

Analysis of the Community of Black Female Slaves in The Book of Night Women from the Perspective of Community Theory

Ruoyun Li

School of Foreign Languages, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, China

Abstract: Marlon James is a prominent Jamaican writer renowned for his ingenious plots of horror and the intersecting themes of violence and gender. Shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award, *The Book of Night Women* presents a neo-slave narrative. The most striking element is the community for enslaved women. Amid the bloody and violent plantations, their solidarity and willpower deserve praise. Based on the systematical community theory proposed by Tönnies, Anderson and Bauman, the paper analyzes the evolution of the community of black female slaves. Begun by the fear of oppression, the status of common blood lineage and dual otherness, the community ends with fragmentation due to individual betrayals and inherent fragility.

Keywords: Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women*, Slavery, Community, Formation and Disintegration.

1. Introduction

1.1. Marlon James and The Book of Night Women

Marlon James is an outstanding Jamaican novelist for prolific and excellent works. Renowned in the literary world for delicate narrative art, ingenious plot setting, black-gothic style and subtle mood of the minority, his novels center on the supernatural, violence, colonialism and sexuality. He is the author of five novels: *John Crow's Devil* (2005), *The Book of Night Women* (2009), *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014), *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019) and *Moon Witch, Spider King* (2022). During writing career, he is awarded with OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, Man Booker Prize, National Book Award, NAACP Image Awards and so on. Meanwhile, James earned a degree in language and literature from the University of the West Indies in 1991 and a master's degree in creative writing from Wilkes University in 2006. Currently, he teaches literature at Macalester College.

Born in Kingston in 1970, he grew up in a family with police background, cultivating his sensitivity about both the superficial and hideous chaos in society. In these novels, not only does he depict the underbelly of West India, but also thinks through the intersecting problems of race, gender and sexuality. As a black man, he also emphasizes the alienation, anxieties, struggles misery and oppression of enslaved people or postcolonial minorities. Apart from that, he uses the Jamaican patois, endowing a local atmosphere to the novels.

The Book of Night Women is the second novel by Marlon James, concentrating on a sugar plantation named Montpelier at the end of eighteenth century. The enslaved women who suffered the sexual, emotional and physical violence, were determined to band together and made a strike for freedom. Because of it, they are collectively referenced as the title's expression - Night Women. The protagonist, Lilith, is a member of them. Led by Homer, they launched plenty of resisting movements from the mischief of Mater's food to the big but tragic revolt. In this process, the black women community plays a significant role while containing the hidden troubles. The brutalizing effects of slavery, the

potentially transformative, yet also destructive power of black (counter-) violence shows incisively and vividly [19].

By tracing the growth of Lilith, James reveals the birth truth of Lilith, the relations with other Night Women, the sufferings of relentless regulations, her daring murder and the final divergence of Night Women - protecting her white husband. The mutating dynamics of this women slave community is the axis of the whole story, creating the ups and downs of the novel. Thus, this study is orienting the community, analyzing the generating conditions and factors, the enhancing measures and the implicit motives to final breakage.

1.2. Structure of this Paper

This thesis is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter is an introductory section, which includes a brief introduction of Marlon James, his literary works and prizes, the plot of *The Book of Night Women* as well as the layout, the value and significance of the study.

The second chapter is composed of two parts. The first part is an illustration of previous foreign and domestic literature review of the work *The Namesake*. The second part introduces the theoretical foundation of this thesis, the community theory. The history of "community" concept and some important theorists are interpreted.

The third chapter is analysis of *The Book of Night Women* drawn on these community theories. From the initial stage of women slave community, the development and enhancement of this community and the deconstruction of it, this chapter consists three sections. The first part analyzes the factors of constructing the basis for the community of black women slaves. The second part points out the common goal, common culture and resistant behaviors which strengthen the community. The last part demonstrates the fragmentation of the community, from the individuals and whole structure.

The last chapter is the conclusion. By using community theories, we can see clearly the development of the black women slaves' community, appreciating the almighty power they held and rebellious trait.

1.3. Significance of this Paper

Firstly, this research addresses a critical gap in existing scholarship on *The Book of Night Women*, which has predominantly focused on postcolonial feminism, representations of violence, or gothic aesthetics, while largely overlooking the novel's communal dimensions. By adopting a community-centered approach, the study bridges the disciplines of sociology and postcolonial literary studies, offering a fresh analytical perspective.

