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THE ENDURING LOCAL: REPRESENTATIONS OF LAND AND HOME IN THE ANGLO-CARIBBEAN

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Enduring Local: Representations of Land and Home in the Anglo-Caribbean

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This dissertation draws on approaches in ecocriticism, critical race theory, and decolonialism to interrogate the ways in which Caribbean space is represented in Anglo-Caribbean literature. Using archival research, visual culture, literary criticism, and Caribbean history, it traces how colonialism shaped the current use of the land. This legacy is seen in the willful ecological destruction of the land, the history of violent labor practices, and the economic and ecological vulnerability of the islands. These violent practices were strategically employed by the early Anglo—colonists like Richard Ligon and William Blathwayt who sought to flatten Caribbean space into colonial intellectual property. Early nationalist writers, and subsequently literature from the contemporary Caribbean, wrestled with this flattening by indicating the ways in which the land was knowable among the locals, and how this knowledge differed from the colonial flattening. This dissertation argues that contemporary Caribbean authors like Shivanee Ramlochan, Dionne Brand, and Shani Mootoo create local intimate spaces and use queer love between women to reimagine a more inclusive local space no longer tied to neocolonial economic models. Building on the work of Belinda Edmondson and Shalini Puri, this dissertation posits douglarization, the cultural hybridization of the Afro- and Indo- diasporas in the Anglo-Caribbean, as a means of creating a localized home space

that addresses the socio-economic concerns of the descendants of plantation laborers. These 21<sup>st</sup> century authors plot a path forward from the narrower, masculinist Anglo-Caribbean literatures of the early nationalist period as practiced by Derek Walcott, proposing a Caribbean future that is broadly reflective of the knowledge and desires of contemporary Anglo-Caribbean people.

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## The Local Home: Douglarization and Ecology in Anglo-Caribbean Literature

In August 2018, Trinidad and Tobago overturned the country's colonial anti-sodomy law, arguing that it infringed on the rights of LGBTQ people. This landmark moment met with approval among local LGBTQ activists and citizens and sharp disapproval among more conservative locals who considered the ruling amoral.<sup>1</sup> That November, the country's national oil refinery, Petrotrin, officially closed, surprising workers who were unaware of the company's economic situation.<sup>2</sup> Trinidad and Tobago had long prided itself on not needing to cater to the tourist industry like other Caribbean islands but now faced a declining oil industry. As St. Kitts did in 2015, Trinidad and Tobago shut down its sugar plantations in 2017, citing a lack of revenue. In addition to its impact on the island's economic practices, this plantation system, along with a horrific legacy of racialized labor practices, had destroyed much of the local environment.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the social and historical atmosphere regarding changing anti-LGBTQ law see also, Mahalia Jackman, "They Called It the 'Abominable Crime': An Analysis of Heterosexual Support for Anti-Gay Laws in Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago," *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 13, no. 2 (June 2016): 130–141. doi:10.1007/s13178-015-0209-6. For more on anti-LGBTQ sentiment in Jamaica, see also, Latoya Lazarus, "Heteronationalism, Human Rights, and the Nation-State: Positioning Sexuality in the Jamaican Constitutional Reform Process," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 36, no. 71 (January 2011): 71–108. Both Jackman's and Lazarus's articles were just prior to the landmark ruling in Trinidad and Tobago overturning the homophobic law. For more on the historic ruling, see also, "Trinidad and Tobago Judge Rules Homophobic Laws Unconstitutional," *The Guardian*, 13 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/13/trinidad-and-tobago-sexual-offences-act-ruled-unconstitutional>.

<sup>2</sup> See also, Marianna Parraga, "Trinidad's State-Run Petrotrin to Cease Oil Refining Operations," *Reuters*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-refinery-operations-trinidadtobago-pe/trinidads-state-run-petrotrin-to-cease-oil-refining-operations-idUSKCN1LD2NG>

In 2014, the World Bank listed Trinidad and Tobago as the third highest consumer of energy per capita in the world.<sup>3</sup> This was an alarming statistic given the geographic size of the island. The revelation led to local interest in a more sustainable future, especially when Jamaica unveiled in 2015 the largest wind/solar hybrid energy plant in the Anglo-Caribbean. As the Caribbean shifts away from sugar plantations and interest in investing in renewable energy grows, the region also finds itself at a juncture when some of its most prominent literary figures, such as Marlon James, Shani Mootoo, and Dionne Brand, are openly gay. Queer, emerging writers such as Shivane Ramlochan are openly environmentally conscious, representing a pair of social concerns long marginalized in the region. The Anglo-Caribbean finds itself in the aftermath of the passing of literary giants V.S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott, the region's two Nobel winners, who were pivotal in the early nationalistic period of the mid-twentieth century. The Anglo-Caribbean today is mapping its future, and in doing so, it is answering the question of who has a say in forming a new, more diverse and sustainable Anglo-Caribbean identity.

This dissertation examines how contemporary Anglo-Caribbean writers resist masculinist nationalist narratives that perpetuate the gendered divides inherited from (former) colonial powers. The discussion focuses on two primary relationships. One involves the relationship between "douglarization" and queer love between women, as together they create a more inclusive social and cultural space in the contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> See also, Andrew Topf, "These Countries Have the World's Highest Energy Usage Per Person," *Business Insider* October 1 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-with-highest-energy-users-per-person-2014-10>; see also, "Energy use (kg of oil equivalent per capita)," *IEA Statistics*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.PCAP.KG.OE>.

Caribbean. Douglarization refers to the blending of Indian and African cultures specifically in the Anglo-Caribbean. Both Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans are the descendants of laborers brought to work on the plantations. Indians were brought as indentured laborers and Africans were brought as enslaved people. The second relationship has at its center the colonial legacy of ecological destruction in the Caribbean and its tie to the racialized hierarchy of labor. This hierarchy continues in the neocolonial tourist imaginary and maintains a stratified society throughout the Anglo-Caribbean based on colonial ideas of race and gender. Using visual culture, archival research and close-reading (with attention to form and the historical processes and systemic structures that create literary and cultural works), this dissertation argues that in the contemporary, regional, Anglo-Caribbean literary imaginary, the local has resisted submitting to the colonial imaginary by creating literary visions of a more inclusive community that experiences and aspires to alternative desires and constructions of success.

Contemporary Anglo-Caribbean authors such as Shani Mootoo, Dionne Brand, and Shivane Ramlochan, emphasize the local perspective through the lens of a cultural douglarization that primarily benefits marginalized locals. These marginalized people are usually women of color, but they can also include queer men and nonbinary people. The term “doula” refers to the children of Indian and African parents. It derives from a Bhojpuri term for an illegitimate child, usually applied only to the first-generation of children of this particular mixing.<sup>4</sup> The children of “douglas” are generally considered

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<sup>4</sup> Rhoda Reddock, “Jahaji Bhai: The Emergence of a Doula Poetics in Trinidad and Tobago,” *Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power* 5 no. 4, (1999): 573, [doi.10.1080/1070289X.1999.9962630](https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.1999.9962630). Reddock explains that the term refers to an inter-varna marriage in Hindi. Reddock goes on to explain that the term originally implied that

creole in the Anglo-Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> The presence of “douglas” in the Anglo-Caribbean can represent, in some of the more misogynist parts of nationalist or local discourse, a loss of control over women who belong to a certain racialized group.<sup>6</sup> Much of this resentment targets the women in these relationships because the presence of “douglas” indicates the women’s agency in acting on their own desires.

While a “dougl” refers to ethnic mixing, douglarization, in this dissertation, refers to the mixing of Afro and Indo cultures. I posit that this is an underexplored aspect of the Anglo-Caribbean literary imagination, often subsumed under creolization and as a result eliding the personal, material, and cultural complexities explored by writers like Mootoo and Brand. This cultural douglarization addresses the concerns of the descendants of the diasporic people of color brought to work on the plantation. Douglarization is evident in local narrative devices, ecology, and the new iterations of local festivals such as Carnival. This cultural hybridity reflects a blending of material concerns, sexual desires, and emotional interests that acknowledge the history of labor practices in the region. Given the emphasis on attempting to control women’s bodies, douglarization recognizes the mutual interests and desires of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean women. Women from both groups express their desire—or outright need—for, and vision of, safe spaces within the Caribbean through similar literary tropes and devices such as the use of folklore and garden spaces. These tropes and devices provide them with an

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the mother of such a union is sexually promiscuous and therefore, according to prominent Hindu supremacists in the region, a threat to the racial purity of Indians in the Caribbean.

<sup>5</sup> Reddock, “Jahaji Bhai,” 593. Reddock states that local Hindu supremacist groups sometimes use this term to discriminate against women who are in interracial relationships and have children.

<sup>6</sup> Reddock, “Jahaji Bhai,” 589.

imaginative way to reconcile a douglarized and creolized past on the island. The specificity of this past goes unremarked in India and Africa, the ancestral homelands of the douglarized communities. However, the imaginative link between the diasporic person and the ancestral homeland runs in one direction only. Dionne Brand writes: “No one in India remembers him [Naipaul] or the experience he represents. Yet he carries within him this particularly accursed ancestral memory and this crushing dislocation of the self which the landscape [of India] does not solve.”<sup>7</sup> Through doularization, a new—and local—culture is created that addresses and focuses on local experience, desires, and concerns that does not need the approval of foreign countries.

Contemporary queer women writers provide a very distinct contrast to the more nationalist works by writers such as Nobel-prize winner Derek Walcott, who represents a much older response and a heteronormative and masculinist vision of the Caribbean. This is true despite the standing his work has as a revolutionary response to, and expression of, decolonization and independence in the Caribbean, one which filled an important literary void globally.<sup>8</sup> In the contemporary, twenty-first century Anglo-Caribbean, however, even as same-sex desire remains socially policed (though recent cultural changes may have an impact in changing that), this desire has also come to embody new aspirations, precisely because more heteronormative desires (such as marriage) are barred from

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<sup>7</sup> Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage, 2001), 61.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Anglo Caribbean nationalism and masculinity with regard to the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean writers see also Belinda Edmondson, *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Kate Houlden, *Sexuality, Gender and Nationalism in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Routledge; 2017); and Michelle Stephens, *Black Empire: the Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press; 2005).

members of these communities.<sup>9</sup> Queer Caribbean female narratives, in particular those of Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo, and Shivanee Ramlochan, are the exemplars of a poetics of recovery from those of either the colonial masters—Richard Ligon, William Blathwayth—or the Caribbean anglophone nationalist literary imaginary represented by writers such as Walcott. These women write against not only present racialized labor hierarchies, but also, discrimination against marginalized sexual identities and the policing of sexual desire.

In Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, queer women of color, and women who experience sexual trauma, find safety by using the local land to create gardens and by expressing a desire to navigate unknown local territory. Through gardens, they resist neocolonial iterations of land use on the

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<sup>9</sup> In 2013, The Commonwealth Equality Network was formed. This network is an LGBT advocacy group in the Commonwealth. "I Am One," belongs to this umbrella network. I Am One is based in Trinidad and Tobago and seeks to champion rights for the local queer communities. For more on I Am One, see also, <https://www.commonwealthequality.org/members/9/>. J-Flag, a Jamaican based LGBT advocacy group also belongs to this umbrella network. J-Flag seeks to improve social conditions for the local queer community through education, outreach and legal reform. For more on J-Flag's work in the local community, see also, <http://jflag.org/>. For more on how queer communities survive in the Anglo-Caribbean, see also, Lyndon Kamaal Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). Using Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic, Gill moves away from discourse that focuses purely on the judicial and structural exclusionary practices of homophobia in the Caribbean to look at how queer desire still exists and thrives in the Anglo-Caribbean. See also, M. Jacqui Alexander, "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," *Feminist Review* 48, no. 1 (November 1994): 5–23. doi:10.1057/fr.1994.39. Alexander blends the personal essay and the analytic article form to underscore the colonial legacy in the marginalization of queer people (particularly women) in both Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas. See also, Vanessa Thorpe, "Marlon James: 'I Underwent Gay Exorcism in Pentecostal Church in Jamaica,'" *Guardian Newspapers*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/17/marlon-james-underwent-gay-exorcism-jamaica>.

islands as garden spaces become personal rather than socio-economic status symbols for them. These women create these garden spaces even on land that does not belong to them. These spaces, while serving as a response to trauma and the marginalization they experience as women of color, also indicate their resilience and agency. In their literary works, women characters actively work against colonially-derived ideas of land-use that men such as William Blathwayt and Richard Ligon imposed on the islands, discursively, economically, and politically, in such colonial texts as Richard Forde's 1675 map of Barbados in William Blathwayt's 17<sup>th</sup> century atlas and Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of Barbados* published in 1657. These colonial models do not account for women of color, women who experience sexual trauma, nor queer women. Mootoo and Brand disrupt this model and portray a more inclusive version of land use that is both more sustainable and opens up the space for new voices and experiences in the shaping of the contemporary Caribbean.

The Indo-Caribbean, queer poet, Shivane Ramlochan refigures folklore characters in *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* as queer and sometimes nonbinary beings who, while decidedly rooted to the local, do not conform to rules of respectability in their experiences and expressions of intimate desire. Ramlochan boldly asserts this capacity when she writes in the closing poem, "Your father said not to take faggots to your bed, so you called them festivals."<sup>10</sup> Ramlochan's navigation of local space extends the vision Derek Walcott presents in his classic, signature poetic text, *Omeros*, to include the desires of characters other than those who are male and heterosexual. That said, both Walcott and

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<sup>10</sup> Shivane Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* (Leeds: Peepal Press, 2017), 70.

Ramlochan are deeply invested in the local ecology and both use folklore as a way to describe local beauty, desire, and agency. To differing extents, the two include both the Indo- and the Afro- diasporas in their iterations of the local and in acknowledging colonial violence and the imposition of the colonial imaginary. Like Brand and Mootoo, both are concerned with local use but also wonder about how this land is represented in literature, who gets to tell the story of the land, and whose voices get left out.

Douglarization provides a means of addressing the mutual concerns and desires of the contemporary Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diaspora. Both groups consider the islands their home, and both have a fractured relationship with their origin and ancestral countries. Despite Dionne Brand's and Shani Mootoo's residency in Canada, their concerns as queer immigrant women of color are profoundly influenced by their formative experiences of the Caribbean. Their work is set in local space, uses local ecology, and local cultural customs shape their narratives. As queer women of color, they reveal a need to create new ways of living and navigating the islands that are no longer tied to neocolonial ideas of Caribbean space and symbols of success. These new ways are built on existing narrative devices and local storytelling practices. They voice concerns with ecological destruction, environmental racism, economic disenfranchisement, and social marginalization. In addition, these new ways are more inclusive of the diverse voices of the Caribbean. They serve as the foundation for a more inclusive and sustainable, New Caribbean identity that acknowledges the global systems that shaped the islands, as well as the always present local affirmation of their dignity and their resilience.



## Douglarization and the Local

Kamau Braithwaite describes the process of creolization as the interaction and blending of African and European cultures.<sup>11</sup> He specifies that this mixture in the Caribbean generally creates a socio-cultural hierarchy between Euro-creole cultures and Afro-creole cultures, with the Afro-creole being considered lesser because it is linked to the black body. Braithwaite's use of creolization is in dialogue with Édouard Glissant's argument that, "[w]hen we speak about creolization, we do not mean only 'métissage', cross-breeding, because creolization adds something new to the components that participate in it'.<sup>12</sup> Elaborating on Glissant's focus on the blending of Afro- and Euro-cultures, Carolyn Allen explores how the term creole is an intermediary for European and African diasporic people born in the New World.<sup>13</sup> She foregrounds the place of Afro- and Euro- people in the Caribbean and how the term creole gets used in nationalist discourse to signal a relationship between Caribbean inhabitants and the land that is divorced from an older "mother" country.<sup>14</sup> Creole then, while signaling a blending of

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<sup>11</sup> Kamau Braithwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> Édouard Glissant, 'Creolization and the Making of the Americas' in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence and Rex Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 269. For Glissant, creolization results in something new and distinctly Caribbean in terms of culture. It is the generative quality of mixing and diversity that interests Glissant. This generative quality is imbricated with the many entanglements that exist in the Caribbean. For more on Glissant's focus on entanglement see also, Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989); see also Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Carolyn Allen, "Creole Then and Now: The Problem of Definition," *Caribbean Quarterly* 44, no. 1-2 (March 1998): 36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40654020>.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, "Creole Then and Now," 40. For more on the relationship between "inhabitant" and the land, see also, Robert P. Marzec, *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature: from Daniel Defoe to Salman Rushdie* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

the cultures of inhabitants and the land, does not necessarily indicate a blending of laborers and the land as the term includes—indeed, requires—the European aspect.

In terms of the Indo-diasporic presence in the myriad blendings occurring on the Anglo-phone Caribbean islands, Victoria Gregg uses the omnipresence of Caribbean food like pelau to include the Indo-diaspora in the process of creolization. In this use, creolization indicates the blending of the many cultures in the West Indies that produce a type of ubiquitous Caribbean lived experience. While Gregg disrupts the problematic pervasiveness of ideas of purity within Indo-diasporic communities in the Caribbean, this blanket blending does not address the specificity of the difference between those who labored on the land and those who profited from the exploitative practices.<sup>15</sup> That said, Gregg complicates Indian womanhood, and points out that these tensions regarding creolization depend on “the construction of heterosexual sex through racialized grids.”<sup>16</sup> Queer relationships between women in douglarized communities are not harnessed to the heteronormative reproductive politics of creolization because douglarization presents a different, more localized understanding of the islanders’ experience with colonialism. Same-sex desire between women of color in douglarized communities are representative

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2007). Marzec looks at the relationship between the term inhabitant and the justification for owning territory in the New World where inhabitant does not necessarily need to mean laborer. The act of inhabiting land then, for Marzec becomes a tool of colonialism, and is a way of separating labor from ownership.

<sup>15</sup> For more on constructions of purity within the Indo-diaspora and the policing of Indo-Caribbean women’s bodies, see also, Espinet Ramabai, “Ramabai Espinet talks to Elaine Savoury: A Sense of Constant Dialogue: Writing, Women and Indo-Caribbean Culture,” in *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature*, ed. Makeda Silvera (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1995), 106-111.

<sup>16</sup> Veronica Gregg, “‘Yuh Know Bout Coo-Coo? Where Yuh Know Bout Coo-Coo?’ Language and Representation, Creolisation and Confusion in ‘Indian Cuisine,’” *Caribbean Quarterly* 44, no. 1-2 (March 1998): 82, doi:10.1080/00086495.1998.11829572.

of an agentive erotic experience that indicated a local iteration of pleasure. Shona Jackson has also complicated the use of creolization in nationalist rhetoric. She uses the term Creole indigeneity to trouble the way that creolization is “also driven by opposition between settler *practices* of belonging (in this case Creole) and indigenous ones and the ways in which they reproduce the conflict between labor and capital, and between idealist and materialist critical practices and cultural forms of expression.”<sup>17</sup> Like Gregg, Jackson includes the Indo- diaspora in her formulation of creolization, while also using this to trouble the displacement of Amerindian culture in the Caribbean.

