tries to control that sexuality by marketing respectability" (103).

In another powerful essay centered on gendered violence, Donna Aza Weir-Soley puts Rihanna's dual position as "megastar" and "battered woman" into fresh perspective. Weir-Soley focuses neither on Rihanna as victim nor as a woman to be vilified for returning to her attacker but instead on a way of understanding the effects of "traumatic bonding," a psychological phenomenon "that may be as common as domestic violence itself and is impervious to class, ethnicity, culture, megastardom or anything else we may believe should set Rihanna apart from other survivors of intimate-partner abuse" (139). By linking Rihanna's experiences to those of other abused women, "like you, like me, like your mother, sister, aunt" (156), Weir-Soley offers a forceful critique of both the United States court system's and the media's failures to sympathize with survivors of domestic violence.

Aaron Kamugisha's essay explores the notion that Rihanna's persona and reactions to it reveal much about politics, power, and social relations in Barbados and beyond, a current of thought that runs throughout the volume. Kamugisha investigates the singer's contribution to Barbados' production and reproduction of global Black middle-class identity. He contributes to Black feminist scholarship and Caribbean studies' longstanding attention to the politics of respectability, framing that attention against the "contours of Barbadian respectability and the extent to which Rihanna's disruptive performances help us understand its current state as well as arguments for self-legitimation" (159).

Rounding out the volume, Curwen Best's chapter probes Rihanna's massive cyber presence alongside the part the digital age plays in constituting identity in Barbadian society. With a convincing call for updating the ac-

ademic literature on the Caribbean's emerging digital culture, Best's entry underscores Marshall's insistence on greater attention to Caribbean youth's agentive use of global technology.

In the eloquently argued final chapter, Russell examines Rihanna as a "diaspora citizen" in order to parse the conflicting and reinforcing sites the singer navigates as both "Barbadian daughter" and "global superstar" (182–83). Russell's complex reading of local popular responses to Rihanna shines a revealing light on how the performer's role as Barbados' honorary ambassador of youth and culture is reconciled alongside perceptions of her sexual identity as disruptive to Victorian notions of proper femininity. Further crystalizing the Madonna/whore dichotomy that surfaces in a number of the collection's essays (Weir-Soley, Jones, Kamugisha) and bringing this paradigm into sharp relief in terms of its implications for Black women, Russell argues that "Rihanna and (by inference) her fellow Bajan and black diaspora sisters are simultaneously entrapped and empowered actors queerly and deftly navigating across national/transnational spaces of possibility, transformation and power, which historically and contemporarily seek to script and conscript their sexual mobility" (199).

At a moment in which US popular and academic discourses around Black feminism are transfixed by megastar Beyoncé's engagements with and articulations of feminist politics, and scholarly and popular audiences confront the gender performances of another Caribbean daughter, Nicki Minaj, this volume adds relevant and useful scholarship to feminist and popular cultural studies. Moreover, its sustained commitment to exploding global/local dichotomies does much to propel diaspora studies and complicate our understandings of the global South.

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Works Cited

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