Secondly, the research highlights the collective survival strategies employed by enslaved Black women, presenting a nuanced and realistic portrayal of sisterhood under extreme oppression. Through the lens of community theory, the study not only illuminates the motivational power behind acts of resistance and solidarity but also interrogates the deeper tensions within the notion of community itself.

By framing the community in the novel as both a "survival strategy" and an "unattainable utopia", this paper underscores the structural constraints that hinder the formation of sustainable communities among subaltern groups. It thereby contributes to broader discourses on how marginalized populations resist, imagine, and attempt to sustain communal bonds within oppressive systems, offering theoretical implications for the possibilities and limitations of community-making in postcolonial and sociopolitical contexts.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Literature Review

1) Studies Aboard

Since *The Book of Night Women* was published, there are a few summative reviews about it. Carson (2009) elucidates the plot and the intertextuality of slavery history, pointing out the bravery of these women [5]. Hannan (2010) thinks the ambivalence of Lilith is ultimately a deficit [10]. After the current of reviews, the specific studies emerge. One of the most extensive fields is postcolonial feminism. Forbes (2017) regards it as a novel repositioning the female in Caribbean history [7]. Ozuna (2017) explores the woman resistance in the post-treaty era echoing the rebellions led by Toussaint, hoping to revive matrilocality of the African social legacy [20]. Shoemaker (2018) presents a gendered history this story conveys and celebrates female legacy [24]. In the sub-branch of sisterhood, Schwartz (2021) presents the obstacles to building sisterhood and community in her doctoral dissertation [23].

And another is the violence study. Nehl (2016) explores both the liberating effect of violence on oppressed subjects and the disruptive nature of violent action [19]. Sangi (2018) studies the pervasive violence in the plantation and the triad roles in the spectacle of violence as victims, spectators and perpetrators [22]. The style of neo-slavery and black gothic is also analyzed by Harrison (2018) [11]. Curdella Forbes (2017) explores the horrific aesthetics in Caribbean identity discourse [7]. Some scholars also pay attention to the representation of African spirit - Obeha ritual, such as Layne (2018). He shows the conflict between secular-rationalism and slave religion [14]. From the perspective of ethnics, Mason (2023) dissects the unaligned insurrectionist ethics in this novel [18].

2) Studies at Home

There are limited researches about Marlon James and his novel. Domestic scholars have been studying Marlon James since 2015 when he was awarded the Man Booker Prize. Mostly the papers are orienting the prized novel - *Seven Killings*. Song Jie (2016) considers that is the "imagined oral history" of Jamaica [25]. Zhao Nan (2021) interprets the trauma caused by the violence [29]. Jiang Zhengyi (2023) analyzes the types of violence and the dynamics of violence in the novel. Other scholars like Wang Hui (2017) and Liu Shuai (2017) probes into the translational strategies of this novel.

About *The Book of Night Women*, Liu Yingjie (2018) focuses on the effects of public punishment and the politics of violence in it. Based on Foucault's power discourse, Debord's society of spectacle and tilly's collective violence, Liu presents a detailed scene of colonial oppression, exposing the irrational essence of slavery [15-17].

2.2. Theoretical Background

The community theory is an important literary trend and one of the literary criticisms. It usually focuses on the collective mighty, joint actions and memories and the plural force to defend themselves from outward storms and rains. It broadens the isolate view to the group standpoint. Originally speaking, it is a concept from sociology, enjoying a long debating history. At the very beginning, Aristotle elaborated "philia" in *Nicomachean Ethics* which meant a reciprocal relationship of mutual love and affective interdependency. This bond is nurtured in family, then extends to the larger scale like *polis*, which is the one form of the communities in public realm. From then on, this concept shows dynamic changes along the periods.

Upon the 19th century, German Sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies published *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, translated as *Community and Civil Society*. In this book, he differentiated these two categories. He considered community is constructed on the natural bases with kinship, corresponding his argument "Community means genuine, enduring life together" [26]. Because of the "complete unity of human wills", community is a living organism, compared to the society as a mechanical aggregate and artifact [2]. Contrast by the modernity, it shows utopian trait.