In terms of a specifically Indo- and Afro- blending, Shalini Puri presents the idea of dougla poetics as “a means for articulating potentially progressive cultural products de-legitimized by both Afro-creole dominant culture and Indian ‘Mother Culture.’”<sup>18</sup> Belinda Edmondson builds on this and addresses the conflation of ethnic mixing and cultural hybridization, specifying that, in terms of ethnicity, douglas are generally considered creole (meaning mixed) and not Indian.<sup>19</sup> She writes that when thinking about hybridization we should remember that, “cultural hybridization does not, in fact, always correlate with ethnic hybridity.”<sup>20</sup> Her use of douglarization then, hones in on Stuart Hall’s definition of creolization as a process of mixtures in the Caribbean to specifically address the Afro- and Indo diasporas.<sup>21</sup> Douglarization, then, becomes a means to address

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<sup>17</sup> Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 221.

<sup>19</sup> Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>20</sup> Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> See also, Stuart Hall, “Creolité and the Process of Creolization,” in *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations*, eds. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Shirely Anne

Caribbean blending while heeding Antonio Benítez-Rojo's warning that, "The Caribbean should be seen not just as a stage where syncretic musical and dance performances are put on, but also a space invested with syncretic forms of understanding that connect to political, economic, and social power."<sup>22</sup>

Douglarization is both decidedly local and decidedly Caribbean. Colonial European figures such as William Blathwayt and Richard Ligon, while they are more engaged in the beginnings of creolization, set the stage for the exploitative cartographies that would produce douglarization (and the hierarchies between bodies and access to space). Dionne Brand and Derek Walcott both speak directly to the historical movements of the Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diasporas to the islands in *A Map to the Door of No Return* and *Omeros*, respectively. Meanwhile Shivanee Ramlochan implicitly does the same through folklore and descriptions of different bodies in *Everyone Knows I am a Haunting*. Douglarization directly confronts the history of exploitative labor practices in the Caribbean that resulted from British colonialism in the region and presents a means of addressing the mutual concerns of both communities as they carve out a new, blended, identity in the contemporary Caribbean.

### **Queer Women Writing as an Inclusive Contemporary Caribbean**

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Tate (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; 2015), 12-25. Hall also discusses the specificity with which the term "creole" is used in Trinidad and in Guyana in order to demonstrate the slipperiness of the use of creole as an ethnic marker given the Indo-Caribbean presence in these countries (14).

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 163.

As much of the animosity in interracial relationship between Indo- and Afro couples is directed toward the women, the presence of same-sex desire among women is also being highlighted in the new Caribbean.<sup>23</sup> Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley explores how narratives of queer love between women, specially Afro-Caribbean women, take tropes “like women-as-flowers, women-as-water, women-as-sugar cane, invented to justify keeping Caribbean women and Caribbean territories in someone else’s control, and redeploy these same tropes to imagine a landscape belonging to Caribbean women and Caribbean women belonging to each other.”<sup>24</sup> She argues that through queer love, black Caribbean women create alliances among themselves—based on intimacy—that are revolutionary, partially due to the violence experienced in the construction of the plantations. Meanwhile, Evelyn O’Callaghan examines the role of silence in policing Indo-Caribbean women’s desires in the works of Shani Mootoo. She argues that, “what interests Mootoo are silenced stories of transgressive female sexuality: stories about women who broke family and communal taboos regarding who and how they could love, and the ways in which they could act on their desire.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For more on how women are specifically targeted for engaging in these relationships see also, Reddock, “Jahaji Bhai,” 570.

<sup>24</sup> Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2. For more on same-sex desire between Afro-Caribbean women, see also, Shana Calixte, “Things Which Aren’t To Be Given Names: Afro-Caribbean and Diasporic Negotiations of Same Gender Desire and Sexual Relations,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 24, no. 2/3 (January 2005): 128–137. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/217467449/>. For more on same-sex desire among men in the Caribbean, see also, Michael A. Bucknor, and James Conrad, “‘Cock Mouth Kill Cock’: Language, Power and Sexual Intimacy in Constructions of Caribbean Masculinities,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 60, no.4 (2014): 1–7.

<sup>25</sup> Evelyn O’Callaghan, “Sex, Secrets, and Shani Mootoo’s Queer Families,” *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 6, no. 3 (November 2012): 235, doi.10.1093/cww/vps023. For more on same-sex desire among Indo-Caribbean women, see also, Suzanne Persard, “Queering Chutney: Disrupting Heteronormative Paradigms of

Moreover, Kate Houlden argues that sexuality cannot be divorced from conceptions of migration or nationalism and focuses on “the ways in which sexual nonconformity challenges ideals of Caribbean citizenship.”<sup>26</sup> Building on Edouard Glissant’s concept of the mangrove, Keja Valens also uses the term “mangle” to describe the myriad entanglements that occur in Caribbean space.<sup>27</sup> Valens argues that the presence of same-sex desire in Caribbean fiction demonstrates “the necessity of accounting for its possibility, indeed the impossibility of thinking about any kind of desire and sexuality in the Caribbean without also thinking through desire between women not along a hetero-homo divide but in the mangle, where desire between women operates as a structural framework.”<sup>28</sup>

Through same-sex desire between women, contemporary Caribbean writers resist dominant masculinist iterations of nationalism and create safe spaces for marginalized people on the islands. Same-sex desire presents a more inclusive vision of the future of the Caribbean—and a more honest picture of the diversity within the Caribbean both past and present. By presenting alternatives to heterosexual desire, women writers such as

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Indo-Caribbean Epistemology,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 26, no. 1 (April 2018): 25–102, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2052781208/>; see also, Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan, “(Un)Settling the Politics of Identity and Sexuality Among Indo-Trinidadian Same-Sex Loving Women,” in *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought Genealogies, Theories, Enactments*, ed. Gabrielle Jamela Hosein, Lisa Outar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Ghisyawan looks at same-sex desire among bisexual Indo-Caribbean women and how they navigate respectability politics in the Caribbean.

<sup>26</sup> Kate Houlden, *Sexuality, Gender and Nationalism in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11. For more on how the use of eroticism in creating and shaping the use of space in the Caribbean, see also, Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Keja Valens, *Desire Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Valens, *Desire between Women*, 6.

Shani Mootoo, Dionne Brand, and Shivane Ramlochan, recover the desire of those who were deliberately erased and include this type of desire when they consider what it means to be from the Caribbean today.

## Ecology and Navigation

Access to safe and intimate spaces is of concern to both the dougla and queer communities of color in the Caribbean. However, safe spaces, particularly green, clean safe spaces, are not always accessible to these communities because of the history of racialized colonial land-use. Romy Opperman writes that, “Environmental racism is generally understood as the differential distribution of environmental burdens according to race, perpetuated by the exclusion of people of color from environmental decision-making.”<sup>29</sup> Looking at America, Robert D. Bullard argues that, “the mainstream environmental movement has not sufficiently addressed the fact that social inequality and imbalances of social power are at the heart of environmental degradation, resource depletion, pollution, and even overpopulation. The environmental crisis can simply not be solved effectively without social justice.”<sup>30</sup> Moving away from America, and focusing

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<sup>29</sup> Romy Opperman, “A Permanent Struggle Against an Omnipresent Death: Revisiting Environmental Racism with Frantz Fanon,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7, no. 1 (January 2019): 58, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/critphilrace.7.1.0057>.

<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 23. For more on environmental racism in an American context, see also, Carl A. Zimring, *Clean and White: a History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 6, 86, 143. Zimring looks at how those who perform manual labor, or whose labor is racialized, becomes tied to seeing them as unclean. This uncleanness makes them a threat to the purity of white spaces and this fear of impurity is used to keep people of color out from living in white spaces even while those bodies work in white spaces.

instead on climate change and the Caribbean, Leon Sealey-Huggins argues that, “crucial to understanding the connections between structural racism and climate change is an acknowledgment that ‘vulnerabilities’ to extreme weather are not ‘natural’. They are not reducible to environmental or geophysical factors. They are profoundly patterned by the ways in which we organize our societies so as to suit some people’s interests at the direct expense of others.”<sup>31</sup> The history of racialized labor in the Caribbean results in a use of space that affects the access to clean places and heightens the environmental costs of living in uncertain territories. Even when locals know about the land, they are not granted the same opportunities regarding administration as Mootoo shows when her character Mala comments after being told that Ambrose has gotten a job with the ministry of agriculture, “‘You going to work the canefields, Ambrose?’”<sup>32</sup> Mala immediately thinks that Ambrose, a brown man, however well-educated, will be engaged in manual labor because this is her experience on the island. Both she and Ambrose know about the local flora and fauna, but she does not think that anyone else will value these skills financially. Indeed, Ambrose only gets this position because of the Reverend, a white Canadian minister engaged in proselytizing on the island. Ambrose can only work in the ministry because it is understood that he has been fully immersed in colonial education and therefore engage in activities that benefit the colonist more than the local people. Locals like Mala are excluded from such considerations because they do not conform to ideas of local respectability.

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<sup>31</sup> Leon Sealey-Huggins, “The Climate Crisis is a Racist Crisis: Structural Racism, Inequality and Climate Change,” In *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence*, eds. Azeezat Johnson, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, and Beth Kamunge (London: Zed Books, 2018), 103.

<sup>32</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 216.



Mala's marginalization stems from the perpetuation of a discourse that views humanity as existing on a spectrum. This notion of the 'spectrum of humanity' has a problematic history in the Caribbean given its history with slavery and indentureship. Monique Allewaert uses the term parahuman to describe, "the slave and maroon persons who seventeenth-through nineteenth-century Anglo-European colonialists typically proposed were not legally or conceptually equivalent to human beings while at the same time not being precisely inhuman."<sup>33</sup> Through the parahuman, she argues that, "the literal and figurative disaggregation of the human body in the American tropics requires that we conceive agency as we might now call an ecological phenomenon."<sup>34</sup> Allewaert is in conversation with Glissant's aesthetics of turbulence, which he describes as processes of change and exchange that are occurring always simultaneously in Caribbean space.<sup>35</sup> Glissant also discusses the need for an aesthetics of earth to counter the "standardization of consumption."<sup>36</sup> This aesthetics of earth is built on disruption in order to create a radical "love of the earth."<sup>37</sup> Dionne Brand speaks to the power of this type of radical love by showing that it is the land that her character Verlia, misses most. Brand writes, "So in the November rain Vee is thinking of tamarinds. Tamarinds that cut the roof of her mouth. Tamarinds she never really liked, not as much as Pomeracs, perfumed, velvet and red. Then of pods of purple dust on the road under a lilac tree hanging. Then pink

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<sup>33</sup> Monique Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 154-155.

<sup>36</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 151.

mountains, tumbling mountains of poui petals.”<sup>38</sup> Her memories of the land are those of a local on her way back home and are both dignified and beautiful, and present a local space meant for local experience and the expression of pleasure. This is not the neocolonial tourist imaginary. This is local lived experience where a local woman of color interacts and finds solace in the land around her. Her interaction with the space is not based on subsidizing this leisurely experience through the exploitation of another entire group. This experience, then, is not undergirded by the notion of a spectrum of humanity, but rather, by a flattening of hierarchies of the human in order to provide this safe interaction between a local woman of color and the space around her.

In order to fully reckon with the ecological damage done to the Caribbean by colonialism, the continuation of systemic racism must also be taken into account. The idea and reality of the Caribbean as now a permanent home space for locals, must be considered seriously in order for the region to establish a more revolutionary local land practice. By looking at how environmental racism shapes access to green and safe spaces in the Caribbean, the contemporary Caribbean aims to dismantle the tourist imaginary and create a space that accurately represents local lived experience, where that experience includes local ideas of beauty, pleasure, and leisure, and no longer caters to the colonial conceptions of these categories.

## Chapter One

Richard Ligon’s (1657) *A True and Exact History of Barbados* and William Blathwayt’s 17<sup>th</sup>-century atlas demonstrate an early colonial perspective that saw the

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<sup>38</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 199.

Caribbean islands as places to extract resources from, not places meant to be permanent homes. This extractive idea of the island, never conceived as a site for settlement and a permanent home, had an effect on the colonial infrastructure and built environment of the Caribbean, as towns and roads were not designed to be long-term resources. What we see in these colonial texts is the erasure of certain types of labor and the prominence of Caribbean space as a space of leisure and colonial ideas of pleasure that do not include the locals.

These colonial texts also act as narratives of discovery. As such they create a hierarchy of labor whereby the skill of observing and recording the natural and built Caribbean world, a task performed by the European visitor, is privileged over the manual labor done by people of color. One instance of this privilege occurs when Ligon describes how an unnamed Native woman teaches him how to eat cassava. He writes, “I learned the secret of an *Indian* woman.”<sup>39</sup> His use of “I learned” emphasizes his role in the learning process and ensures that he is central in this display of knowledge. As another example, Blathwayt’s map of Barbados portrays the island as a space to be carved up among settler colonists with the aim of economically benefitting Britain.

Narratives of discovery elide the violence used to extract labor from the bodies of people of color and privilege the perspective of foreign colonial agents. Narratives of discovery further emphasize the adventures and superiority of the white colonists in order to justify their exploitation of the land and of people of color as the local land is never meant to be a permanent home. These narratives racialize the process of acquiring and

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 76.

disseminating knowledge and instill a sense that Caribbean space is meant to serve colonial interests at the expense of the local.<sup>40</sup>

## Chapter Two

Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* underscores how the descendants of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean populations in the region use recovery as a mode of resistance to inherited colonial narratives of discovery written by colonial Europeans such as Richard Ligon and William Blathwayt. Brand creates an understanding of island space that accounts for the specific types of internal insular movements that created the Caribbean's current economic and cultural legacies, while also engaging in movement to and from island space. Brand emphasizes the many transactions happening on the island, dispelling the idea that its sole or primary function is to cater to a tourist imaginary that erases the labor done by locals and diminishes the ecological impact of both colonialism and tourism.

Brand confronts the legacy of the hierarchy of labor she inherits from men such as Blathwayt and Ligon, instilled through the dominance of their narratives of discovery.

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<sup>40</sup> The recording of the natural world in the Caribbean (and the New World) was part of the colonial agenda. For more on the relationship between cataloguing the natural world and colonialism, see also, Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). The colonial coopting of discovery narratives in the Caribbean creates an anxiety that persists in the contemporary Caribbean. For more on this anxiety regarding the relationship between modernity and discovery in the Caribbean, see also, Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3, 24, 253. For more on discovery as key to colonial discourse, see also, Pramond Nayar, *Colonial Voices the Discourses of Empire* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Nayar traces how discovery is used to move from imagination to inquiry, where inquiry necessitates documentation within the colonial framework.

She contextualizes the importance of this legacy through the metaphor of the room of history, writing, “Where one stands in a society seems always related to this historical experience. Where one can be observed is related to that history.”<sup>41</sup> She seeks ways to overcome that violence, making use of narration that treats different forms of labor with dignity and unlearns the belief that certain skills are inherent to certain bodies. To do this, she must fill the blanks left by the willful erasures in the narratives of discovery, a recovery project that confronts a highly selective view of colonial excellence.

Brand’s act of recovery relies on her returning, occupying, and observing spaces and places denied to her ancestors and the ancestors of other diasporic groups. She underscores how the Anglophone Caribbean descendants of those whose labor was extracted without reward, use recovery as a mode of resistance to narratives that privilege the role of discovery. Brand’s work dignifies those who were historically not compensated properly for their labor. She dismantles the hierarchy of labor through the use of recovery and adventure as elements of a mode of storytelling that prioritizes the experience of diasporic peoples whose racialized bodies were exploited on the plantations.

### Chapter Three

Shani Mootoo and Dionne Brand both confront how the vestiges of colonialism influence sexual trauma among women on the island, and how those women resist that trauma through access to gardens on the islands. In *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *In Another Place, Not Here*, garden spaces provide women from both the Indo- and Afro-

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<sup>41</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 25.

diasporas with solitude from violence, as well as a refuge within which they experience pleasure and express desire on their own terms. These women discuss desire among people of color—something left out of narratives of discovery—and privilege and acknowledge the desires of women.

Mootoo writes of Mala, a young woman who finds solace in a wild garden, “She did not intervene in nature’s business. When it came time for one creature to succumb to another, she retreated. Flora and fauna left her to her own devices and in return she left them to theirs.”<sup>42</sup> Mala does not seek to control the space. For her, its beauty lies in mutually consensual use. Brand, meanwhile, writes of the peace her young Elizete feels in garden space, commenting through Elizete’s voice, “I get to find out these things as a child and in my smallness all I could think was how the names of things would make this place beautiful.”<sup>43</sup> The young Elizete, like Mala, finds revelatory beauty in the wild spaces on the island, and this is where she focuses in order to find solitude. Both characters are deeply shaped by the labor hierarchies on the island, but both break from the neocolonial imaginary of land use through the wildness—uncontrollable, but never threatening to locals—in garden space.

The garden is a douglarized space that expresses the women’s desire for escape from the socio-economic system that directly affects descendants of the women of the Indo- and Afro- diasporas. In creating their own versions of paradise, the women are engaged in a decolonization project that reimagines the land that was formerly the paradise of colonizers. Through the garden, they find safety from sexual violence and

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<sup>42</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 137.

<sup>43</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 23.

trauma and experience and express a sensuality that they were made to believe they were not entitled to. Through pleasure—safe and consensual pleasure—these women resist neocolonial aspirational models that seek to continue to destroy Caribbean ecologies and perpetuate feelings of inferiority and marginalization.

## Chapter Four

While texts written in very different eras, Shivanee Ramlochan's *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* employ the poetic use of the local storytelling practices of islanders to disrupt tourist imaginaries by presenting alternative ideas of pleasure. Islands are often presented in literature as isolated places. However, those who choose to make islands their homes (or who were forced to make islands their homes) are in constant contact with non-islanders. Local Caribbean folklore often embodies the blending of cultures that occurred in the archipelago, and as such they resist colonial conceptions of the colonized islands as temporary—and exploitable—spaces. Folklore is a way for locals to discuss both their material reality and the ways in which they are shaped and affected by global movements and economies.

Ramlochan and Walcott both use folklore figures to discuss past traumas and to present the experience of (and destigmatize) desire for pleasure among the locals. While describing a mother's desire for her child to escape school and enter the forest Ramlochan writes, "Nothing the forest raises is a monster."<sup>44</sup> The forest is in the space outside of the plantation, outside of the cities, outside of the inherited ideas of aspiration and civilization, but the forest is where the child will find safety. Walcott uses the

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<sup>44</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22.

iguanas to draw attention to the performance of servitude to colonial masters by having the iguana ignore Plunkett, a local white colonial agent. St. Lucia, the setting of *Omeros*, was originally named for the iguana. Plunkett knows this. He says, “‘Iounalo, eh? It’s all folk-malarkey!’/ The grass was as long as his shorts. History was fact,/ History was a cannon, not a lizard.”<sup>45</sup> Plunkett’s disturbance comes from his awareness of the iguana’s continued presence on the island, and his inability to control or destroy it. The socio-economic markers offered by the colonists mean nothing to the iguana, a figure that appears in local folklore tales.<sup>46</sup> It reminds him of how the colonists destroyed the land and that the locals remember this destruction (even if they do not say anything).

Folklore figures provide a frame for narratives and scenarios in which desire and survival are not mutually exclusive, and can be experienced in combination by the descendants of both the Indo- and Afro-Caribbean people. Although traditionally meant to evoke fear, in works by these writers folklore figures represent a way out of the type of socio-economic stasis and vulnerability faced by the Indo- and Afro diasporas, who were taught to adhere to neocolonial models of aspiration. Walcott and Ramlochan douglarize the purpose of folklore figures by presenting different ideas of pleasure, and by

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<sup>45</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 92.

<sup>46</sup> For an example of the iguana in an Amerindian folklore see also, Odeen Ishmael, “Why There Are Storms on Mount Roraima,” in *Guyana Legends: Folk Tales of the Indigenous Amerindians* (Bloomington: Xilbris, 2011), 60-65. In this tale, the iguana is an alligator’s cousin and acts as a messenger for the alligator (who functions as a trickster figure). For more on how the blending of diasporic people and native people is represented in changed folklore see also Jan Carew, “The Fusion of African and Amerindian Folk Myths,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (March 1977): 7–21. Carew shows how blending the Amerindian and African folklore became a way for the enslaved people to understand the land. This blend of folklore was then disseminated through the local communities through local oral storytelling practices and is a way to impart local ideas of moral order among the descendants of those disenfranchised by the plantation system.



addressing how the history of labor practices colors aspirational desire. Taken in tandem, Ramlochan and Walcott's works present a more inclusive version of belonging that acknowledges the history of labor in the Caribbean, the locals' pleasures and desires, and the racial and gendered dynamics on the islands.

## Conclusion

This dissertation, *The Enduring Local: Representations of Land and Home in Caribbean Literature*, draws on ecocriticism, critical race theory, and decolonial theory to interrogate the ways that Caribbean space is represented in literature by (mostly) Caribbean authors. Reading Caribbean authors like Shivanee Ramlochan, Dionne Brand, and Shani Mootoo alongside maps and historical records from former colonists, this dissertation traces how the legacy of colonialism shaped the current use of the land. This legacy is seen in the willful ecological destruction of the land, the history of violent labor practices, and the current economic vulnerability of the islands as they fall victim to climate change. The ecocritical work here, therefore, interrogates the legacy of colonialism and is in conversation with environmental racism and decolonial discourse.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The plantationocene, as proposed by Donna Haraway, is a way to engage with how the plantation is a site where the human actions of aggressive extraction, monoculture and exploitative labor practices have fundamentally altered the local ecology and play a substantial role in climate change. For more on Haraway's plantationocene see also Donna J. Haraway, "Making Kin," in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 99-103. Haraway explains in her footnotes that the term was collaboratively decided on in the *Ethnos* conversations at the University of Aarhus in October, 2014. Janae Davis, Alex A. Moulton, Levi Van Sant and Brian Williams critique the flattening of the exploitative racial dynamics in Haraway's definition of the plantationocene. They draw on Black geographies to discuss the environmental justice issues at play in the plantationocene where the harsh racial logics at play in the development of the plantation need to be addressed. They show that the processes of settler colonialism (rationalized by racism) is integral to understanding

By creating local intimate spaces, the land no longer perpetuates the plantation model where locals need to perform Otherness. These contemporary authors use queer love between women as a way to reimagine a more inclusive local space that no longer needs to be tied to neocolonial economic models.

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the ecocide that occurred in settler colonies as well as understanding the impact of climate change in the region. Their work is embedded in discourse of environmental racism perpetuated by the plantation model. For more on their necessary intervention in the plantationocene discourse and the need to address environmental racism see also Janae Davis, Alex A. Moulton, Levi Van Sant, and Brian Williams, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises,” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 5 (May 2019), doi:10.1111/gec3.12438.

## Chapter One

**The Loss of the Local:****Legacies of Environmental Discrimination, Land, and Labor in the Anglo-Caribbean**

The contemporary Caribbean maintains a racialized and classed hierarchy of labor directly tied to the plantation system. One can observe the discursive construction of certain of these key hierarchies in early colonial texts, in works as different in form as Richard Ligon's prose account, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657), and in the maps contained in the William Blathwayt's 17<sup>th</sup>-century atlas, *The Blathwayt Atlas*.<sup>1</sup> Both texts underscore the relationship between early colonial European narratives of discovery and the creation of a hierarchy of labor in the culture of the Caribbean. In the early era of New World colonization, Europeans' settlement of land was often recorded by, and circulated among, those with a path to owning property. Discovery narratives couched the act of "discovery" itself as a type of labor that would be rewarded economically, since the act of discovery leads others to a means of acquiring wealth. However, the acquisition of wealth in discovery narratives required extraction from the colonized land and exportation to the colonial power. Exportation made the colonized country dependent on the colonial power as their main market. And extraction

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011). Richard Forde, *A New Map of the Island of Barbadoes Wherein Every Parish, Plantation, Watermill, Windmill & Cattle mill, Is Described with the Name of the Present Posseor, and All Things Els Remarkable According to a Late Exact Survey Thereof* (1675), in *The Blathwayt Atlas. Volume I*, ed. Jeannette Black, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1970), 32. Unless otherwise noted, all citations regarding Forde's map in *The Blathwayt Atlas*, will be referred to as *The Blathwayt Atlas*.

used the labor of others who were not as rewarded economically as the ones writing and circulating the narratives of discovery.<sup>2</sup>

The hierarchy of labor of most interest here is the division between physical and unnamed, invisible labor, and the intellectual, named, visible labor of the early colonizers. Named labor is dignified in the written records of the early colonial narratives of discovery. Gordon Sayre describes narratives of discovery as driven by, “the desire for wealth that nearly all colonists shared [and that] entailed a separation from European society and a discovery of secret riches.”<sup>3</sup> Christoph Irmscher adds that “discoverers provide role models for later novelists because [of] their need to create space out of seeming chaos or because they struggle so hard...to endow that space with meaning.”<sup>4</sup> Daniel Vitkus builds on these arguments by framing discovery narratives as commodities that promote commercial colonial activity. Vitkus views the writing of discovery narratives as intellectual labor. He values the role of intellectual labor at a time when books were becoming more accessible.<sup>5</sup> However, he cautions that “The discovery

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<sup>2</sup> For other examples of narratives of discovery, see also, Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Johann D. Wyss, *Swiss Family Robinson* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Sayre, “Le Page du Pratz’s Fabulous Journey of Discovery: Learning about Nature Writing from a Colonial Promotional Narrative,” in *The Greening of Literary Scholarship Literature, Theory, and the Environment*, ed. Steven Rosendale (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 39. Sayre also discusses the role of exploration and the idea that many scholars who work on discovery narratives do not acknowledge that native peoples might have also had a desire for exploration.

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Irmscher, “Crossblood Columbus: Gerald Vizenor’s Narrative ‘Discoveries,’” *Amerikastudien* 40, no.1 (January 1995): 84.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Vitkus, “Indicating commodities in early English discovery Narratives,” in *The Book as History: New Intersections of the Material Text*, ed. Heidi Brayman, Jesse M. Lander, Zachary Lesser, and Peter Stallybrass (New Haven: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 2016), 188.

narrators represent themselves as the eyes and ears of a laboring body that toils and sweats but is only occasionally mentioned or acknowledged.”<sup>6</sup> Laboring bodies were not economically rewarded, and any social reward given to their labor is secondary to the colonist who usurped the labor of the colonized in their (the colonists’) narrative of discovery. Unnamed and invisible labor is generally physical labor performed mostly by people of color in the early Anglophone Caribbean. Unnamed and invisible labor was only important to the colonists insofar as it benefited the colonists on the islands. Bluntly, named visible labor was the labor done by colonists and rewarded economically by the system of colonialism.

The hierarchy between physical and intellectual labor in the Caribbean was used by the colonists to justify their coopting of the labor done by the colonized as their (the colonist’s) property.<sup>7</sup> The colonists valued the physical and reproductive labor people of color performed on the plantation insofar as it increased their wealth. They did not see the bodies of people of color as having any value outside of serving the empire. This meant that these bodies were only seen as tools for an efficient and profitable plantation. Colonized land only existed as a type of factory for the colonists.<sup>8</sup> They gave little

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<sup>6</sup> Vitkus, “Indicating Commodities,” 191.

<sup>7</sup> For more on labor and property relations, see also Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994). See also Christian Høgsbjerg, “‘A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain’: C. L. R. James and the Caribbean Labour Rebellions of the 1930s,” *Small Axe* 15, no. 2 (2011): 24-42, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-1334221>.

See also C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989). For labor, property and race relations in the Caribbean, see also, Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: the Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> See the plantation machine in Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: the Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 9.

consideration to making the land a permanent and developed home as displayed in both the infrastructure and colonial use of the land. The needs of the locals were given very little thought.

Labor in the colonial Caribbean, then, was fraught, as Richard Ligon's 17<sup>th</sup> century text, and the 1675 map of Barbados in William Blathwayt's atlas expose. Caribbeanist Shona Jackson explains: "The labor of the enslaved, indentured, and others is captured within an aesthetic economy that not only articulates the particular subordination of the South to the North but does so in such a way that that relationship remains reproductive for and hence gives meaning to his [Antonio Benetiz-Rojo's] postmodern trope of it [the Caribbean] as 'a Caribbean machine.'"<sup>9</sup> This unnamed and unrewarded labor serves as a background for the colonists' named and rewarded labor. Named labor masked the violence done in co-opting unnamed labor for building colonial wealth. Named labor bolstered the patriarchal aims of colonialism and was tied to a form of masculinist storytelling in which certain figures were the dominant voices telling these narratives of discovery.

Narratives of discovery show that once labor became racialized in the Caribbean, it was difficult for members of oppressed groups to be compensated for their labor, but as importantly here, to achieve recognition for their intellectual labor. Jackson argues that the labor performed by diasporic bodies became a source of created indigeneity for Creole people, where Creole refers to Indo, Afro, and Chinese people brought to the islands to labor on the plantations. Jackson explicates that Creole indigeneity became a

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<sup>9</sup> Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 14.

tool for local diasporic groups to inscribe a sense of entitlement to the land at the expense of Native peoples. For Jackson, this labor turned into an exclusionary nationalist tool. Jackson highlights how Creole people created a sense of belonging—of home—based on their having performed (or descending from those who did) physical labor on the plantation. This labor shaped the contemporary Caribbean because it changed the demographics and the ecology of the islands.<sup>10</sup>

Building on Jackson's critique of Creole indigeneity, the "local" refers to the people living in the Anglophone Caribbean islands and who use the land to provide for their primary needs. Local refers to the flora and fauna on the island that is not meant for mass exportation. Local includes the labor and the production of goods and ideas meant for consumption by those living on the island. The local allows for imagining a space outside the economy created by the plantation machine. Focus on the local shifts attention from how the land can be tamed in order to serve the empire to how it primarily benefits those who live on the island. This is not to say that trade is not important, but that trade for foreign consumption is not the objective. This view of the local dignifies local tastes, local conceptions of beauty, and local experience.

Narratives of discovery create a hierarchy of labor where the skill of observing and recording is privileged over the manual labor done by people of color. Narratives of discovery elide the violence used to extract labor from the bodies of people of color and profit from the land. They privilege the perspective of foreign colonial agents who do not intend to make the land their home and who seek to gain social and economic capital. Narratives of discovery tend to emphasize the adventures and superiority of the white

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<sup>10</sup> Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 26, 52, 68.

colonists in order to justify their exploitation of the land and of people of color. Privileging the colonists' named labor resulted in the loss of the local because the colonists sought to tame the local in order to gain wealth. Underscoring where narratives of discovery erased the contributions of local people of color starts the process for undoing the shame created by those gaps.

Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* and the Richard Forde 1675 map of Barbados in William Blathwayt's atlas perpetuate this hierarchy between physical and intellectual labor in the early Anglophone Caribbean. Both texts were produced during the expansion of the British empire into the Caribbean. They highlight the relationship between discovery narratives and the hierarchy of labor by showing that the early colonizers saw the land through a commodifying gaze and rendered the land knowable through its economic value. The seeds for which labor gets credited in terms of whose labor is recorded and rewarded is present in these texts' depictions of the plantations and general cataloguing and methods of consuming and domesticating the land.<sup>11</sup>

### **Richard Ligon's Importance as the Bearer of Knowledge of the Caribbean**

Ligon's text documents his experience as an overseer in Barbados in the seventeenth century. Published in 1657, his text is part travel narrative and part of an

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<sup>11</sup> For more on how visual depictions bolster the colonial imaginary see also the Caribbean pastoral in Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2009), 172. For more on the relationship between knowledge of plants and its use to expanding the empire, see also, Jill Cassid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).



“emerging body of commercial literature on ‘thriving’ and ‘improving’” the self.<sup>12</sup>

Written to clear his debt while in debtors’ prison in England, Ligon describes the local planters, flora, fauna and terra he encountered on his journey to and in Barbados, simultaneously displaying the worth of his experience for an audience of reading consumers in order to ensure his own economic gain.<sup>13</sup> He includes diagrams of plants, a sugar mill, musical instruments and a map (see figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Chan Smith, “Useful, Knowledge, Improvement, and the Logic of Capital in Richard Ligon’s *True and Exact History of Barbados*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, no. 4 (2017): 552, doi:10.1353/jhi.2017.0031.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Introduction,” in *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 30.

<sup>14</sup> According to Kupperman, Ligon’s map “reproduced one created by Captain John Swam in 1639, which had been seized by governor Henry Huncks and taken to England,” 32.



*Figure 1. A topographicall Description and Admeasurement of the Yland of Barbados in the West Indyaes with the Mrs. Names of the Seuerall plantacons*

In addition to descriptions of the local planters, he discusses encounters with local enslaved Africans and the Indigenous. In Ligon's account, the reward for going to the island and taming the land is displayed through depictions of the land's fertility as he labors to appease his audience's commodifying gaze. This fertility is depicted on the map in drawings of wild hogs, trees, and plants. In addition, the absence of plantations in the center of Ligon's map gives the impression of unoccupied land that new planters can inhabit. This impression of fertile land that can be controlled using European weapons is

crucial, as his text serves as a manual for prospective planters in addition to displaying his own knowledge. The greenness in Ligon's text is both part of the allure (this is what is being sold to potential settlers) and part of the danger (because it is unknown) of the Caribbean. However, by selling this newness as a type of adventure, Ligon makes that danger part of the allure.

He shows white men confronting unfamiliar vegetation and exerting their control over this new and strange place. For example, in his map (see Figure 2), the man in the upper-left hand corner is seen charging after two enslaved people of color.



*Figure 2. Close-up of scene in A topographicall Description and Admeasurement of the Yland of Barbados in the West Indyaes with the Mrs. Names of the Seuerall plantacons*

The white man is on a horse, clothed, and he brandishes a gun. He dominates the nearly naked men and while their feet are rooted to the ground, he is atop an animal implying a separation between him and the land. This image explicates the might of the colonist. He

uses violence to assert his position. Even as he is apart from the land, he remains the dominant figure in the depiction (in the sense that he uses violence to ensure his dominance). Ligon's map shows a concentration of plantations and properties along the lower coastline. There is unowned space for other prospective settlers to build plantations. People of color perform labor under white and colonial supervision and while some land is claimed, land remains open to be owned.

Much of the scholarship on Ligon's text that tries to find progressive moments in *True and Exact History* highlights Ligon's astonishment that enslaved persons were purposely barred from converting to Christianity because Christians could not be enslaved at the time. David Chan Smith follows this trend to conclude that "[Ligon] condemned instead individual choices that resulted from ignorance or the pull of immediate desires."<sup>15</sup> He emphasizes Ligon's appreciation for achievement as evidence of Ligon's progressiveness in a text that serves as a manual for building sugar plantation that exploit enslaved labor.<sup>16</sup> Keith Sandiford points out that the location of plantations, "served the dual purpose of staking English claims against the designs of colonial rivals, and directing the gaze of prospective settlers towards areas of the map, especially in the extreme southern and central parts of the island, that remained unsettled or only sparsely

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<sup>15</sup> Chan Smith, "Useful Knowledge," 568.

<sup>16</sup> Smith ignores that Ligon focuses on the exceptional enslaved persons and that Ligon believes that it is these exceptional slaves who deserve freedom rather than arguing against the system of slavery. Smith falls in the category of scholars who find this focus on the exceptional to be evidence of progressiveness while ignoring that this view means that some people have to earn their humanity while others do not.

inhabited.”<sup>17</sup> This implies then, that the purpose of Ligon’s map is to play to the colonial understanding of the Caribbean as something that can (and should) be owned.

Meanwhile, Rebekah Mitsein argues that “Ligon’s *History* represents Barbados as a space where the ontological blending between organisms and mechanisms is a fundamental aspect of the natural world, and it suggests that the recognition of the fact would lead to a more productive and ethical commonwealth.”<sup>18</sup> Mitsein’s work provides a generative look at machines and how sugar mills become part of the landscape.<sup>19</sup> However, she adds that, “Ligon’s plans do not so much erase the labor of African slaves as factor the slaves’ labor into the mechanisms of colonization, as if the laborers’ enslaved state is a just and inevitable consequence of the mechanics of the island as a whole.”<sup>20</sup> Such a statement, and much of the scholarship that cautions readers to consider the worldview of the period, privileges the worldview of the colonist. However, in not considering the worldview of the enslaved, upon whom the productivity of Barbados rests, Mitsein replicates the problem as much as she criticizes it.

The existing scholarship on Ligon neglects discussion of the fact that Barbados was never intended to be a permanent home for the settlers.<sup>21</sup> This belief in the island as a

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<sup>17</sup> Keith Sandiford, “Mapping the Caribbean: Ligon’s Map and History: Cartographics of Emergent Knowledge in Early Barbados,” *Anglistik Und Englischunterricht*, 67, (2007): 242.

<sup>18</sup> Rebekah Mitsein, “Humanism and the Ingenious Machine: Richard Ligon’s *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016): 106, doi.10.1353/jem.2016.0009.

<sup>19</sup> Mitsein goes on to later state, cursorily, that “Ligon’s *History* is a useful space for investigating some of the answers to these questions as his descriptions and plans for the Barbadian sugar mills implicitly justify slavery while technology in the surrounding narrative condemns slavery’s cruelty, if not the institution itself,” 99.