With the emergence of post-modernism in 20th century, the issue of community surged in the era of globalization, decolonialization and independence. Confronted with the turbulent fluidity and political turmoil, Benedict Anderson published *Imagined Communities* to understand modern nations. Imagined community can be conceptualized as an intangible and imaginary group intertwined with a unified political ideology. Apart from its imaginativeness, it is finite just as "both inherently limited and sovereign" [1]. In the turn of 21st century, Zygmunt Bauman's book *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* came into sight. He argues that "community" conveys support, safety, warmth and belonging because the contemporary world is no longer provides these things [19]. With the increase of social uncertainty, the traditional community ties have gradually disintegrated, people's lives have become more unstable, and the demand for community has become stronger.

3. Analysis of the Community of Enslaved Black Women

3.1. Recognition and Formation: The Genesis of Enslaved Black Women's Community

1) Volatile Macrosocial Environment

The Gothic has always been central to Caribbean literary discourse [11]. Both Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* exemplify the macrosocial environment of terror and suffocating oppression. Neo-slavery novel *The Book of Night Women* positions itself within this literary tradition by infusing the 19th-century plantation narrative with Black Gothic elements-graphic violence, sadistic murders, and eroticism-to reconstruct a blood-soaked world of systemic dehumanization. Amidst the broader focus on slavery's legacy, James gives a detailed portrayal of environment and statues of slaves.

Firstly, the subjugated people faced inhuman living and working conditions. Subordinate groups were neglected, marginalized and excluded from the power and knowledge. Slaves were denied basic rights-including even the environmental prerequisites for physical survival and psychological well-being. Field slaves must obey the strict schedule without much time to rest. "Ants, mosquito, rat, snake and scorpion bite them in the bush" [13]. The enslaved domestic workers including Homer remained confined to the kitchen quarter day and night. Meanwhile, Lilith, while concealing herself from charges in the cellar, endured solitude amid darkness and rodents.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, when the sugar boom was at its height, Jamaica became Britain's most valuable and profitable colony, attracting thousands of white European immigrants and sojourners [21]. To extract surplus value, systemic violence inscribed itself upon Black bodies. Torture left indelible scars; their flesh displayed as spectacle. Nonetheless, the disciplinary spectacle of public humiliation, corporal punishment, and visceral suffering persists in collective memory [8]. Public torture was a routine in plantations. Lilith witnessed the field slaves who were whipped. Their hands and feet were cut off for failing to meet planters' quotas. Homer's attempt to justify sheltering Lilith was silenced by the master's fist. An enslaved woman was whipped so hard for breaking dishes that she couldn't life butter after that [12].

Bauman offers a poetic definition about community. In the preface of *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, he says "community is a 'warm' place, a cozy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day [2]. Systemic fear and verbal abuse pervaded the plantation, as violence eroded humanity. Under hostile conditions, Homer recognized the necessity of forming an enslaved women's community-a survival strategy rooted in collective resistance.

2) Hybrid Individuals with Common Roots

Tönnies posited that 'Gemeinschaft' (community) is primarily actualized in groups rooted in primary natural foundations, marked by kinship ties such as family and clan [25]. Siblings are bound with blood, supporting each other with affirmation, empathy and solidarity. The affinity of six mixed-race female slaves provided the foundation for the community.

At the outset, Lilith was brought up by Circe, firmly believing that she is the daughter of Circe and Tantalus. Once

she mistakenly entered the cave where the night women gathered together, she was shocked to see Gordon and Hippolyta's green eyes. "Lilith feel trembling come over her like they just dip her in a night stream [12]. It shook her sense of identity. Within the plantation, these women lived side by side, sharing the same social status and enduring collective oppression and hardship. The revelation of their half-sibling kinship created a basis for them to unite against their surrounding circumstances. An initial sense of closeness held together the six enslaved women of different ages, and the early form of a community began to take shape.

At the same time, the image of green eyes not only illustrates their closeness by blood, but also shows their common trait - hybridity. They are descendants of the mixture between the white and the black, staying in-betweenness [3]. On the one hand, they are not complete black. On the other hand, they still have black skin, depriving them from interests of whites.