<sup>20</sup> Mitsein, “Humanism,” 106.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the oceanic and the colonial imaginary in Richard Ligon’s text see also, Keith Albert Sandiford, *Theorizing a Colonial Caribbean-Atlantic Imaginary: Sugar and*

temporary factory affects the infrastructure and the pride in the local as the colonial foreigner's larger ambitions are focused elsewhere. The roads, the water systems, the homes that Ligon, to his credit, rightfully critiques, were shoddily constructed. Ligon writes, "A Town ill situate; for if they had considered health, as they did conveniency, they would never have set it there...But, one house being set up, another was erected...till at last it came to take the name of Town...which vents out so loathsome a savor, as cannot but breed ill blood."<sup>22</sup> There was no intention behind considering where the town should be built, nor was any change made once it was found to be inhospitable. This signals that the local was meant to be left behind once those funding such shoddy infrastructure gained their wealth (at the local's expense). Ligon's text never speaks of the island as a home. His text, and much of the scholarship that uses his text, forgets that the island was as new for the enslaved Africans as it was to Ligon, and that it became a type of home for these exploited groups whose labor was subsumed by the plantation system. These exploited groups, though, needed the island for their survival. However, the colonial model of commercial success did not take this into consideration and treated the island as a temporary stop gap on the way to economic success. This success was determined by European colonial models and was meant to benefit colonial powers and

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*Obeah* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 53-100. For more on the use of narrative in defining colonial growth and colonial opportunity in Richard Ligon's *True and Exact History of Barbados*, see also, Keith Albert Sandiford, "Ligon: 'Sweet Negotiation,'" in *The Cultural Politics of Sugar Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24-40. For more on Richard Ligon's background, see also, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Introduction," *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 1-35. See also, Myra Jehlen, "History beside the Fact: What We Learn from *A True and Exact History of Barbadoes*," in *The Politics of Research*, eds. E. Ann Kaplan and George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 127-139.

<sup>22</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 70-71.

saw the labor of the colonized as somehow owed to them (the colonists). Ligon is capable of a condemning tone towards early colonial settlers here in his description of the situation of Bridgetown. Ligon espouses the danger of having people who have no intention of living permanently in a place be in charge of infrastructure. The island simply has to be, and perforce will remain, a factory that makes goods for the wealthy colonists to gain profit.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to not considering the island as a permanent home, Ligon's narrative of discovery emphasizes his point of view. He gets credit as the explorer. He presents colonialism through a reductive imaginary. He highlights his masculinity and makes the role of the adventurer desirable and virtuous in the sense of aiding the empire. He describes a new space and explains how to extract use from this space. He uses a sense of adventure to drive his narrative when he discusses not just how dangerous the land is, but also, his ability to conquer this danger and then gain wealth from the land. He writes about a poisonous tree that he encounters with the aid of an enslaved person, saying, “[a] Negro had two Horses to walk...and the horses beginning to fight, the Negro was afraid, and let them go; and they running into the wood...struck the poisonous juice [of the poison tree] into one another’s eyes...and they were both led home stone blind, and continued so a month, all their hair and skin pilling off their faces.”<sup>24</sup> Ligon emphasizes the enslaved person’s fear of the horses, though it is not clear if it is Ligon or the

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<sup>23</sup> Even if some of these colonists are not wealthy (as in the case of Ligon) they have a path to creating wealth because their labor is compensated. This is not the case for the colonized people. This difference creates a systemic economic disenfranchisement for the descendants of laborers who simply cannot hope to bridge the gap created by the years in which the colonists were able to accumulate wealth.

<sup>24</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 122.

enslaved person who actually led the horses back to the house. Ligon clarifies that this was an enslaved *man* through an earlier description of the horses as “left with him by two Gentlemen,” thereby distinguishing himself [Ligon] as the possessor of a superior brand of masculinity, less prone to feeling fear.<sup>25</sup> His emphasis that it was an enslaved *man* highlights Ligon’s white masculinity as he, not the enslaved man, can conquer the tree. Ligon ends his description of the poisonous tree by saying that colonists use this timber to make “the Pots we cure our Sugar in; for, being sawed, and the boards dried in the Sun, the poison vapors out.”<sup>26</sup> Despite how fearsome the tree might be, he is able to extract use from it by way of his knowledge. By writing down the encounter, Ligon ensures that his role is credited, while the unnamed enslaved persons’ labor is not.

Ligon does not mention any (prospective) women settler-colonists, implying that the act of discovery for empire-building is a masculinist pursuit. The only women he mentions are women of color, the majority of whom are enslaved. He objectifies the majority of the women of color. Ligon describes the enslaved mistress of a planter as “[a] *Negro* of the greatest beauty and majesty.”<sup>27</sup> While trying to determine how to approach her, Ligon writes, “and considering she was but the *Padre*’s Mistress, & therefore the more accessible, I made my addresses to her.”<sup>28</sup> Ligon gives the impression, through the use of the word “accessible” that these women are available and open to relationships with the white colonists and that the colonists do not need to treat these women with reserve as they are not as protected as white women. He speaks of her as “accessible,”

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<sup>25</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 122.

<sup>26</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 55.



yet, goes on to say that she lived “not above a stone’s cast from the *Padre*’s...for they are as jealous of their mistresses, as the *Italians* of their wives.”<sup>29</sup> He shows that in colonized space white men can own beautiful women and display that ownership to other white men. It should be noted that no white wives, white daughters, or white women are mentioned in Ligon’s text.

Along with giving little consideration to the consent of colonized women, Ligon describes how little thought is given to the environmental needs of the workers of the plantation, while showing that the environmental needs of the colonists were met.<sup>30</sup> Water is collected and stored in the white settler homes that have “gutters at eaves.”<sup>31</sup> Control of the water supply becomes weaponized as Ligon writes that, “in case there should be any uproar or commotion in the Island, either by the Christian servants, or *Negro* slaves; serves them [the colonists] for drink whilst they were besieged; as also, to throw down upon the naked bodies of the *Negroes*.”<sup>32</sup> The colonists weaponize their controlled access to water. They construct the buildings and the storage systems to privilege their needs over the enslaved. Even without the threat of a slave revolt, this control is egregious given the extreme heat of the tropics and the type of labor the enslaved did on the plantation.<sup>33</sup> Ligon writes that, “Eight months of the year, the weather is very hot, yet not so scalding, but that servants, both Christians, and slaves, labor and

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<sup>29</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 55, 56.

<sup>30</sup> It should be remembered that Ligon has the option to wander around this new island documenting all that he sees and appreciating the beauty of the space. Although Ligon and other colonists are the ones extracting profit from the land, they are the ones with the time (and protection) to observe and experience the land without consideration for immediate survival.

<sup>31</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 75.

<sup>32</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 72.

travel ten hours a day.”<sup>34</sup> Yet Ligon makes explicit that, “We are seldom dry or thirsty, unless we overheat our bodies with extraordinary labor.”<sup>35</sup> Through the use of “we” and “our” Ligon distinguishes himself from the laborers. With the phrase, “[w]e are seldom dry or thirsty,” Ligon attempts to portray the islands as hospitable to those like him, who do not intend on seeing the islands as a home or a place where they were going to work. By having their needs met, Ligon shows that their presence is itself rewarded while the labor of the people of color is not.

This prioritization of one group’s environmental needs over another corresponds with the discourse of environmental racism Carl A. Zimring describes in *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States*.<sup>36</sup> His focus on racialized labor contrasts with Monique Allewaert’s eco-criticism in *Ariel’s Ecology*.<sup>37</sup> Zimring attends to the relationship between racial discrimination and access to clean spaces. He focuses on the human. Allewaert, meanwhile, focuses on parahumanity, which she says “describes the slave and maroon persons who seventeenth- through nineteenth-century Anglo-European colonists typically proposed were not legally or conceptually equivalent

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<sup>34</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 72.

<sup>35</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Carl A. Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). See also Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Bagasse: Caribbean Art and the Debris of the Sugar Plantation,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 73-94. See also, Laura Pulido, “Geographies of Race and Ethnicity II: Environmental Racism, Racial Capitalism and State-Sanctioned Violence,” *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no.4 (August 2017): 524–533. For more on environmental discrimination in the Caribbean, specific to the French Caribbean and French colonialism, see also, Christopher M. Church, *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 6.

to human beings while at the same time not being precisely inhuman.”<sup>38</sup> This description does not allow her to attend as directly to the role of racialized labor practices that affect access to clean spaces for those living on islands that exist as lush space in the colonial imaginary.<sup>39</sup> Dovetailing with the discourse of environmental discrimination, Urusla K. Heise cautions in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* that focusing on the local (as many ecocritics do) can breed a kind of destructive nationalism. Shona Jackson’s use of the notion of Creole indigeneity complicates the use of labor within nationalist frameworks.<sup>40</sup> The local in the Caribbean is already imbricated in the global because of the specific ecological destruction and environmental discrimination that occurred during colonialism and continues in the contemporary Caribbean.

Ligon presents discovery as a colonial and masculine pursuit. White male colonists own the land and the space allows for a display of colonial might. While Ligon gets the opportunity to explore the land and to record his observations, the same privilege is denied to the enslaved people. Ligon’s disregard for this privilege allows him to give the impression that only white male colonists knew how to extract value from the land while people of color are meant to perform physical labor because they are afraid of the new land (in the case of the enslaved) or do not understand how to extract wealth from the land (in the case of the native peoples). His control over the point of view in his discovery narrative indicates the material privileging of the colonists’ needs and desires

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<sup>38</sup> Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 2, 12-13.

at the expense of the exploited laborers. It is the colonists who have access to the safe green spaces while the colonized work the land under the threat of violence.

### **Exploitative Extraction and the Hierarchy of Labor**

Ligon explicates the hierarchy of labor on the island that places bodies of color squarely at the bottom. He mentions that there are “three sorts of men,” on the island “Masters, Servants, and Slaves,” and focuses on the Masters and the Slaves because this relationship is tied to a belief that the enslaved are perpetually the property of the Masters.<sup>41</sup> The needs, wants and desires of the enslaved were subject to the whims of the Masters. The lack of concern for their lodging is seen in the following account: “One bunch [of plantains] a week is a Negro’s allowance. To this, no bread nor drink, but water. Their lodging at night a board, with nothing under, nor anything a top of them. They are happy people, whom so little contents.”<sup>42</sup> This is not very much food, especially when juxtaposed with the lavish spread the settler-colonists had.<sup>43</sup> The physical lodgings are also shabby and leave the bodies of the enslaved open to cockroaches.<sup>44</sup> Ligon writes: “The Negroes...are bitten so...[that]their skins are raced, as if done with a curry comb.”<sup>45</sup> This is a horrific image, and yet Ligon comments that “They are a happy people, whom so little contents.”<sup>46</sup> His statement shows how little consideration is given to the well-being of the enslaved, in sharp contrast to the amount of attention given in his text to

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<sup>41</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 93.

<sup>42</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 51-54.

<sup>44</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 115-116.

<sup>46</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 94.

cataloguing the best environments for growing sugarcane. The plants receive more consideration than the enslaved. Only the physical bodies of the enslaved are needed for the colonists, and so they are kept in conditions that cater only to their survival, but not to their pleasure nor leisure. Furthermore, denigrating the needs of the enslaved to have clean, safe, spaces because of their supposed ability to be easily pleased denies the violence that coerces this supposed contentment.

In Ligon's text, adventurous men do not need to labor on the lands that they conquer because the act of conquering is valued more than continuous plantation-style fieldwork. He gives the impression that he discovers the worth of the land through his observations and his understanding of techniques to extract wealth from the land. His discoveries are built on and add to the circulation of written texts about these islands. Ligon even alludes to this circulation of knowledge in the hands of the colonists, writing, "I had some speech with the ancientest, and most knowing Surveyor there, Captain *Swan*, who told me, that he once took an exact plot of the whole island, but it was commanded out of his hands by the then Governor, Sir Henry *Huncks*, who carried it to *England*."<sup>47</sup> The discoveries made by the enslaved, the indentured, and the indigenous regarding their contact with newness on the islands were not known or were coopted by colonists who display that knowledge as proof of skilled observation. Moreover, the enslaved people, with direct ties to elsewhere, were at a disadvantage because they did not have access to the texts to prepare them for life on the islands. Ligon presents danger and adventure as simultaneous experiences for the masculine colonist and uses this to justify his right to own the land.

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<sup>47</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 71.

While Ligon does not claim to have discovered Barbados, his text notes the discovery of certain techniques for extracting use from newly recorded local plants and animals. His ability to show how these plants and techniques benefit the empire exemplify his commodifying of the Caribbean. The act of narrating the discovery of a technique, trumps the actual creation of the technique (by indigenous and enslaved laborers) in terms of economic reward. Ligon writes, “I learned the secret of an *Indian* woman, who showed me the right way of it.”<sup>48</sup> The woman who taught Ligon how to eat cassava is unnamed. Ligon ensures that his learning of the skill comes first in the sentence and her teaching of the skill comes second. Even when a person of color who discovers a technique is known by name, that person is not rewarded economically or symbolically.<sup>49</sup>

Ligon gives the impression that white colonists are the only group capable of extracting use from the land. His map, and his text, show that this extraction calls for the destruction of the local flora in order to build plantations. The manual labor done on the plantation is performed by people of color. The needs and desires of the people of color matter less than the needs and desires of the white colonists because the colonists own property. Owning property, or even having the possibility of owning property, makes the

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<sup>48</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 76-77. See also, Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (North Carolina: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 265. Parrish describes how knowledge was guarded by native peoples in a manner similar to how land was treated by the Europeans as property. Susan Scott Parrish describes how knowledge was guarded by native peoples in a manner similar to how land was treated by the Europeans as property. See also Londa L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 213.

<sup>49</sup> See also the character of Man Friday in Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

colonists' labor more valuable to the empire. In contrast, being denied the ability to own property (and indeed, being considered property under slavery) makes the labor of the enslaved less valuable even while their labor is precisely what drives the profitability of the plantations.<sup>50</sup> Because the land is private property, the desires of the locals do not count in the pursuit of colonial expansion. All the European colonial powers wish to impose the plantation model in the Caribbean. This model disregards other ideas of living on the land

### **The Colonial Audience: Marginalizing the Knowledge of Indigenous Women**

Throughout Ligon's text, he marginalizes the knowledge of indigenous women and frames their skills as less than his own powers of observation. He exemplifies this in the retelling of the account of Yarico and Inkle. In roughly only two paragraphs, Ligon relates the tale of Yarico, a young, beautiful Amerindian woman, who is betrayed by Inkle, an English sailor.<sup>51</sup> Ligon tells how she nursed Inkle back to health and hid him from her own people, only to be sold, along with them, into slavery by Inkle.<sup>52</sup> Yarico's

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<sup>50</sup> To see more on how white colonists privileged the property rights of slaveowners and colonists over the enslaved and laboring people of color, see also, Greg Beckett, "The Ontology of Freedom: The Unthinkable Miracle of Haiti," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2013): 54-74, doi:10.1353/jhs.2013.0040. Beckett also mentions the fact that France paid reparations to the white slave owners after the Haitian Revolution while the former slaves received no compensation for their labor.

<sup>51</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 106-107. Yarico's beauty matters as Ligon focuses on her beauty as part of her worth because it initially makes her stand out. He writes, "We had an *Indian* woman, a slave in the house, who was of excellent shape and color, for it was a pure bright bay; small breasts, with the nipples of a porphyry color" (106).

<sup>52</sup> Richard Steele elaborates on Ligon's rough storytelling in *The Spectator* in 1711. For a feminist critique on Richard Steele's Inkle and Yarico re-telling, see also, Nicole Horejsi, "'A Counterpart to the Ephesian Matron': Steele's 'Inkle and Yarico' and a Feminist Critique of the Classics," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no.2 (2006): 201-226, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053436>. For more retellings of the Inkle and Yarico tale,

role is to show *Ligon's* role as a virtuous discoverer. Ligon discovers her worth, and he is the one speaking about her worth to display his morality without actually changing her lived conditions (nor the lived conditions of her people). Her exceptional loyalty to Inkle and morality mean that she should be treated as a human. She is different from her people and worthy of reward. Inkle, however, is supposedly unlike his people and therefore should be rebuked. Furthermore, Ligon's exceptional ability to notice her morality and loyalty makes him an exceptional man. His humanity is never debatable. Yarico needs to prove hers. This is not a tale of narrative reward for Yarico. Furthermore, Ligon does not show the virtuous actions of any Amerindian men and he never gives the names of any Amerindian men. Yarico can be saved in his eyes, but what of her father, her brothers, or her friends? Ligon does not spare any thought to the Amerindian men and their right to freedom.

Ligon gives the impression that he would never have traded Yarico into slavery. He writes, "But the youth [Inkle], when he came ashore in the *Barbados*, forgot the kindness of the poor maid, that had ventured her life for his safety, and sold her for a slave, who was as free born as he: And so poor *Yarico* for her love, lost her liberty."<sup>53</sup> Ligon uses the words "free born as he" to show that Yarico was never meant to be a slave, implying that those who are born into slavery are not as deserving of liberty as those who are born free. Ligon uses the phrase "[b]ut the youth" to distinguish himself from men like Inkle who are only motivated by money, as the "but" implies that Inkle is

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see also, Frank Felzenstein, *English Trader, Indian Maid: Representing Gender, Race, and Slavery in the New World: an Inkle and Yarico Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 107.



acting poorly. This tale presents Ligon as better, in a moral sense, than men like Inkle because Ligon can acknowledge Yarico's moral worth. However, Yarico's worth is based on her beauty and on her betrayal of her people. While Ligon focuses on Yarico as an individual and emphasizes that she is different from her people, Yarico *and her unnamed people* are sold into slavery. Ligon does not concern himself with the inherent worth of her people.

Ligon uses Yarico's pregnancy to portray native women's bodies as a tool for empire-building. The native women can become physically and emotionally tied to the colonists through pregnancy. Ligon writes, "[s]he chanced to be with Child, by a Christian servant."<sup>54</sup> Ligon only refers to white people as Christians so it seems that Yarico was impregnated by a white colonist.<sup>55</sup> It is implied by the circumstances in Ligon's tale that Inkle is her son's father. Along with adding to the property of the colonist, Yarico's comeliness and her child provide evidence of another colonial imaginary of the islands where objectified young women serve the sexual desires of white colonists. This is not the first time Ligon speaks about young native women in erotic terms, and in both instances, with the specter of literally owning their bodies as a possibility.<sup>56</sup> Even as Yarico is betrayed and even as Ligon says that this is wrong, the colonists profit from her body as Ligon can sell her story of betrayal while objectifying her thereby making her body and her tale also his property.

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<sup>54</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 107.

<sup>55</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 96. Ligon once says that an exceedingly talented enslaved person named Sambo should have been given the chance to be a Christian, but Sambo never actually was a Christian. Ligon, *Barbados*, 101.

<sup>56</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 59. Ligon describes teenaged native women on the island and specifically mentions the "badge of their freedom" on their ankles implying that he is specifically looking to see if they are free while objectifying them. Ligon, *Barbados*, 59.

Ligon profits from native women's knowledge and their pain. He retells the story of Inkle's betrayal of Yarico but does nothing to change her lived conditions. Her story allows him to privilege his supposed morality by implying that he would never act like Inkle while he does nothing to stop systemic injustice. As much as he tries to differentiate himself from Inkle, Ligon also gains from systemic injustice. He, not Yarico, is the primary beneficiary of telling this tale. This is similar to him benefiting from relaying information about how to eat cassava, while never giving the names of the women who taught him this skill. Ligon's misogynistic and racist framework means that the indigenous women can only hope to be useful to Ligon to be worth his attention. Only Ligon gains economically and narratively from his commodification of their knowledge and their stories.

### **The Colonial Imaginary: Turning Colonized Space into Colonial Intellectual Property**

The relationship between models of property and the use of land is integral to understandings of Caribbean space during the colonial era. Henri Lefebvre speaks of the relationship between owner and land by specifying that, "The ownership of land, whether or not it has been built on, is of feudal origin. To properly understand what has occurred, it should be recalled that the landowner, whether he owns land or buildings, is initially someone other than the industrial capitalist."<sup>57</sup> While Lefebvre focuses on urban planning in Paris, his politicization of space can be applied to the colonization of Caribbean land

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<sup>57</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, eds. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 177.

that was originally occupied by indigenous peoples. They used the local vegetation to provide for their needs because it was their home. Once European colonists entered the Caribbean, they established ownership through contracts backed by violence, changing the relationship between humans and land in the region. European colonists were not locals needing the island's land to provide for their everyday needs; instead they relied on trade with Europe and Africa. They changed the ecology of the land by building plantations in the Caribbean for the cultivation of sugar, cocoa, coffee, and rice crops. Large swaths of land were cleared for these plantations to thrive. These plantations needed buyers in order to be profitable. These crops do not provide basic sustenance for those living on the land. In addition, plantation monoculture leaves the land weak.<sup>58</sup> However, because of the property rights of the foreign colonists, these environmental concerns were not addressed.<sup>59</sup> Instead, Ligon's text turns the islands into colonial space, itself a type of intellectual property.

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<sup>58</sup> See also Arlette Saint Ville, Gordon Hickey, and Leroy Phillip, "Addressing Food and Nutrition Insecurity in the Caribbean through Domestic Smallholder Farming System Innovation," *Regional Environmental Change* 15, no. 7 (October 2015): 1325–1339, doi.10.1007/978-981-13-8256-7\_9. Arlette Saint Ville, et al look at how the plantation monoculture depleted the soil (and existed in some of the formerly most fertile areas). They tie this to food shortage, wealth inequality, and the legacy of slavery in the Caribbean. See also, Shobha S. Maharaj, Hamish Asmath, Safraz Ali, John Agard, Stephen A. Harris, and Mark New, "Assessing Protected Area Effectiveness Within the Caribbean Under Changing Climate Conditions: A Case Study of the Small Island, Trinidad," *Land Use Policy* 81 (February 2019): 185–193, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.09.030>. Shobha S. Maharaj, et al discusses the need for what they call "plantation forests" (areas designated for growing trees and bamboo for the purpose of combatting deforestation). They show that these forests cannot be monoculture forests (made of teak and pine) as these deplete the soil.

<sup>59</sup> For more on how the plantations made the Caribbean islands dependent on colonial models of labor, see also Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830- 1848* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

In addition to the ecological violence of the plantation machine, there was the everyday violence faced by laborers. These laborers were part of the colonial imagery where colonists do not perform manual labor nor are expected to care for those who do. Ligon writes of a pregnant enslaved woman: “In a fortnight, this woman is at work with her Pickaninny at her back, as merry a soul as any is there. If the Overseer be discreet, she is suffered to rest herself a little more than ordinary; but if not, she is compelled to do as others do.”<sup>60</sup> How can Ligon be sure that the woman being observed is “merry”? He provides no evidence of this, and he has no access to the woman’s thoughts or feelings. Even if he had asked, it is possible that the power dynamic between him as a colonial agent, and her as an enslaved woman, would mean that she could not be truthful out of self-preservation. Ligon’s choice of remarking on the Overseer’s discretion, and his use of the word “compelled,” implies that he might believe that the woman should be resting, but he does not say this outright. Although Ligon *might* believe that the woman should be resting, his text promotes the use of slave labor as part of the process to gain capital. His text was intended to be read by prospective slave-owners and he profited from his presentations of enslaved labor and enslaved bodies.

Moreover, Ligon exoticizes the women by highlighting how they are different while interpreting their gestures and features through a lens that might not pertain to them. This is a kind of violence which plays into colonial conceptions of the local needing to perform Otherness in order to be beautiful or useful to the empire. Colonizers did not need to perform Otherness, rather, they entered the island and established standards of worth based on their homelands. The locals were only worthy if they pleased

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<sup>60</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 98.

or were useful to the colonists, and here, that worth rested on their difference while being judged by the colonist. The colonists decided what was useful or what was desirable and took credit for discovering such worth. At several points in Ligon's text, he reminds the reader that he is a trained visual artist and a trained musician.<sup>61</sup> At one point he writes, "But 'tis a lovely sight to see a hundred handsome Negroes, men and women, with every one a grass-green bunch of these fruits [plantains] on their heads, every bunch twice as big as their heads, all coming in a train one after another, the black and green so well becoming one another."<sup>62</sup> This is one of the only moments of free time for the enslaved people and they are using some of this time to get their meagre rations. For him, their presence in the landscape pleases him, so he ignores their paltry rations and enjoys watching them on their time off, thereby extracting further use from their bodies. Patricia Mohammed discusses this move of naturalizing enslaved bodies in the landscape as a feature of the Caribbean picturesque, where people of color are Othered and become part of the colonial imagination of leisure. Mohammed links narratives of discovery to the need to render the African enslaved body as part of the landscape. She writes, "There is a conscious attempt here to transform the image of the African slave trade from terror and abject abuse to harmless and leisurely voyage across the Atlantic."<sup>63</sup> In Ligon's view of the enslaved bringing back meagre provisions, this leisure was one-sided. Ligon attempts to portray the bodies as beautiful (while highlighting their difference) and as part of the landscape in order to shy away from the violence they experience and the paltriness of their provisions.

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<sup>61</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 93-94.

<sup>63</sup> Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean*, 308.

This move of viewing the labor of the enslaved as part of the natural landscape is essential to Shona Jackson's work on Caribbean indigeneity.<sup>64</sup> Jackson argues that New World colonists could not view the work performed by indigenous people, nor colonized people of color, for themselves as labor. She traces colonial representations of the labor done by native peoples, notably, the mining of gold as seen by Las Casas and Christopher Columbus. She claims that neither Las Casas nor Columbus viewed the natives' mining of gold as labor unless that labor served the empire-building project. The labor of the native peoples was first discredited by the colonists in order to justify colonial ownership of the land. In the example of gold-mining, Jackson points out that the colonists did not view the gold mining of the locals as productive unless they gained from it, because they did not value the labor the locals did for themselves. The second move the colonists performed was replacing the labor of the native peoples with something European. This did not mean that Europeans performed the actual labor, but that the labor was understood through the colonial lens as producing something for colonial purposes. The third move was to extract that labor and the products of that labor for colonial purposes. All three moves combined meant that the labor of the native peoples was not seen as producing anything of value if the labor was done for the natives themselves. Their labor, and the products of that labor, only mattered if they benefited the colonists. Their labor therefore became the property of the landowner in a system where the laboring body was always performing for the landowner.

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<sup>64</sup> Shona Jackson, "No Black Liberation without Indigenous Sovereignty": Intersections of Blackness and Indigeneity in Culture, Education and Society," in *Archipelagic Assemblages, Colonial Entanglements: Rethinking American Studies* (Chicago: American Studies Association, October 2017).

By erasing the local, the colonial power asserted their dominance by ensuring that the land existed only to serve the colonial power, and only so long as it was relevant to the colonial power. This can be seen in Ligon's description of learning how to use cassava.<sup>65</sup> In the paragraph preceding his concession that he learned the skill from a native woman, Ligon describes the making of cassava pone by, "the Indians, whom we trust to make it, because they are best acquainted with it."<sup>66</sup> Here, two things are happening. First, Ligon ensures that the audience knows that the colonists did not allow enslaved Africans to make pone for them because it can be poisonous. Second, there is the implication that the native people who do make this pone were valued and allowed relative physical safety for this skill. The native people who performed this skill, then, were only valuable if they properly performed this skill (and therefore might prize this skill as it afforded them, the native people, a certain level of safety). By leaving the women unnamed, Ligon renders them as part of conquered colonial space and usurps their skill as colonial intellectual property.

Frantz Fanon speaks to this willful creation of dependence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He writes,

In reality the colonial system was concerned with certain forms of wealth and certain resources only—precisely those which provisioned her own industries. Up to the present no serious effort had been made to estimate the riches of the soil or of mineral resources. Thus the young independent nation sees itself obliged to use the economic channels created by the colonial regime.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 76-77.

<sup>66</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 76.

<sup>67</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 100.

Fanon argues that the colonial powers created a system of dependence because it ensured a constant market and a constant source of cheap raw materials. The use of “obliged” indicates that this dependence continues to be forced upon young postcolonial nations. Furthermore, what is considered to be their “riches” is only what the colonial power deems valuable. These were the raw materials that the colonial power exploited. (Formerly) colonized nations see themselves as inferior to their (former) colonial masters because of this hierarchy. This is not only an economic hierarchy, but also, a learned social hierarchy that perpetuates the former colonizer’s social power. Ligon’s text fosters the idea that the colonized country needs the colonizer by describing foreign intelligence as needed to make the land readable and useful.

To ensure that the colonist’s relationship to the land is the only type that creates a useful and reward-worthy individual, Ligon utilizes the specimen-commodity system. Even if his text humanizes a very select few of exceedingly exceptional enslaved persons, his text is meant to be read by prospective planters. Christopher P. Iannini discusses the colonists’ efforts to turn local knowledge into a commodity by looking at Hans Sloane’s *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*.<sup>68</sup> Iannini writes, “Sloane’s text arrives at a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the West Indian plantation as a new social and economic formation and the specimen-commodity as a new cultural form. The transformation of the natural curiosity into an exchangeable commodity, he begins to perceive, is linked by some occult logic to

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<sup>68</sup> Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica vol. 1* (London: Printed by B.M. for the Author, 1707), treats enslaved people as specimens and in addition to placing these bodies in a hierarchy, shows that this labor becomes naturalized to black bodies in early colonial discourse.



the recognition of human beings as chattel property.”<sup>69</sup> Ligon’s ability to present himself as a skilled observer means that he can spot what on the island is useful in the specimen-commodity system, but this is troubling given the role of chattel slavery in the Caribbean.

<sup>70</sup> After all, Ligon arrives on a slave ship and is therefore acutely aware of the workings of chattel slavery.<sup>71</sup> However, Ligon downplays this, and focuses on the newness of the island and which fruits and plants might be of interest to prospective planters.

Furthermore, lost in Ligon’s text is the fact that the island is every bit as new to the enslaved people brought in from other countries. Their discoveries remain unknown for the most part and this erasure helps foster the idea that Ligon, and men like Ligon are seen as the most observant.

To secure his position as a skilled observer—and therefore his necessity to the specimen-commodity economy—Ligon uses first-person narration. This situates the narrator as a skilled observer and commands the narrative. In addition to looking at the cataloguing of the local as part of the colonial project, Iannini looks at the use of first person in Hans Sloane’s *Voyage to...Jamaica* where he highlights that this use creates a “certain tension in Sloane’s self-characterization as a ‘settled’ adult still bound by youthful ‘inclinations.’”<sup>72</sup> Ligon applies a similar technique in his text. He uses first person narration to highlight his experience in the new land, his overcoming danger, and his pleasure in the New World. The tension between a “‘settled’ adult” and “youthful

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<sup>69</sup> Christopher Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (North Carolina: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 50.

<sup>70</sup> This is perhaps made easier for him because he represents the system that decides what is and is not useful.

<sup>71</sup> Ligon, *Barbados*, 42.

<sup>72</sup> Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions*, 36.

‘inclinations,’”<sup>73</sup> is present in Ligon’s text, where youthful inclinations align with Ligon’s sense of adventure while the desire to be a “‘settled’ adult” aligns with his desire to acquire property. This acquisition of property includes intellectual property whereby Ligon’s experience in the New World becomes useful to the colonial building project. In believing the land can be owned, and that all the actions done on the land are their property, the colonists create the idea that only their relationship to the land produces an individual.

Furthermore, while Ligon’s text uses the Caribbean as raw material, it is produced and distributed in England and does not consider Caribbean locals among its intended audience. In order for the local to be understood intellectually, that work must be done outside of the Caribbean, particularly in terms of distribution in this colonial understanding. It signals the way the empire conceived of the Caribbean. They only rendered visible what was of use to them on the land. If something was not of use to them, it might be a curiosity, or as Ligon shows, becomes a way to showcase the worldliness of the explorer and therefore is the colonial power’s intellectual property.

By controlling access to the production and distribution of knowledge of the Caribbean the colonial power creates a narrative of discovery in order to justify their ownership of property in the New World. Ligon deftly manages how interactions with locals are portrayed and positions the colonists as keen observers. This display of who can and cannot observe emphasizes the abilities of the colonizer and grants them, by naming their labor, the credit for observation and innovation. The act of attaching these skills to one group at the expense of others denies that other groups have these abilities.

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<sup>73</sup> Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions*, 36.

Even when the land is explained to the colonists, the information in the text is presented as the fruit of the author's observations and not the result of the observations of the native peoples or those working the land. Indeed, the knowledge the native people and laboring people possess and acquire is treated as innate, while the *ability* to observe, to adapt, and to record is seen as an innate skill of the colonists. The narrative itself becomes a process of turning the island into colonial intellectual property.

Ligon treats colonized space as primarily serving the empire whether it be in terms of the plantations, or in terms of exotic scenery. He does not treat the space as capable of existing without a colonist. His text is meant to justify the pursuit of property in the Caribbean whether it be through plantations or knowledge of the exotic (and how to tame the exotic). His skills of observation are privileged over the skills of the person providing the information. He, not the one showing him the skill, benefits from this display of knowledge because he, not the one being observed, benefits economically and narratively from the interaction. Furthermore, by privileging his skills of observation (and therefore his ability to understand how to extract wealth from what he sees) he gives the impression that he, and those like him, are needed to create use and wealth from Caribbean space. His narrative of discovery is used to justify dependence on the colonial powers.

### **The Blathwayt Atlas and Maps as a Tool for Colonial Administration**



Original in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

Figure 3. A new map of the island of Barbadoes wherein every Parish, Plantation, Watermill, Windmill & Cattlemill, is described with the name of the present Possessor, and all things els Remarkable according to a Late Exact Survey thereof

William Blathwayt's atlas is a surviving seventeenth century collection of maps held at the John Carter Brown library that provides insight on early Anglophone Caribbean colonialism. As a tool of colonial administration, the maps show the location

of islands in the Caribbean, as well as who was considered to be present on the islands and what roles people performed.<sup>74</sup> The maps represent colonial property visually, but also, are themselves objects created, reproduced, and distributed by agents of empire whose names are recorded in this legacy of discovery. They represent the colonist's desire for property, but also, the colonists' claiming of Caribbean space, literally and figuratively, as their own intellectual property. This aspect of the colonists' desires, bolstered by myths of discovery and adventure, became integral in seeing the islands as a place where wealth could be attained and where adventure offered the promise of leisure that would persist in the contemporary tourist gaze. The reward for a sense of adventure is pictured on Blathwayt's map as profitable property, indicated by the presence of plantations that can be owned by colonists. While hardship is described, and implied on the maps, in terms of the journey, the climate, and attempts at taming the land into the plantation machine, this hardship is meant to end in economic gain through the ownership of land. It takes skill to produce the maps, but the audience for the maps are motivated by the colonial project, whether that be land acquisition, or the acquisition of intellectual property.<sup>75</sup> This is not to diminish the skill in creating the maps, nor the effort in publishing and distributing the maps, but to draw attention to the economic reasoning behind these efforts.

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<sup>74</sup> William Blathwayt's map of Barbados does not depict any enslaved people nor does it mention any Native peoples. It does however give the names of the owners of plantations.

<sup>75</sup> See also, J. B. Harley and Paul Laxton, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2001).

One particular map was made by the surveyor, Richard Forde.<sup>76</sup> Like the map Ligon included in his text, Forde's map is also a depiction of Barbados. Forde requested and acquired the copyright for this map both in England and in Barbados (despite Barbados having no printing press). The map itself is made using a copperplate press, and since no copperplate printing press existed on the island, the map itself was made in England. The map was made by Richard Forde for Governor Jonathan Atkins, who was required by the Lords of Trade to submit a map of Barbados.<sup>77</sup> This process and distribution of knowledge highlights the beginnings of the consolidation of a belief that the Caribbean can only be rendered visible if it is commodified by the colonial powers. Forde's map was published roughly eighteen years after Richard Ligon's map of Barbados and flattens the island into a form of colonial intellectual property. It is this transformation that secures the local Caribbean, symbolically and literally, as the intellectual property of the colonizers, who literally establish the meaning of the local in the Caribbean.

The map of Barbados pictured here (Figure 3) shows land parceled off for colonists whose names are attached to the land. This signifies their right of property, acknowledges their presence and allows these people to become part of the island's recorded history. As such, it permits us to trace the motivations and management of early English colonialism in the Caribbean as they build a narrative of how they saw the

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<sup>76</sup> For more on the making and acquisition of this map, see also, Jeanette Black, "Map 32: A New Map of the Island of Barbadoes wherein every Parish, Plantation, Watermill, Windmill & Cattle mill, is described with the name of the Present Possessor...Sold by Mr. Overton...Mr. Morden...Mr. Berry...And Mr. Pask...[1675-76]," in *The Blathwayt Atlas: Commentary*, ed. Jeanette Black (Providence: Brown University Press, 1975), 180-185.

<sup>77</sup> Black, "Map 32," 180-181.

Caribbean. If early Anglo-colonial texts established and maintained a distinction of labor in which only the colonists' labor was recognized, then this map is itself a product of recognized, named and rewarded labor. This labor refers to the work done by colonists who are now given credit for publishing and narrating the texts about the land they have seized for their own conceptual and economic use.<sup>78</sup> This early colonial representation shows how early colonialism shaped the use of the land and the ramifications of using the land for strictly economic reasons given how much space is dedicated to the plantation project.

The 1675 map of Barbados in the Blathwayt atlas does not show as much open space as seen in Ligon's map, published almost twenty years earlier, nor does it contain the many local animals or depictions of laborers. Instead, this map goes even further to obscure the violence of the plantation system by removing humans from the land. Mythical humans do appear as decorations on the periphery of the map, but not within the island itself. The key informs the reader that this map documents the position of cattle mills and windmills that are employed in the sugar refining process. Both of these mills use slave labor, as Ligon described. Forde's map shows many of these mills throughout the island, and depicts plantations and the houses of settlers, both of which use slave

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<sup>78</sup> For more on the Lords of Trade and the methods used to require and acquire the maps of *The Blathwayt Atlas*, see also, Jeanette Black, "The Blathwayt Atlas: Maps Used by the British Colonial Administrators in the Time of Charles II," *Imago Mundi* 22, (1996): 20-29. Meanwhile, Peter Korby uses data analysis to critique the accuracy of these maps. Mapmakers relied on government censuses to accurately report on who owned what property, though he finds that the parish boundaries are not at all clear in the Ford map. For more on the accuracy of the map, and to learn more on Peter Korby's digital humanities project, see also, Peter Korby, "The Modern Utility of Ford's [sic] Colonial Map of Barbados, 1674," *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* 11, (May 2015): 60-79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15420353.2014.1001505>.

labor to function. That the labor of others became the property of the landowners obscures the myriad contributions made by different groups and different individuals who simply, because they lack the rights and powers of property owners, did not have access to the channels that distribute and accumulate recorded knowledge. That reality is reflected in the complete absence of their depiction in Forde's map, a contrast from Ligon's depiction of dominating the indigenous peoples. In Forde's map, the island is completely owned and open for business.