3) Subjects of Dual Otherness

Gender dualism imposed a shared yoke upon Lilith and the Night Women. In the presence of male authority, enslaved women rarely wielded agency or subversive power, let alone the freedom of choice. Paris, the Black slave overseer, sexually objectified Lilith, reducing her to an animalistic object and commanding her submission to his subjugation [13]. Through a crevice, Lilith saw Homer's back covered in welts and chest marked with knife scars - his body inscribed with systemic oppression. Under such violence, women endured passively, their agency constrained. Even Homer, despite her relatively high position in plantation, remained cautiously submissive.

In terms of gender, women were attachment of men. Colonialism endows the plantation owners the supreme position, thus the black female slaves are marginalized again. Women slaves are the commodities of the masters, embracing dual materialized attributes. The standards of Montpelier plantation are made by Humphrey Wilson whose words and acts are the absolute justice. Black women slaves cannot but follow it. When Andromeda died accidentally, her daughter fell in trance, "screaming down the passage and waking everybody up" [12]. For Homer, Lilith and other slaves, this behavior is understandable, but it arose the dissatisfaction of plantation of owners. Humphrey hit her on the back of the head with a musket just for a tiny reason that his sleep was disturbed. Black women have no dominant position, and they can only keep silent when encounter disasters.

The display of double otherness is also reflected in the sexual gaze of white men on black women. When Lilith saw his father, the white supervisor Wilkins, didn't feel warmth and care. He is all over her like a man and she feel naked [12]. When Humphrey sold slave girls, white men in Kingston would judge the body. Under slavery, the black slave was simplified as her body, and her body was simplified as a sex organ. Their bodies are "disassembled and fragmented" [9]. The colonials have put their feet firmly on the land, holding high the sign of power. The colonized women slaves are doomed to fall into the trap of the double other. After several marginalized female slaves got to know each other's plight, their inner sense of community had awakened.

3.2. Consolidation and Evolution: The Development of Enslaved Black Women's Community

1) Common Goal: Freedom

Goals arise in the community, complement the community and inject strength into the community. Community is a cooperative system, and real cooperation is produced when people pursue a common goal. In *The Book of Night Women*, the shared pursuit of freedom acts as the lifeblood of this rebellious community, shaping its purpose and binding its members together.

Homer, a courageous and resourceful leader of the Night Women, envisioned a future beyond the plantation walls. Inspired by the success of the Saint Domingo uprising, she aimed to lead the enslaved women toward liberation. Her ambition was not merely escape, but revolution — the creation of a “Black republic” free from white dominance. She often whispered urgent phrases like “we don’t have much time,” signaling both the peril of delay and the necessity of unity. In moments of secrecy, she declared, “Freedom comin’ before next Easter,” revealing not only her belief but her determination to make this belief a reality^[12]. Her resolute motto, “freedom or death,” symbolized a spirit of collective defiance, lifting the torch of resistance high and illuminating the uncertain path ahead.

In the binary opposition between whites and slaves, enslaved people were often depicted as ignorant, incapable of grasping the rational or scientific world. However, this narrative began to unravel as the women, especially Lilith, start to learn. Knowledge becomes the seed of subversion. While hiding in the cellar, Homer became Lilith’s enlightener, telling her, “As long as you can’t read, this white man will have all sort of power over you”^[12]. Under Homer’s guidance, Lilith started to spell, to read, and to understand. Gradually, the cellar - once a symbol of isolation - transformed into a space of awakening. As Lilith’s literacy grew, so did her desire for liberation. Her symbolic acts of rebellion - excreting in the food of plantation owners, burning down Coulibre - reflected her internalization of the community’s ultimate goal.

As Michel Foucault posits, power is diverse, horizontal, non-central, and subtle^[27-28]. Literacy, language, and critical thinking shift the power balance. When enslaved women acquire knowledge, they gain agency, undermining the ideological and epistemic foundations of slavery. In this way, the pursuit of freedom is not merely physical escape - it becomes an intellectual and spiritual revolution, cultivated quietly in the shadows, yet capable of toppling empires.

2) Common Culture: Language and Obeah

In the context of extreme deprivation and dehumanization, culture functions not merely as heritage but as resistance. The black women slave community in *The Book of Night Women* can be understood as a “Gemeinschaft,” as defined by Ferdinand Tönnies - a naturally bonded community rooted in kinship, proximity, shared values, and spiritual belief systems. Despite being forged under oppressive conditions, this community of enslaved women cultivated a cultural identity grounded in language and spirituality, both of which served to confirm each other’s existence, enhance emotional bonds, and strengthen internal cohesion.

One of the most powerful unifying forces is language - intimate, crude, yet deeply expressive. Fanon insightfully pointed out in *Black Skin, White Masks* that language is not only a tool of communication but also a bearer of civilization and cultural memory^[6]. While white plantation owners maintained a refined vocabulary reflective of colonial authority and elitism, the enslaved women communicated in a vibrant, hybrid vernacular, blending Jamaican patois,

African-derived words, and English. This creole language - rich in emotional range and social nuance - acted as a linguistic barrier against the plantation hierarchy while simultaneously building a bridge among the enslaved.

For instance, during casual kitchen banter, Pallas exclaimed, “Jesus Christ, is who break wind in here?”, followed by Chiron’s cheeky retort, “Smell like you just crack a rotten one with you arse”^[12]. Though seemingly trivial, such exchanges fostered a sense of normalcy, humor, and intimacy in an otherwise brutal reality. Words like “chile,” “comlobo,” “yuh,” and “fool-fool” were more than slang - they were linguistic affirmations of shared experience and emotional survival. Tönnies underscores this phenomenon by asserting, “The true organ of mutual understanding... is language itself,” which allows the transmission of “pain and pleasure, fear and desire, and all other feelings and emotions”^[26]. Within this linguistic bubble, the Night Women forged a symbolic space - a creolotopia - where cultural symbols, rituals, and idioms created a protective membrane against the encroaching violence of the plantation. The cultural circle they established, built on shared speech and mutual recognition, helped transform the physical limitations of the plantation into a psychological and cultural sanctuary. Even in confined spaces like the kitchen or cellar, this shared language allowed emotional expression, collective memory, and psychological resistance to flourish.

In addition to language, Obeah, the Afro-Caribbean spiritual tradition, plays a crucial role in shaping the community’s cultural consciousness. The women’s belief in Obeah, often criminalized and demonized by colonial authorities, becomes a clandestine source of power, continuity, and identity. After her confrontation with Andromeda, Lilith discovered her supernatural abilities, which terrify her at first. However, this revelation also signals her entrance into the deeper cultural and spiritual lineage shared by the Night Women. Homer, the matriarchal leader, recognized Lilith’s latent potential. The fact that Lilith, like Homer, could channel Obeah elevated her from an outsider to a central figure in the rebellion. Their supernatural bond becomes not only a spiritual link but also a symbolic affirmation of sisterhood. Obeah, though suppressed, grants agency and legitimacy to the women, allowing them to reconnect with ancestral traditions and non-Western worldviews. It provides a moral and cosmological framework that stands in defiance of colonial Christianity and Eurocentric rationalism.

Cultural recognition through shared culture - whether linguistic or spiritual - dissolves interpersonal boundaries. Homer and the other Night Women engage Lilith through a series of cultural rituals and teachings, allowing her gradual immersion into the symbolic life of the group. Like water blending into water, these shared exchanges solidify group identity and emotional dependence. In this spiritual communion, the women are not merely resisting the system; they are reimagining the world through an alternate cultural lens - one that is rooted in memory, oral tradition, and supernatural power. In this sense, both language and Obeah serve as twin pillars of cultural cohesion within the Night Women community. They are not ornamental or peripheral but foundational - anchoring the group’s sense of belonging, meaning, and rebellion. Amid the brutality of the plantation, these shared cultural practices offer a form of autonomy and a mode of collective survival, allowing enslaved women to resist not just physically but ontologically.

3) Common Reaction: Resistance

In the plantation, Homer, Lilith and other night women used their actions to deconstruct the solid slavery. The harsh treatment makes resistance impossible for female slaves to express contempt and disdain in a fair and square way, but within the self-controlled kitchen boundaries, they dispel authority in different approaches.