The Caribbean's place in the map trade among the competing colonial powers further demonstrated the region's symbolic role as a display of colonial intellectual property in the early Anglophone colonial imaginary. England's desire for information on Barbados included their interest in protecting their colony from other European powers seeking colonies in the New World. One of the ways England showcased their colonial majesty was to cease their dependence on Dutch maps. England wanted to gain more information about the New World than the French, their chief rival in this period of conquest.<sup>79</sup> Patricia Mohammed describes the map trade as a way to understand the early colonial period in the Caribbean. She uses the term "war of the maps" to provide some perspective on how highly prized these maps were and as a means of describing the war

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<sup>79</sup> For more on how the maps in the *Blathwayt Atlas* were made and used, see also Jeanette D. Black "Mapping the English Colonies in North America: The Beginnings," in *The Compleat Plattmaker: Essays on Chart, Map, and Globe Making in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Norman J.W. Thrower (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). For more on how maps underscore the political and economic relationship between Barbados and England, see also, Richard S. Dunn, "The Barbados Census of 1680: Profile of the Richest Colony in English America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (January 1969): 3-30. For more on the trade of colonial maps in England, see also Sarah Tyacke, *London Map-Sellers, 1660-1720: a Collection of Advertisements for Maps Placed in the London Gazette, 1668-1719, with Biographical Notes on the Map-Sellers* (Hertfordshire: Maud & Irvine Limited, 1978).



of imaginaries represented by the maps.<sup>80</sup> Information about these colonies and how to get to the colonies were integral to owning and controlling an empire. Mohammed recounts the British desire to no longer depend on manuscript Spanish maps, and to become independent of the Dutch map trade.<sup>81</sup> During this period the British were making a concerted effort to create their own maps as they started to expand their colonial territory. Jeanette Black also speaks of the necessity for maps, though she focuses on the everyday utility of maps in demarcating who owns what plantation.<sup>82</sup> The British desire to spread to the New World challenged the Spanish and made them rivals with the French. Furthermore, with the coming of the Royal African Company, Britain's presence in the New World competed with the Portuguese monopoly on the African slave trade. The creation of a narrative of greatness is built on harnessing knowledge of the New World and showcasing that knowledge as a display of the might of one colonial power over another.

In addition to being a tool of colonial administration, and the product of the acquisition of knowledge generated from inter-imperial rivalries, maps trace how European colonial identity was tied to written documentation and how the Caribbean came to be defined in discursive and symbolic terms by European colonial contact and colonial expansion. The production of the maps themselves served as a display of a

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<sup>80</sup> Mohammed, *Imaging*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> Mohammed, *Imaging*, 67. For more on the Danish colonial presence in the Caribbean, see also, Lars Jensen, "Postcolonial Denmark: Beyond the Rot of Colonialism?" *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 2015): 440–452, doi:10.1080/13688790.2015.1191989. Jensen looks at the Danish Virgin Islands to trace why this region is a popular tourist destination for contemporary Dutch travelers. Jensen pays particular interest to how the Dutch presence in the Caribbean resembles that of the French colonial model and less that of other Nordic (historic) colonial powers.

<sup>82</sup> Black, "Mapping the English Colonies," 104.

colonial power's ability to observe, document, and protect themselves. Mohammed cautions that the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean also had conceptions of ownership: "How aboriginal populations of the Region named the islands and territories indicated messages of ownership or what the land could yield to a community of peoples. For instance Xaymaca, the Taino name for Jamaica, meant 'land of wood and water' and Hayti meant 'mountainous land.'"<sup>83</sup> Her understanding of property highlights that naming proved a type of ownership. Because the land *was* owned, the land can be *stolen*. Her inclusive model of ownership establishes the theft of the native peoples' land and does not erase the violence they experienced. This violence extended to the land itself, given the decimation of local flora in order to build plantations.

Forde's map of Barbados presents an island inhabited by Europeans with no native people, a fact complicated when compared with Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, where interaction with natives was both frequent and necessary. Ligon's text is the product of his two year stay in Barbados in the seventeenth century. However, this map implies a space safe for settlers (and even safer for investors) precisely because of the lack of a Native presence. This map displays a developed colonial infrastructure already in place to properly maintain a plantation. Without the accumulation or display of property the journey to the Caribbean would not have been successful. In both Ligon's text and in the atlas, sugar mills feature prominently because Barbados at the time was one of the richest colonies. The maps therefore serve as a means of advertising the island to settlers. His text then becomes a tool for reinforcing power dynamics. This map serves to show that Barbados was already equipped to

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<sup>83</sup> Mohammed, *Imaging*, 57.

facilitate other prospective planters. Forde's map is published almost two decades after Ligon's map. Forde does not have the same impetus to assure planters that the indigenous and the enslaved are under the colonists' control. Instead, the indigenous and the enslaved are erased and the land is presented as fully part of the colonial imaginary and as a product of colonial intellectual property.

The maps of Barbados in both Ligon's text and the atlas display a landscape completely utilized for the production of sugar, which highlights the environmental impact of the plantation economy. Sugar plantations are a form of monoculture that result in land susceptible to the elements. This destruction is only part of the environmental impact faced by the local and the localized. The needs and desires of the locals do not matter when the land is employed for colonial use. These maps indicate a desire on the part of the colonists to make the islands function as factories and so local plants, animals, and people are destroyed in that quest to create a *purely* functional landscape. Whereas Ligon's map presents a version of the land that includes the local flora and fauna, Forde depicts a purely functional space. From Forde's map one sees the extent to which the plantations cover most of the land. The land has been rendered a factory where only the colonists are named and only the colonial view of the land matters. Because the focus for the colonists' use, the colonized exist in spaces that are either ill-equipped or unequipped to meet their needs, particularly as the number of localized laborers grow and the local flora and fauna diminish. Even when the local is present (in the cartouches on maps, or as symbols of local vegetation, or as natives being fought by colonists) they are always seen as performing for the colonists to indicate the economic dominance of the colonist. Forde

has flattened the local landscape into a series of plantations and only what matters to the proper, mechanical and physical functioning of those plantations.

Richard Forde's map demonstrates a colonial understanding of the land focused on exchange with foreigners and not on internal local innovation. It belies a belief of the land needing to constantly serve the empire and the needs and desires of the colonial power over the needs and desires of the local. Forde's map depicts the Barbados as fully functional, devoid of local flora and fauna that no longer matter to colonial mass extraction. Almost twenty years after Ligon's map, the land is transformed into the intellectual property of the colonizer, showcasing their power and their worldview where the land now serves the colonizer fully. Only the plantations matter in Forde's map as the land is understood to be fully conquered and catering to the needs to the colonists.

## **Conclusion**

The hierarchy of labor that exists in the Caribbean is rooted in the colonial plantation system. This hierarchy places physical, unnamed labor at the bottom and intellectual named labor at the top. Physical labor is racialized and classed. This labor is not tied to property ownership and those who perform it do not get credit for intellectual labor. Early colonial texts, such as Ligon's narrative of discovery and Blathwayt's atlas, demonstrate both narratively and visually how the colonists co-opted the skills and knowledge of the laborers to gain both economically and narratively from the labor done by (enslaved) people of color. The racialized labor hierarchy of the colonial period had a lasting impact on who has access to clean, green, safe spaces on the islands even today, as these spaces are still generally kept for the personal use of those who own property or

have a means of owning property. It also had a symbolic effect on who establishes the meaning of place for the Anglophone Caribbean. Richard Ligon presents himself as a knowledge bearer. He usurps the knowledge of indigenous women. Meanwhile, Richard Forde erases them entirely from his map in an era when the island becomes fully symbolized as the functional, intellectual property of the colonizer. Twenty years later, Forde published a map that shows how the island has been turned into a fully functional colonial space. Forde does not spare any space on local flora and fauna, and only depicts the cash crops meant for colonial wealth acquisition. The land, in these early colonial texts, became colonial property and the maps themselves are evidence of colonial intellectual property that erases the local and local contribution.

The legacy of presenting the colonists as knowledge bearers effectively rests on erasing the knowledge of people of color. This erasure creates a sense of shame among the descendants of people of color in the Caribbean who do not see their contributions nor experiences (that grant them dignity) recorded in these narratives of discovery. Contemporary Caribbean writers like Dionne Brand seek to rectify this shame and fill the gaps of the narratives of discovery with narratives of recovery. These contemporary writers redefine the local and resymbolize the meaning of place as part of the douglarized populations of the Caribbean. Writers from the Afro- and Indo- Caribbean reimagine their relationship to European and Indigenous past in ways that highlight the dignity of the local and does not erase their contribution nor their pleasures. The next chapter looks at how Dionne Brand fills the gaps in narratives of discovery through her narrative of recovery where the local experience is prioritized.

## Chapter Two

**Narratives of Recovery in Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return***

Colonial narratives of discovery set the terms for an exploitative way of thinking about land and labor in the Caribbean. Early colonial texts and their maps, such as Ligon's and Forde's paradigmatic characterizations of the anglophone island of Barbados during the initial colonial period, construct local indigenous labor, needs, and values as foreign to the colonial power and therefore secondary to the needs, wants and intellectual goals of colonial representatives. Colonial desires and needs therefore guided ideas of beauty and taste; they had an effect on how property was obtained, used, and symbolically understood and represented. The authoritative power of colonial narratives of discovery in the contemporary Caribbean are distorted by what Homi K. Bhabha calls *Entstellung*, which he defines as "a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition—the dazzling light of literature sheds only areas of darkness."<sup>1</sup> Narratives of discovery are articulations of cultural difference from what is local.<sup>2</sup> This cultural difference is installed through narratives of discovery by men like Richard Ligon, as a signifier of authority.

Subsequently, we find in contemporary Caribbean writing an effort to counter this discourse from the colonial past, specifically in the effort to reimagine the local. In this chapter I define this impulse to reimagine as taking shape in narratives of *recovery*, an approach exemplified by Dionne Brand in both her nonfiction prose works and in her

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<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (October 1985):147, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448325>.

<sup>2</sup> Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 155-156.

fiction. In the essay collection *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Brand is preoccupied with creating and demonstrating a cognitive framework for rethinking the local in Caribbean space. She does this by confronting the legacies of exploitation and exclusionary land use practices that continue in the contemporary Caribbean, and in the narratives about Caribbean space. Originally from a small, coastal town in Trinidad, Brand emigrated to Canada in 1970, just eight years after Trinidad become independent and two years before it became a republic. She is an openly queer writer from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.<sup>3</sup> While primarily a poet, she also writes fiction and nonfiction.

Throughout her work, Dionne Brand presents a way out of this disempowering colonial vision by focusing on the worldviews of formerly enslaved people and the members of the diasporas created through the colonists' use of exploited labor. Two works are of interest in this regard—*A Map to the Door of No Return*, because of its direct wrestling with “the room of history,” and *In Another Place, Not Here*, for its clear imagining of Caribbean space for queer women of color, a population doubly marginalized in the contemporary Caribbean via the continuation of colonial-derived hierarchies (and in the case of being queer, colonial law). Brand's narrative of recovery in *A Map to the Door of No Return* extends dignity to the local by portraying humor, desire, and curiosity as ordinary occurrences amongst locals rather than displays of extraordinary

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<sup>3</sup> For other, openly queer authors in the Caribbean, see also, Rita Indiana, *Tentacle*, trans. Achy Obejas (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2015); see also Nicole Dennis-Benn, *Patsy* (New York: Liverlight, 2017).

ability in singular individuals. This narrative of recovery situates the local as the primary audience and does not treat what is local as strange.

Brand's narrative of recovery disrupts the authority of the narrative of discovery by resisting the erasure of the subjectivity of the people of color, and by normalizing brilliance among locals. Narratives of recovery privilege local sensibilities, local bodies and local needs as a form of resistance to the vestiges of colonialism present in the contemporary Caribbean. Narratives of recovery restore a sense of pride and dignity in local Caribbean space as it is experienced by the people of color who descended from exploited laborers. In doing so, Brand's work effectively re-maps Caribbean space, reclaiming it from long-held assertions that it belongs as colonial intellectual property.

Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging* is a collection of essays published in 2001. Brand's text traces her experiences traveling the world as a black woman from the Caribbean. She uses memoir, family lore, archival research, and travel narrative to frame her experiences with other minorities, oppressed peoples, specters of power and the politics of archival buildings. Part autobiography, part work of criticism, part reference text, the work has become a seminal text in Canadian literature.<sup>4</sup> Her text focuses on the movements imposed upon exploited people and the narratives created by the dissemination and creation of colonial maps, as well as the

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<sup>4</sup> For more on autobiography in the Caribbean, see also, Michael J. Dash, "'Larrier, Renée, Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean, and Hess, Deborah, La poétique du renversement chez Maryse Condé, Massa Maka Diabate and Edouard Glissant," *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 2 (2008):170–73, [www.jstor.org/stable/20109602](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20109602). Dash focuses on the francophone Caribbean and contends that autobiography is a site of resistance against the colonial project because it makes personal memory textual. Autobiography, for him, is a way to witness and confront the violence of colonialism.



acquisition of colonies. *A Map to the Door of No Return* contains descriptions of movement from one country to another, the legacy of historical trauma, and the ways in which groups of people are denied dignity (and their ways of resisting that denial).

*A Map to the Door of No Return* explores themes of belonging, home, trauma, and diaspora and reexamines this colonial past. It confronts the ways in which European narratives of discovery were shaped by a labor hierarchy that devalued manual labor and the descendants of manual laborers in the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> Christoph Irmscher discusses how narratives of discovery position the narrator as central to the understanding of a space that is implied to be new and unknown.<sup>6</sup> The narrator, as seen with Richard Ligon, generally represents a nation, conquers the new land and, in doing so, shows others from the narrator's nation how to do the same.<sup>7</sup> Narratives of discovery in the early colonial period emphasized adventure and the profitability of the land.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey names these narratives of discovery *robinsonades* and underscores the role of they played in training British boys to desire to serve the empire.<sup>9</sup> Brand speaks to this deliberate

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<sup>5</sup> In another contemporary work, Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), Kincaid wrestles with feelings of inferiority regarding the Caribbean landscape because her local home was not treated with the same regard as foreign lands in the work she read in the schools she attended on the island.

<sup>6</sup> Christoph Irmscher, "Crossblood Columbus: Gerald Vizenor's Narrative 'Discoveries,'" *Amerikastudien* 40, no.1 (January 1995): 84.

<sup>7</sup> For more on how narratives of discovery teach readers to conquer the wild, see also Bruce Greenfield, *Narrating Discovery: The Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790-1855* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> For other examples of narratives of discovery, see also, Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Johann D. Wyss, *Swiss Family Robinson* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Island Writing, Creole Cultures," in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 806. DeLoughrey also speaks to how popular these narratives were by tracing how many printings of these tales were produced to meet commercial demand.

attempt at cultivating colonial agents and underscores that her narrative of recovery need not apply present day standards on historical events. She holds that, “People use these arguments as reasons for not doing what is right or just. It never occurs to them that they live on the cumulative hurt of others. They want to start the clock of social justice only when they arrived. But one is born into history, one isn’t born into a void.”<sup>10</sup> By mentioning the “cumulative hurt of others,” Brand emphasizes that she does not have the option to dismiss historical hurt because of present *individual* desires to treat history as a vacuum. Brand cannot escape the legacy of violence nor the legacy of erasure and finds that this dismissal furthers the aims of colonialism.

In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand creates a space for the Caribbean islands to exist without being tied to narratives from other larger (and older) places. She acknowledges and values the labor being done by locals in their home space. The locals she focuses on are primarily those in Trinidad, and in Grenada (during the Grenadian Revolution).<sup>11</sup> She attends to the labor performed by the locals and the assumption of who does what type of labor, thereby recalling the relationship between history and those occupying the space. For her, understanding this type of labor, be it physical labor, artistic, or scholarly, means that she focuses on local knowledge (and the locals’ appreciation of knowledge). She recovers the labor and the land by dignifying both as central to her narrative of recovery. By focusing on the local, she avoids concerns about

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<sup>10</sup> Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage, 2001), 82.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the Grenadian Revolution in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, see also, Greg A. Mullins, “Dionne Brand’s Poetics of Recognition: Reframing Sexual Rights,” *Callaloo* 30 no. 4 (2007): 1100-1109, doi:10.1353/cal.2008.0045. Mullins argues that Verlia and Elizete’s disillusionment in their romantic relationship mirrors the disillusionment with the social justice aims of the revolutionaries in Grenada.

whether the manner of land usage will generate income through export and relevance to foreign markets and foreign audiences. She is not engaged in an isolationist project because this recovery is already imbued with diasporic bodies and the importation of plants and animals. Rather this is a project meant to recover methods of storytelling and experience in order to reinvent traditions and create a more sustainable and dignified future for those on the island.

Brand traces this historical loss and the collective recognition of that loss through *The Door of No Return*, a physical place in Ghana. It is the place enslaved people passed through just before they went on slave ships, never to return to their native land. Brand enlists this door as a metaphoric space in order to include those who may not have passed through those particular doors, but who are historically linked to this journey of no return. It offers her a way to discuss shared, inherited trauma. She writes, “My grandfather, who knew everything, had forgotten, as if it was not worth remembering, the name of our tribe in that deeply unknown place before the trade. Derek Walcott wrote, ‘the sea history.’ I knew that before I knew it was history I was looking at.”<sup>12</sup> This anxiety about forgetting while constantly seeing the ocean, a reminder of that loss, fuels Brand’s project. Brand does not have the option of asking her grandfather for family genealogy, yet even the landscape reminds her of her history (though it provides no personal specifics). Brand wrestles with the impositions of what it means to belong in a space, whether that space is driven explorations of the islands, conferences, or other countries tied to legacies of

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<sup>12</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 12. For more on how memory affects Brand’s work, particularly her fiction, see also, Johanna X. K. Garvey, “‘The Place She Miss’: Exile, Memory, and Resistance in Dionne Brand’s Fiction,” *Callaloo* 26, no. 2 (2003): 486-503, doi:10.1353/cal.2003.0043. Garvey attends to the insistence of memory as a way to resist colonialism and links this insistence to the constant presence of the ocean.

colonialism and nationalism. She seeks to fill in the gaps her grandfather cannot remember because she is driven by the constant reminder of that loss, and the implication (as evidenced by her identification with Derek Walcott's words) that other islanders feel as she does.