Lilith “crouch good over the pot but high up that she don’t burn herself and piss”, posing some threats when white people are unknown ^[12]. When honey was needed in the diet, Lilith would replace it with cow dung. Besides these tiny events, there were some large-scaled rebellious incidents. In the course of the rape of Lilith by a Johnny-Jumper, she grabbed the cutlass to kill him. In her rage, “from foot up to thigh the black skin all chopped up with pink flesh peeking” ^[12]. When she was sent to serve Coulibre Manor, Lilith was treated inhumanely and witnessed all kinds of darkness. The small number of slaves didn’t mean less suffering. Even the place of rest was a pipe dream, slaves had no place but just sleep in the workplace. Sacco was stripped of his clothes and fully coated with honey for ants’ biting. Lilith’ anger couldn’t be calmed down. After personally experiencing humiliation, there seemed to be a voice of resistance in her mind. When she once served Maasa Roget for his bath, she forcefully hit him chest and denied all ugly and obscene words.

As the leader of Night Women, Homer allowed and supported Lilith and other female slaves’ resistant behaviors. When she saw the aftermath of Lilith’s killing of Johnny-Jumper, she stopped the fussing Circe and worked with two other night women to dispose of the corpse, preventing Lilith from being executed by Humphrey. In kitchen, she tacitly approved of Lilith’s act of defecating in Mass and Mistress’ s food and commended Lilith, helping her to go further on her path of resistance.

3.3. Betrayal and Disengagement: The Deconstruction of Enslaved Black Women’s Community

1) Diverged Ideology among the Night Women

The most critical fault line within the Night Women’s community was the divergence in ideology - in particular, differing perceptions of whiteness, freedom, and loyalty. Although Homer stuck to the collective envision of liberation, other gravitated toward assimilationist or individualistic goal. The most representatives are Lilith and Iphigenia.

a) Lilith’s Whitening Tendency

Lilith, the youngest member and most complex member of the Night Women, embodies the contradiction of resistance and complicity. As a half-breed, two conflicting belief systems constantly battled within her. Caught between the plantation slaves’ tragic existence and the slave owners’ inhumane “pleasure-seeking lifestyle”, she gradually became fascinated by the White world while attempting to erase her Black identity. After her first meeting with the Night Women in the cave, Lilith learned she was the daughter of a White overseer - a revelation that sparked fantasies about her identity, suggesting her miserable, lowly fate might be altered by the White blood. She doesn’t understand why Homer was lending her a hand, suspecting that she might have interests. Moreover, Lilith was full of self-pride because a random praise from mistress, saying “you jus’ wicked’ cause me be sixteen and the mistress favorite” ^[12]. It is an oath of allegiance to the white ranks.

Undoubtedly, her obsession with whiteness was most prominently reflected in her view of love. She harbored a

lifelong desire for a white superior to rescue her, whether it was the brutal plantation owner Humphrey or his accomplice Robert Quinn. From her view, “There be two things that a white man can do at once” - holding her with the gentle hand and freeing a niggerwoman ^[12]. Becoming a white person means the harvest of power, prestige, interests, status, crafted a utopian vision that insidiously shaped Lilith. Even after the clandestine arson at Couliber, she failed to consistently uphold the rebellious spirit. Falling into love with Robet Quinn, she was assimilated, allowing the white ideology to creep into her mind. Overnight the mulatto girl had gone from the rank of slave to that of master ^[6]. In the latter part of the novel, she was indifferent to the suffering of other Black slaves. When Homer reminded her that the white man she loved and depended is just a bloodthirsty beast who cruelly, executed Black people, she simply retorted. Finally, driven by her obsession with whiteness, she sided with the whites in the uprising. By killing Hippolyta to protect her father, she sealed her betrayal.

b) Iphigenia Self-protecting Mind

Iphigenia was one of the first enslaved women Homer recruited. Whether expressing contempt for Lilith’s submissive remarks toward whites during cave gathering or comforting humiliated Lilith afterward, she always acted simultaneously with other night women. In a long robe, she was skilled at masking her movements. Homer often held her up as a paragon for Lilith.

However, unlike Homer, who stakes her life on revolution, Iphigenia harbors deep doubts. Beneath her quiet demeanor lies a calculating mind. She does not believe in martyrdom or utopian visions. Secretly, she reports on the Night Women’s activities to the plantation’s external informants, hoping for personal reward or protection. Her betrayal is exposed just before the uprising, when Callisto publicly denounces her: “Every week she send word to Judas nigger in Jackson Lands to pass on to the massa” ^[12]. This moment is devastating for the community. If Lilith’s betrayal was emotional, Iphigenia’s is strategic. Bauman notes, “The sameness evaporates once the communication between its insiders and the world outside becomes more intense and carries more weight than the mutual exchanges of the insiders” ^[2]. Iphigenia’s betrayal widens the breach already opened by Lilith and confirms the impossibility of maintaining ideological purity under such intense structural pressure. Callisto exposed the mask of Iphigenia by violent means, solved the disharmonious factors with both hands, and at the same time completely split the community of female slaves.