Brand contends with these narratives that she had to learn as a child growing up on the island of Trinidad. This means challenging how she is trained to see the island and diasporic bodies. She learned that the former colonists were discoverers and associates them with invention, narration and observation because of the legacy of this training. By emulating travel narratives, Brand engages in an act of recovery by returning, occupying, and observing spaces and places denied to her ancestors and the ancestors of other diasporic groups. She does not gloss over the violence done to the local as is done in work that seeks to inscribe Caribbean space as colonial intellectual property. She seeks ways to overcome that violence, making use of narration that treats different forms of labor with dignity and unlearns the belief that certain skills are inherent to certain bodies. In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand underscores how the Anglophone Caribbean descendants of those whose labor was extracted without reward, use recovery as a mode of resistance to narratives that privilege the role of discovery. Brand's work dignifies those who were historically not compensated properly for their labor. She dismantles the hierarchy of labor through the use of recovery and adventure as elements of a mode of storytelling prioritizing the experience of diasporic peoples whose racialized bodies were exploited on the plantations, effectively reclaiming colonized space and reframing colonial intellectual property as local knowledge.

## The Recovery Project and Storytelling as a Method of Archiving

Literary criticism on *A Map to the Door of No Return* tends to focus on the multi-generic form of her text, the role of trauma and the ability to create communities as an act of resilience and resistance. Sharlene Cranston-Reimer follows this in her focus on the role of trauma and Brand's use of autobiography.<sup>13</sup> Cranston-Reimer is particularly drawn to how, "The text values communities based on shared experience, as opposed to shared identity categories."<sup>14</sup> Cranston-Reimer points out Brand's frustration with the continued desire for "recognition from the colonial center."<sup>15</sup> Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley embraces community building through what she calls "erotic resistance" in the queer relationships that occur in Brand's text, specifically relationships that occur on ships and as the result of travel.<sup>16</sup> Tinsley subverts dominant narratives of nationalism by focusing on the oceanic. L. Camille van der Marel is another critic who focuses on the role of trauma in Brand's text. She looks at the role of melancholy and argues that "Brand uses melancholic agency to establish an alternative and self-identify community based on

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<sup>13</sup> Sharlene Cranston-Reimer, "It Is Life You Must Write About': Fixity and Refraction in Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*," *Canadian Literature* no. 228-229 (Spring/Summer 2016), 93-109, <https://doi.org/10.14288/cl.v0i228-9.187594>.

<sup>14</sup> Cranston-Reimer, "Fixity and Refraction," 101. For more on trauma in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, see also, Julia Grandison, "Bridging the Past and the Future: Rethinking the Temporal Assumptions of Trauma Theory in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2010): 764-782, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/390249>. Grandison looks at how Brand is able to pause during traumatic moments—or when confronting historical traumas—and creates a type of agency for diasporic peoples by showing that the one experiencing trauma is not fixed in time, but rather, is looking at possible futures.

<sup>15</sup> Cranston-Reimer, "Fixity," 104.

<sup>16</sup> Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2 (January 2008): 198, <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/241316>.

shared experiences of dispossession.”<sup>17</sup> Van Der Marel is also interested in Brand’s ability to critique dispossession while remaining aware of the role land ownership plays in nation-building. Simona Bertacco focuses on Brand’s use of “unconventional textualities” to represent trauma.<sup>18</sup> She argues that “its traumatic form of repression and repetitive reappearance, marks it as a complex form of representation of the past that can only be found outside official historiography.”<sup>19</sup> As with most of the scholarship on Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return*, community forged through shared trauma and shared dispossession is central to Bertacco’s work.<sup>20</sup>

While these critics provide fruitful interrogations, they do not attend to Brand’s confrontation of the sense of adventure and the desire to create a narrative of recovery. While trauma is central to *A Map to the Door of No Return* as is wrestling with the legacy of both economic and cultural dispossession, Brand’s text also traces her movement away from privileging the colonial recognition that Sharlene Cranston-Reimer focuses on, and instead emphasizes recognition from members of the diaspora. Brand’s text disrupts the colonial narratives of discovery by exploring the degree to which Caribbean postcolonial fiction is marred by colonial epistemologies of land and the desire for recognition from (former and neo) colonial powers. *A Map to the Door of No Return*, in contrast, shows

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<sup>17</sup> L. Camille van der Marel, “Diaspora, Loss, and Melancholic Agency: Mapping the Fields between Susanna Moodie and Dionne Brand,” in *Inhabiting Memory in Canadian Literature*, ed. Benjamin Authers, Maïté Snauwaert, and Daniel Laforest (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2017), 99.

<sup>18</sup> Simona Bertacco, “Between Virtuosity and Despair: Formal Experimentation in Diaspora Tales,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50, no.6 (December 2014): 650, doi.10.1080/17449855.2014.885911.

<sup>19</sup> Bertacco, “Between Virtuosity and Despair,” 651.

<sup>20</sup> See also, Erica L. Johnson, “Unforgetting Trauma: Dionne Brand’s Haunted Histories,” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (May 2004), 4-20, <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.9>.

how contemporary fiction writers reach back and evoke a more localized relationship to land in representations of Caribbean place and space.<sup>21</sup> Brand challenges the view of the Caribbean as colonial and colonized property, both literally and figuratively. She wrestles with the colonial belief that the Caribbean is subservient to and dependent on the colonial power economically and in understanding how the land and its use ought to be represented in literature.

Brand grapples too with what it means to consume foreign-produced cultural (and historical) information about her home island as a diasporic person. This reflects a refusal to accept a Caribbean filtered through the lens of being colonial intellectual property. She comments while listening for news about her island on BBC Radio, “You have read of islands, such as in the *Tempest* described as uninhabited except for monsters and spirits, as in *Treasure Island* described as uninhabited except for monsters and spirits; you have read of pirates and buccaneers on islands; you have read of people banished to islands, prisoners.”<sup>22</sup> There is a deliberate repetition of both *Treasure Island* and the *Tempest* as presenting the islands as places “uninhabited except for monsters and spirits.” These texts are considered canonical. Their authors, Robert Louis Stevenson and William Shakespeare respectively, are both white Englishmen who hail from the colonial period. Consequently, it is difficult for Brand to escape the image of herself as portrayed by these

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<sup>21</sup> Dionne Brand, as a Canadian-Caribbean author, is also engaged with discussions about Canadian land. Canada is still a constitutional monarchy. Canada has a deeply problematic history with First Nations people and with immigration. For more on Dionne Brand’s work on reterritorialization in Canadian space, see also, Maia Joseph, “Wondering into Country: Dionne Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return*,” *Canadian Literature*, no. 193 (Summer 2007): 75–92, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/218808261/>.

<sup>22</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 13.

outsiders whose narratives shaped the popular understanding of the Caribbean. She goes on to write, “You are living on an island, banished or uninhabited, or so it seems through the voice of the BBC. You are therefore already mythic.”<sup>23</sup> Brand is waiting to see her island made real through recognition of its existence by the British, via the official imprimatur of the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC).<sup>24</sup> By hearing the island mentioned, though, she seems to hunger for the BBC to recognize her as part of their audience as this is news that pertains to her, a local islander. Listening for news about herself—news that signals recognition of her island home—makes her feel real, but it is a false reality as this representation is filtered and dislocated from her home space.

In her early desire for recognition from the colonial power of her island’s existence, Brand shows how narratives of discovery of the Caribbean continue to influence the way islanders see their historical position and cultural influence. Brand focuses primarily on the Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean perspectives and shifts from privileging the colonists’ perspective. Contemplating V.S. Naipaul’s journey in India,

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<sup>23</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 13. The news she ends up hearing is that V.S. Naipaul has won the Booker Prize (14). Naipaul won the 1971 Man Booker Prize for his novel *In a Free State*, a novel that encompasses themes of same-sex attraction among people of color, colonialism, migration, and class hierarchies. In this moment, Brand witnesses the BBC recognizing a local islander on the occasion of receiving a prize from the colonial powers, a prize only open to members of the Commonwealth.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the role of the BBC in creating a canon of Anglophone Caribbean literature, see also, Glyne A. Griffith, *The BBC and the Development of Anglophone Caribbean Literature, 1943-1958*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); see also, Glyne A. Griffith, “The BBC’s Caribbean Voices and Its ‘Critics’ Circle’: Radio Criticism and the Development of Anglophone Caribbean Literature,” in *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 129-144. Griffith argues that the tastes of the announcers for the BBC series *New Caribbean Voices* profoundly shaped the Anglophone Caribbean literary canon in terms of privileging social realism and the use of “local color,” a demand placed on the submissions by Henry Swanzy, an Irish man who ran the series.



Aime Cesaire's writing, and her own journeys to places in Europe, Africa, and elsewhere, Brand voices the overwhelming sense of loss and driving desire to fill that void. She writes, "It [the old country, be it India or Africa] exists only in memory, which is sometimes untrustworthy; it exists in the stories of his family passed down, each image dependent on the storyteller's gifts and skills."<sup>25</sup> Although the stories might be untrustworthy, the act of storytelling belies a desire in both the storyteller and the listener to fill in the gaps of their history on the island.<sup>26</sup> She uses a sense of discovery as a narrative device. Her sense of discovery is fueled by a desire for recovery, and for confronting the signs of ownership remaining from the colonial period. She interrogates the hold a certain kind of storytelling has on her and on her desire to belong in a room constructed to exclude her. For Brand, narratives of recovery highlight this violence and dignify the labor done by people of color.

This history of recorded and acknowledged labor is the foundation for what Dione Brand calls the "room with history."<sup>27</sup> The room with history represents the spaces of power that Brand feels barred from because she, as a diasporic person descended from

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<sup>25</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> For more on how Brand's oral storytelling informs her narrative style and the link between this style and community building among those most affected by the subject matter of Caribbean-based literature, see also, Lynette Hunter, "After Modernism, Alternative Voices in the Writings of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris and Marlene Philip (Black Writers in Canada)," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (December 1992): 256–281, <https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.62.2.256>. Hunter argues that Brand uses orality to show distrust with the way that people of color are represented in canonical written texts. See also, Maria Caridad Casas, "Orality and the Body in the Poetry of Lillian Allen and Dionne Brand: Towards an Embodied Social Semiotics," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 33, no. 2 (April 2002): 7–32. Casas argues that Brand uses orality in her written work in order to create a cultural grammar that allows her to present her black female body as a subject and not as an oppressed object.

<sup>27</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 25.

manual laborers, is denied access to (or has restricted access to) as a consequence unfair education systems and land-owning practices. She contextualizes the importance of this room by writing, “Where one stands in a society seems always related to this historical experience. Where one can be observed is related to that history.”<sup>28</sup> For her as a member of the black diaspora, the room is a record of shared trauma and of systemic erasure. The shared quality of the experience among the members of the black diaspora makes it also a room of recognition among those who best understand this experience. This room is directly linked to the hierarchy of labor, in that the privilege given to recorded achievements generally negates the achievements of those who performed unnamed labor.

Brand teaches herself to see her home island as a dignified site and to portray this dignity through storytelling. She learns to see that her home is the site for the production of discourse, not just the raw material to be refined elsewhere. She confronts signs of ownership including maps, descriptions of places, visual representations of people and landmarks. All of these signs, coupled with older colonial narratives of discovery, result in what she calls having a seat in “the room with history.”<sup>29</sup> This is a metaphoric space occupied both by diasporic bodies and the ones who forced their movement and removal. She speaks of a constant awareness of the “Door of No Return,” and wishes to discover (or uncover) how and why this door exists for her and other Black diasporic people. She refers to her diasporic subject position throughout the text in her description of her conversations with her grandfather trying to figure out if she might be Ashanti, or Ibo,

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<sup>28</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 25.

and resulting in his confession that he does not know.<sup>30</sup> She later looks at V.S. Naipaul's journey in India to discuss a shared difficulty with specificity of origin faced by members of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora.<sup>31</sup> She writes, "No one in India remembers him or the experience he represents. Yet he carries within him this particularly accursed ancestral memory and this crushing dislocation of the self which the landscape [of India] does not solve."<sup>32</sup> She has in common with Naipaul a type of collective shame and desire to fill in the gaps of her historical narrative. Neither of them is fully claimed by their respective ancestral home countries. In sharing this experience with a member of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, Brand makes her narrative of recovery perform a type of cultural douglarization to reflect this experience she and Naipaul both share. Here, she is speaking to their collective pain and the collective creative and archival work both have to perform as they seek to fill in the gaps in spaces that do not recognize their history.

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<sup>30</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 59-60. By referring to V.S. Naipaul's experiences in India, Brand engages with the returning trope in diasporic fiction. She also is using an Indo-Trinidadian's work to be inclusive of the different diasporas in the Caribbean.

<sup>32</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61. For more on memory in Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*, see also, Erica L. Johnson, "Building the Neo-Archive: Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 12, no. 1 (January 014): 149-171, <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.12.1.149>. Johnson argues that Brand's use of memory (and Brand's wrestling with archive building) builds a type of postcolonial aesthetic where Brand's memory is supplemented by archival material that functions as a type of postmemory. For more on memory and traumatic collective experience, see also, Michael Laramée, "Maps of Memory and the Sea in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*," *Anthurium: Caribbean Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (December 2008): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.121>. Laramée argues that the past exists as traumatic phantoms for Brand and that she transcends this trauma through the creation of symbolic spaces like the Door of No Return.

Brand speaks of the burden placed on diasporic artists to represent their communities and their ancestors, because these bodies are erased from or serve as background to the narratives of discovery passed down by colonists, many of whom were men.<sup>33</sup> Brand confronts the legacy of the learned shame she inherits through these narratives of discovery. Brand displays this in an encounter with an inspector in a British airport. She writes, “Close to a thousand years of foraging and conquest are preterite in this clerk’s use of the familiar. He even smiles a genuine kind of smile not the quick smirk of my compatriots. He at least tries to disarm me and not overpower me. That is the test of true power. That is why I know how to dance the maypole[.]”<sup>34</sup> The clerk is charming to her and it makes her wish to be pleasing, even while she recognizes the power dynamics in the situation. His smile, though, seems like a dismissal of the violence done to her ancestors who labored on the land, and this is part of her learned experience that bleeds into the discomfort she feels in in this space that is informed by the room of history. This legacy affects how the contemporary locals view their place in the room of history when their land and bodies have been reified by the colonial gaze. Brand is open to the possibility of not needing to be tied to any past conceptions of land. She relates to the land in a new way partially out of necessity because of the myriad blendings that

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<sup>33</sup> For more on white women and their role in the colonial project, see also, Jane Haggis, “White Women and colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History,” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory a Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2013), 161–189. Haggis argues that most scholars have taken the position that white women helped perpetuate colonialism and that authors like Rudyard Kipling helped bolster this stereotype. She argues that the realities of the historical period have to be recalled and that many of the white women in colonial settings were taught to be dutiful wives and mothers and therefore were victims of patriarchy. She argues for a more pluralistic view of colonialism that accounts for the different experience of white women colonists.

<sup>34</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 77.

occurred on the island. This new relationship acknowledges the violence done to the local and allows for a new way of interacting and understanding the land to take place. Labor is integral to understanding the legacy of representation of the land, and methods of storytelling play a role in dignifying and rewarding the local narrators of these tales. In other words, the form discovery takes in Brand's text is in recovering lost people and lost modes of interacting with the landscape from the diasporic past, which includes the Afro, Indian, and Middle Eastern subjects of the contemporary Caribbean.

Brand presents a type of selfhood that is both collective and personal, but it is a sense of the personal that is not necessarily tied to the desire for and the establishment of property in the same way as the colonist's sense of the personal. For her, the Caribbean is her home. For Brand, the difference between the two conceptions of the personal rests on her inheritance of how colonial models of property and narratives of discovery suppress her origins. Brand's recoveries, then, are organized around the elisions created by the narratives of colonial discovery. Her work establishes a type of selfhood no longer in service to any of the old colonial powers as she seeks to understand the land as no longer valued only as property. She writes of the Door of No Return in Ghana, "Our ancestors were bewildered because they had a sense of origins—some country, some village, some family where they belonged and from which they were rent. We, on the other hand, have no such immediate sense of belonging, only of drift."<sup>35</sup> She reframes the land to free herself and those living on it from the need to satisfy anyone else's construction of the region. However, she has to confront what was lost, and how jarring that loss was to her

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<sup>35</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 118.

ancestors. Also, she is able to see that, as a contemporary local, she does not experience the same type of loss they felt.

Her narrative renders the land more knowable than narratives of discovery do, because she views the land as home and therefore has no need to render the land as colonial intellectual property. Brand presents the local—the primary site and vessel that experiences the violence of colonialism—as the main source for knowledge about the island. By acknowledging the local as the recorders and primary narrative builders of a type of lived experience, as well as the people’s collective history with colonialism, she can confront the deliberate gaps in colonial narratives of discovery that frame the island as a place to be exploited. In addition, by focusing on collective experience, she creates an inclusive storytelling practice that better represents the contemporary islanders.

### **Clean Spaces: The Legacy of Labor and the Affect of the Local**

Brand seeks to represent how locals navigate the island as a way to rent the space from being seen as colonial intellectual property. Brand’s text imbricates in environmental discrimination discourse as she explores the legacy of the colonists’ access to safe, clean land on the island, land the locals were excluded from. Brand shows how hierarchies are inscribed through land-use in a visit to Jalousie in St. Lucia, an all-inclusive hotel built on a former sugar plantation using local taxpayers’ money.<sup>36</sup> In the

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<sup>36</sup> Jalousie is a contested site in Caribbean tourist discourse. For more on the fraught racial and economic dynamics in building and promoting this site as a tourist destination, see also, Lesley France, “Sustainability and Development in Tourism on the Islands of Barbados, St. Lucia and Dominica,” in *Resource Sustainability and Caribbean Development* ed. Duncan F.M. McGregor, David Barker and Sally Lloyd Evans (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1998), 116-119. France shows that the hotel’s construction was done using a blend of local taxpayers’ money and foreign

scene, Brand walks through the poor area surrounding the resort on her way back to Jalousie. She writes, “The entire hillside cliff leading down to the ocean is covered in feces. The smell is overpowering and follows me as I try to escape it up the hill...I come to the sea again and Yemaya...I thank whoever her sister and brother gods are that it is not me on that hill in a slip and a head tie, but I cannot be so pitiless, I ask Yemaya, why is it that we must live like that?”<sup>37</sup> Brand has the option to leave this hillside place because she is a tourist, and at this point in the narrative, is Canadian. She shows that being from elsewhere and belonging to the professional class, she has access to the clean ocean and to the spaces outside of this ill-provided for place (or anyway ill-provided for locals). However, Brand also recognizes that she could easily be in the same situation as the locals there because she is a member of the Black diaspora. She signals this knowledge through the use of “we” when she asks, “why is it that we must live like that?” making herself part of the people living in squalor. Although she initially feels ashamed of (and therefore distances herself from) the woman who lives on the hill “in a slip and a head tie” she realizes that the shame really needs to be felt by those who perpetuate the living conditions of those in the hillside area. Through her narrative of recovery, she seeks to answer the question, while never shying away from the lived conditions of those on the islands (nor her ability to escape those conditions).

While agriculture and the natural landscape feature in *Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand is explicit that she did not grow up laboring on the land. This colors her view of her relationship to the land and her conception of belonging. She belongs to the

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investment, but that the area is restricted. The construction also made the hillside area more susceptible to erosion.