2) Intrinsic Vulnerability of this Loose Community

a) Unshakable System

In 18th and 19th centuries, women suffered more structural and institutional oppression than men. According to the paper titled “Slaves and Slavery in Kingston, 1770-1815”, the proportion of female slaves among all women in Kingston is greater than that of male slaves among all men ^[4]. Black women slaves were faced with conundrum where they have few opportunities to lift their positions. Unlike some Black or mulatto men, who could become overseers or “Johnny-Jumpers,” Black women remained fixed in roles of servitude - as field laborers, domestic servants, or sexual objects. The possibility of social elevation was virtually nonexistent. Montpellier manor in the book is the epitome of society, and the ruthless hierarchy binds the female slaves. From the top to bottom, there are owners (massa), white supervisors such as Wilkins, black administrators, women slaves are at the

bottom suffering abuse and violence from both the white men and black men. This vertical hierarchy leaves little room for genuine female solidarity. Though the Night Women's resistance is noble, it remains perpetually constrained by the structural bars of patriarchy and racism.

b) A Short-lived Community

In the last chapter of his book, Bauman explains the reason why the barrier cannot become a community. The community should have provided a safe environment without thieves and strangers, as a positive closed environment for survival. However, isolation can only deepen the gap between people, and the uncertainty leads to the failure of security establishment, so people in the community can't live on each other. Plantation, a bloody and violent testing ground, is different and the same as every other place, which makes the slave community crumble.

First of all, the personal safety that cannot be guaranteed makes the female slaves feel insecure. Personal behaviors and words of female slaves will be speculated and suspected. After Circe's death, Homer suspected that Gorgon was involved in the conspiracy of Obeha Homer publicly spoke "so somebody in this kitchen was in league" [12]. At the first gathering of whole night women, Gorgon expressed doubts about Lilith's character, comparing her as devil. Also, she was puzzled by Homer's partiality towards her, conveying "You lead her half de way" to show her rejection of Lilith's joining [12]. When Homer revealed Massa Humphrey's affair with Isobel, Lilith questioned why Homer chose to reveal the truth at this time. Even as the key training object of Homer, she is still wary of Homer's real motives. This internal distrust weakened the bond of the night girls and affected the implementation of the resistance plan.

Secondly, the educational effect is limited. Under the circumstance that slave owners monopolize education and prevent slaves from reading, Homer persisted reading Joesph Andrews for Lilith and told her "but when you can make out a word, that is something indeed" [12]. But such education remained unsystematic and incomplete. Lilith only had a partial understanding of the importance of education, and was unable to truly apply what she had learned to practice.

4. Conclusion

The paper has made a qualitative and quantitative analysis on the emergence, the development and disintegration of the community of black female slaves. At first, the volatile macrosocial environment, similar hybrid identity and the status of dual otherness promote the mutual identification of night women and then unite altogether. And then the adhesives of community - common goal, common culture elements and resistant behaviors contributes to the further development and stability of the community of black female slaves. However, in the overwhelming system and cruel plantation system, the community can no longer be sustained. Tortured by inner conflicts and individuals' betrayal, it falls apart. Undoubtedly, Marlon James is an excellent writer who depicts the subtle tense about the evolution of the community. The brutality of the plantation system and the harm inflicted on female slaves are conveyed lively and vividly. Ideal community of black female slaves is night women's long-cherished haven, but also an unattainable illusion. This paper offers the enlightenment of oppressed people who are trapped in the solid systems as well as the edificatory notice to the people who seek the support amidst this insecure and turbulent world.

Due to the limited length of the paper and the limited knowledge of the author, the paper also has its own limitations in both breadth and scope. In terms of breath, this paper just selects some important community theories and analyze this community. It lacks the analysis of the fragility of the community's formation in the field of plantation. As for the scope, it lacks some description of Homer's own weaknesses in the dissolution of the community of female slaves. In this paper, the majority of the text focuses Lilith's actions. Homer's role is pivotal thus the illustration of her motivations and the alienation inspired by the craze of freedom can add some depth. The research would be more comprehensible if the breadth and scope will be enlarged.

References

- [1] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 2006.
- [2] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [3] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- [4] Burnard, Trevor. "Slaves and Slavery in Kingston, 1770–1815." *International Review of Social History*, 65.S28 (2020): 39-65.
- [5] Carson, Warren J. "Review of *The Book of Night Women*", *CLA Journal*, 53. 2 (2009): 229–233.
- [6] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.
- [7] Forbes, Curdella, "Bodies of Horror in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* and Clovis Brown's Cartoons." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 21. 3 (2017): 1-16.
- [8] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books.
- [9] Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacles of the Other." in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London, Thousands Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997, p. 223-290.
- [10] Hannan, Jim. "Review of *The Book of Night Women*", *World Literature Today*, 84. 1(2010): 66.
- [11] Harrison, Sheri-Marie. "Marlon James and the Metafiction of the New Black Gothic." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 26. 2 (2018): 1–17.
- [12] James, Marlon. *The Book of Night Women*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2009.
- [13] Jiang, Zhengyi. *The Theme of Violence in Marlon James's "A Brief History of Seven Killings"*. Master's thesis, Hangzhou Normal University, 2023.
- [14] Layne, Jhordan. "Re-Evaluating Religion and Superstition: Obeah and Christianity in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* and William Earle Jr.'s *Obi*, or *The History of Three-Fingered Jack*." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 26. 2 (2018): 50–65.
- [15] Liu, Shuai. *Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation Research: A Case Study on the Translation of Marlon James's "A Brief History of Seven Killings"*, Master's thesis, Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2017.
- [16] Liu, Yingjie. "The Public Spectacle of Physical Punishment in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women*." 4th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2018). Atlantis Press, 2018.

- [17] Mari, Megan. "Review of Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World", *Community Literacy Journal*, p.115-117.
- [18] Mason, Sheena Michele. "Revisioning Unalignment and Freedom: Insurrectionist Ethics in Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women*." in *Insurrectionist Ethics: Radical Perspectives on Social Justice*, New York: Palgrave MacMillian Publishing, 2023, p.15-38.
- [19] Nehl, Markus. "A Vicious Circle of Violence: Revisiting Jamaican Slavery in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* (2009)." in *Transnational Black Dialogues: Re-Imagining Slavery in the Twenty-First Century*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016, p.161–190.
- [20] Ozuna, Ana. "Feminine Power: Women Contesting Plantocracy in *The Book of Night Women*." *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10.3 (2017): 132-148.
- [21] Rini Mathew, K. Varsha. "Conflict in Caribbean Women Consciousness during Anti-Slavery Movement: Detailing From 'The Long Song' By Andrea Levy and 'The Book of Night Women' By Marlon James." *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering (IJITEE)*, 8, 7C (2019): 203-207.
- [22] Sangi, Sangeeta. "The 'True Darkness' of the Slave Woman: Portrayal of Women and Violence in Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women*." *Editorial Board*, 3.1 (2018): 13-17.
- [23] Schwartz, Jessica. "True Darkness and True Womanness": A Study of Sisterhood in Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women*." Diss. Montclair State University, 2021.
- [24] Shoemaker, Lauren. "Femme Finale: Gender, Violence and Nation in Marlon James' Novels." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 26. 2 (2018): 18–33.
- [25] Song, Jie. "'Imagined Oral History' of Jamaica — Review of Marlon James's Crime Fiction A Brief History of Seven Killings." *Journal of Hubei University of Education*, vol. 33, no. 11, 2016, pp. 20–23.
- [26] Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Community and Society*. New York: Dover Publications, 2011.
- [27] Wang, Hui. "Strategies for Translating Culture-Specific Items in 'A History of Seven Killings'". Master's thesis, Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2017.
- [28] Wang Ming'an. *The Limits of Michel Foucault*. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press.
- [29] Zhao, Nan. "A Chronicle of Seven Killings: The Writing of Violence in A Brief History of Seven Killings." *Overseas English*, no. 22, 2021, pp. 246–248.