<sup>37</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 173-174.

middle-class and has both academic and artistic leanings, which at first cause her to romanticize physical labor while at the same time feeling displaced in relation to the history and literature she reads. She links physical labor directly to a right to property, while also (in the beginning) not fully respecting the knowledge it takes to perform physical labor. She locates this lack of respect in the unequal distribution of amenities and links this directly to the legacy of labor practices in the Caribbean. Directly after the short description of her experience in the village outside of Jalousie, Brand writes of a 17<sup>th</sup> century slaving station, saying, “The slaves were held in cells below. There were no amenities. The traders packed these cells to overcapacity. Chained and cramped in filth and excrement, many died from the inhuman conditions.”<sup>38</sup> Brand directly links the current conditions of the economically disenfranchised people living on the island to the conditions of slavery. By including cities in the Caribbean and in other colonized areas, Brand explores the ecological damage done to create these cities, as well as the introduction of a hierarchy of labor that signals that the locals are less than those who live in, or who make it to the city areas, individuals who are themselves coded as better because of the city’s association with the non-local.

While Brand is deeply invested in the local, she is cognizant of how too narrow a focus on the local can result in exclusionary nationalist discourse. Ursula K. Heise critiques emphasis on the local when she argues: “[t]he challenge that deterritorialization poses for the environmental imagination, therefore, is to envision how ecologically based advocacy on behalf of greater socio-environmental justice might be formulated in terms that are premised no longer primarily on ties to local places but on ties to territories and

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<sup>38</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 174.



systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole.”<sup>39</sup> Heise’s concern is based on the Nazi party’s historical investment with blood and soil where the local took on an ugly significance.<sup>40</sup> She offers a way to critique environmentalist discourse that does not consider how concepts of nationalism and racism might be problematically elided. Shona Jackson warns against a form of Caribbean nationalism in which the term Creole can mean *only* Afro-Caribbean thereby excluding the labor done by other diasporic groups while evading the violence and presence of the native peoples.<sup>41</sup> She also uses this term to trouble the complicated relationship between Creole indigeneity and nationalist discourse, where the labor of native peoples gets excluded and the labor of the Afro- and Indo- groups gets co-opted in the service of exclusionary nationalist discourse.

Brand is concerned with how exclusionary practices also determine what skills are still considered useful or not and the implication this has for controlling local tastes

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<sup>39</sup> Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: the Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2008),10. Heise also advocates on behalf of the nonhuman, which is problematic, as that advocacy comes at the expense of people who were once likened to the natural world and treated as specimens themselves as seen in Ligon, and in the work of Hans Sloane. Please see also, Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*. vol. 1 (London: Printed by B.M. for the Author, 1707).

<sup>40</sup> For more on the link between the Nazi party and certain iterations of environmental language, see also, Janet Biehl, and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995). For more on the rise of the link between certain iterations of environmental language and contemporary Neo-Nazi moments, see also, Irina Dumitrescu, “‘Bio-Nazis’ Go Green in Germany,” *Politico Europe*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-bio-nazis-go-green-natural-farming-right-wing-extremism/>.

<sup>41</sup> Jackson uses the term Creole indigeneity to provide a more inclusive look at diasporic communities because this term applies to the Afro and Indo-communities due to their presence as the enslaved and indentured workers. For more on reclaiming the native presence in Caribbean discourse, see also, William F. Keegan and Lisabeth A. Carlson, *Talking Taino Caribbean Natural History from a Native Perspective* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

and aspirations. She describes an uncle of hers who took a kind of serene pleasure in carving heads out of copper on the island. Of this pleasure she writes, “my uncle did not go to ‘mas; he stayed home, sending instead his ferocious copper into the street battling the sun itself.”<sup>42</sup> However, this same uncle moves to Canada and Brand never sees him again or knows if he continues the practice. She comments, “The city drowns out your longings and your fears, replacing them with its own anonymous desire. These three cities in the northern hemisphere took him to the more mundane vulgar acts of acquisition, away from any contemplation of the self into the hurly-burly of a packaged life, property and consumption. And he may have been grateful.”<sup>43</sup> Brand contends with this legacy of needing to leave the island for economic survival in *A Map*, as she learns through her research in (pre)colonial texts that the Caribbean is a place to go to acquire and display wealth in a style that does not consider the needs, wants, and interests of the local. Her uncle finds a kind of meditative pleasure in the act of mask-making (though he did not parade in Carnival).<sup>44</sup> However, this local skill did not make him money on the island, and it was not a skill that would make him money in Canada. She writes about this skill and this uncle to showcase a local artistic form and a local artisan. Her narrative of

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<sup>42</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 124.

<sup>44</sup> For more on mask-making in the poetics of Carnival in Trinidad, see also, Kevin Adonis Browne, *High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2018). Focusing mostly on Ugly Mas, (or Ole’ Mas, or Jouvay), Browne uses the photo-essay form to highlight the production of traditional masquerade characters, the history of Carnival, and the culture of Ole Mas’ Carnival on contemporary Trinidad. For more on the loss of traditional aspects of Carnival (particular to Carnival Tuesday) see also, Frances Henry and Dwaine Plaza, “Women and the De-Africanization of Trinidad Carnival: From the Jamette to Bikini, Beads, and Feathers,” in *Carnival Is Woman: Feminism and Performance in Caribbean Mas*, ed. Frances Henry and Dwaine Plaza (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), 21-42.

recovery places this man in the archive of locals and local skills that she is building and representing.

Brand wrestles with the legacy of coming from a place not intended to foster innovation, and one that does not, in terms of infrastructure for the laboring class, consider her environmental needs. Still, she learned to find pride in the past, but it is a past rooted in Africa—“older” countries and not the “newer” space of her island. Once, when meeting a parking attendant who is also a member of the black diaspora, he informs Brand: “‘Look, I come from one of the oldest cities in the world. The oldest civilization. They build a parking lot and they think that it is a civilization.’ Stunned, I burst out laughing. And he joins me.”<sup>45</sup> She later admits, “I do not come from any old city...Yes, it is at the ironic circumstances of belonging to this civilization of parking lots—I am the citizen of the parking lot.”<sup>46</sup> Brand originally feels close to the parking lot attendant because they both belong to the black diaspora. However, he is from the Old World and she is from the New World. He has a pride in place based on having lived in the Old World. He knows what they have created because he lived there. Brand does not have this experience. Her homeland is meant as a stopgap for those from elsewhere, a place to park while business and innovation is conducted elsewhere. As much as she wrestles with her island home, it is still her only home. Furthermore, her country was decimated to create this “parking lot” (which includes plantations, shoddy housing near plantations, and improper infrastructure). This decimation of nature lessens her ability to feel as if she has a claim on greatness in terms of achievements. Brand emphasizes the violent use of

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<sup>45</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 109-110.

diasporic bodies to do labor on the land and the destruction of the land, in order to reestablish a relationship with the land that is not dependent on the former colonial powers. Brand eventually finds pride in being from a colonized space and interrogates the legacy of ownership, unnamed labor and environmental discrimination.

Along with describing the plantations, Brand discusses cities, drawing attention to the loss of the local in the contemporary Caribbean, as those in the cities distance themselves from agricultural labor because of a sense that such work is shameful. The distinction between the agricultural and the urban is present when Brand describes what it means to live on the island and visit Town. She writes, “One would come home the next day with goods never seen before, with sweets never tasted before, with stories of how long the streets were, how busy, how one outsmarted a town person, how one got lost and found again, how hungry one was and how sick or how happy, how confident and how sophisticated one now was having been to Town. Town was nowhere that I was from.”<sup>47</sup> By focusing on cities, Brand draws attention to the continued hierarchy of labor on the island. She traces this to the shame inherited from the legacy of colonialism.

Even as a local, Town is foreign because it was meant historically to house outsiders, and eventually their descendants. She uses the words “sophisticated,” and “confident” to highlight that Town is a site of the worldly, unlike the less sophisticated outskirts (or agricultural section). Residents of the Town are the people who do not work the land. She mentions that being from the Town is a status symbol on the island, and this is aligned with intelligence, access to a variety of goods, and with busyness. This efficiency is commercial and indicative of having important things to do and places to be.

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<sup>47</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 178.

It is not the tedious work of agricultural labor. It is the work in the Town that is worldly, that is valued. Her look at the cities allows Brand to show how the colonial powers insert themselves, or images of themselves, onto the landscape by fashioning the city section in their likeness and by instilling an idea that this likeness is exclusive. The result is a kind of world apart. It is not a local space.

Brand uses the style of travel narratives to underscore how inaccessible certain parts of the island are, and how that contributes to a type of regionalism despite the small size of the island. She writes, “I arrived in Toronto before going to Town. Port-of-Spain, in my case. I had passed Town on my way to the airport without ever seeing it. Town. The word had summoned an old wonder. Town—one could get lost in it...One would have to stay with Aunt Tina, who lives in Barataria, because Town was far.”<sup>48</sup> Town takes on a type of otherworldly significance because it is meant to be an epicenter of a type of urbanization that locals, particularly those who do manual labor and those whose ancestors were not rewarded for said labor are not fully privy to. It becomes an aspirational space to the locals for the way it signals worldliness, through its alignment with foreignness.

Brand’s work demonstrates that the colonists were unconcerned—in a systemic way, as evidenced by the slapdash building of infrastructure and the strict hierarchy of labor—with the future effects on the land outside of their economic interests. Locals are made to live in ill-situated areas with little to no amenities while foreigners, including those foreigners who are members of a returning diaspora, have access to spaces and conditions that locals do not. When she describes the towns they built on the islands, she

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<sup>48</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 178.

shows that these are places meant to consume products produced elsewhere. Furthermore, it is access to these foreign products that make these towns aspirational spaces. Brand realizes that in order to recoup pride in the local, a restoration of pride in the labor done by people of color needs to happen in tandem. Without the two existing in dialogue, the descendants of laborers will continue to be denied access to clean, green spaces *and* be denied the ability to gain economically from that access due to the history of land and property ownership.

### **Brand and the Recovery of Diasporic Labor**

Brand's narrative of recovery is fueled by a sense of adventure and confronts colonially derived methods of disenfranchisement, learned shame, and the legacy of violence by centering the local. Brand deals with the erasure of choice by calling upon the image of the Door of No Return, which exists as the embodiment of a collective experience.<sup>49</sup> Brand writes, "The Door of No Return—real and metaphoric as some places are, mythic to those of us scattered in the Americas today. To have one's belonging lodged in a metaphor is voluptuous intrigue; to inhabit a trope; to be a kind of fiction. To live in the Black Diaspora is I think to live as a fiction—a creation of empires, and also self-creation."<sup>50</sup> Brand's use of the word "lodged" emphasizes the violence with which this shame in being scattered is foisted on members of the black diaspora. She links the Black diaspora to the colonial enterprise and never shies away from the physical *and* epistemological violence of this type of movement. However, by also highlighting

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<sup>49</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 48, 50, 60.

<sup>50</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 18.

“self-creation,” Brand includes a type of hope in the present that something new can result from this experience that does not discount the real trauma experienced and inherited.

Indeed, the title of Brand’s book harkens to the mission of her project. The Door of No Return is a slave holding prison. Brand states that she has never been to the physical door, writing, “I have not visited the Door of No Return, but by relying on random shards of history and unwritten memoir of descendants of those who passed through it, including me, I am constructing a map of the region, paying attention to faces, to the unknowable, to unintended acts of returning, to impressions of doorways.”<sup>51</sup> The door represents both the trauma and the evidence of that trauma experienced by members of the black diaspora. Brand is describing some of her methodology in recreating this collective experience by treating these stories and feelings as valid forms of evidence given that much has been stolen. In doing so, she disrupts the need for textuality in origin stories and acknowledges what stories get left out when written text alone, treating these accountings as necessary for charting recovery.

Furthermore, by disengaging from a type of origin story tied to discovery, Brand steps away from an economic model of land because she is no longer attempting to gain private property. She does not see property and the quest for property as the sole markers of success (and by extension dignity).<sup>52</sup> Brand writes, “Origins. A city is not a place of origins. It is a place of transigrations and transmogrifications. Cities collect people,

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<sup>51</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 19.

<sup>52</sup> For more on alternative models of success that are not based on economic neocolonial markers, see also, Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

stray and lost and deliberate arrivants. Origins are rehabilitated and rebuilt here.”<sup>53</sup> Brand is following Edouard Glissant’s view of the Caribbean as a site of newness, where the flux of origin stories is itself the origin of the Caribbean creole, not tied to any one particular origin outside of the Caribbean. For Glissant, the newness of the mixtures occurring in the Caribbean is itself an origin of sorts for the conception of the contemporary Caribbean. Glissant bases this potential for newness on what he calls, “relation” and goes on to define relation as: “not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge.”<sup>54</sup> However, whereas Glissant focuses mostly on the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, Brand looks at the Indo, Chinese, and Syrian diasporas in the Caribbean as well.

Brand’s project of recovery wrestles with inherited ideas of who was allowed to see the move to the islands as an adventure, and she uses the troubadour figure as a way to engage in a retelling and a reimagining of what Caribbean space is for contemporary generations (both those living on the island and the diasporic communities).<sup>55</sup> Edouard Glissant describes the role of the troubadour in literature saying, “At first this thought of errantry, bucking the current of nationalist expansion, was disguised ‘within’ very personalized adventures—just as the appearance of Western nations had been preceded by the ventures of empire builders. The errantry of a troubadour or that of Rimbaud is not yet a thorough, thick (opaque) experience of the world, but it is already an arrant,

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<sup>53</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 62.

<sup>54</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that Brand is travelling as a Canadian citizen and therefore does have a powerful passport. For more on the use of adventure as a means of constructing an identity, see also, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 52, 55, 64.



passionate desire to go against a root.”<sup>56</sup> For Brand, making the Door of No Return a metaphoric space (while keeping its physicality in mind) allows her to include many black bodies in this conception of violent movement that ruptures linear origin stories.

Brand is going against the “adventurer” figure as presented in Ligon’s text because she is not involved in a nation-building project. She contends, “You must remember this is one point of the middle passage. People are to be lost here, drowned here; people are to be sold, backs and hearts broken; those cherubs, their sweet lips pursed, blow a rough trade. only an artist could render an angel here.”<sup>57</sup> She shows that the colonists got the chance to be adventurers but that does not make them the only discoverers. Glissant also speaks to the importance of adventure, writing: “Since the beginning of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century the shrinking of unexplored regions on the map of the world has made minds less infatuated with adventure, or less sensitive to its beauty, inclining more toward a concern for the truth of human beings.”<sup>58</sup> While Brand is not “infatuated with adventure,” she uses the sense of adventure to complicate her narrative. For her, adventure recovers spaces that allow her to rethink her position (and that of other diasporic locals) in the Caribbean as occupying and navigating a site of belonging. She writes of her experience in a local museum, which does not receive the funding that the British Museum does, “This small wreckage of broken stones, bones, and carvings strewn in a glass case without classification or dating is what is left of millions of journeys, millions of songs, millions of daily acts, millions of memories that no one remembers.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 200.

<sup>58</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 198.

She is showing that while the descendants of colonists can depend on spaces like museums to tell and preserve their stories, she does not have that privilege. She is also showing that the locals do have a museum, implying that there is a desire to preserve and a desire to tell their stories, though they do not receive the same kind of funding. Her project seeks to make the Caribbean a thing in its own right, and to acknowledge—but not depend on—other places and origins as a home. The feeling of adventure allows her agency in her narration, but she does not wield it at the expense of others as Richard Ligon does.

Brand uses narrative to rethink her relationship to the land and her ideas about what the relationship between land and labor looks like. While she believes that labor ought to be the basis for owning land, she does not quite understand how hard that labor is, nor how fertile the land the laborers will be inheriting is. She realizes that her confusion comes from her belief that her knowledge is more valuable than the knowledge the locals have. Prior to attempting to actually work the land, she did not understand that they knew the land better than she did. She believed that her enthusiasm and academic knowledge afforded her some knowledge about labor, but she does not have any experience performing physical labor. This becomes clear when she and some of her friends went to work on a farm. She writes, “Then the next day, all of us, the internationalists, had boarded a bus and driven out to see farms as if we knew anything about them at all. The poor farmers impressed us with heads of lettuce growing but more with how weak our own bodies were and how childish our plans and our visit.”<sup>60</sup> Once she experiences the difficulty of their labor she sees that their labor and their knowledge

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<sup>60</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 55.

is valuable and that she can learn from them if she sees them as her intellectual equals. This is not to say that their labor is not being exploited, but rather that her belief in her benevolence toward them is also a form of exploitation in that they exist only to be helped and therefore only matter to her if they *can* be helped. Once she loses that mentality (which she quickly does) she understands that they have knowledge she does not have partially due to her not living in the places she idealizes. This is not to romanticize poverty, but she realizes that there are many different home spaces in the island she considers to be her home.

Brand goes against the masculinist presentation of the adventurer in colonist narratives. She privileges collective experience over individual excellence by highlighting and acknowledging the knowledge that all the locals share. By including the experiences and conditions of everyday locals, she resets the frame of thinking of the Caribbean as a place for foreigners to make wealth. She underscores the legacy of that exploitative thinking in the distribution of amenities and access to data and records.

### **The Body and Desire as Collective Experience and Collective Storytelling**

Brand underscores the tensions between collective and individual desires by creating an inclusive home space. Brand is deeply concerned with the relationship between her body and the space it occupies, particularly in regard to the historical and economic processes which created that space. For her, history dictates the way a person views themselves in terms of their position on the island, and in terms of how they fit into narratives of invention and claims to accomplishments. She writes, "Where one can be observed is relative to that history. All human effort seems to emanate from this door.

How do I know this? Only by self-observation, only by looking. Only by feeling. Only by being a part, sitting in the room with history.”<sup>61</sup> Brand cannot escape history, and this history colors her conception of her sense of self, her understanding of home, and her place in the trajectory of progress. In order to shift the dynamics of the room, Brand presents a narrative of recovery that is not tied to the promise of economic success, nor necessarily tied to the acquisition of property by way of exploitative labor practices. Brand confronts the legacy of Ligon’s version of ownership through moments of humor in her text. She shows his version of ownership as temporary, founded on base human motivations rooted in violence, and hampered by an inability to understand the complexity of human desire. For her, desire is not only rooted in the aim of economic success or a need to prove masculinity.

In having a different motivation for desire, namely for recovery, Brand reconfigures her relationship to the land, as she is not seeking to own the land, but to understand her relationship to the conception of home and belonging. The need to be of service to the empire affects the way the local flora and fauna is viewed, and as Brand describes in her text, the legacy of one’s belief of one’s placement (in terms of hierarchy) in “the room of History.”<sup>62</sup> Brand reveals that the ownership model affects the locals’ understanding of their self-worth because they are trained to believe that they only matter if they are relevant to or seen as exceptional by the (former) colonial powers. This creates an idea that the islands remain economically dependent on the colonial powers because of trade and intellectual, academic, or artistic pursuits. Brand’s text describes aspects of the

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<sup>61</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 25.

<sup>62</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 25.

islands that the local people know, thereby privileging local knowledge and recognizing a local audience interested in intellectual, academic and artistic endeavors. She shows what power can be gained from creating communities amongst diasporic peoples by sharing an experience she had in Australia while watching a play about the indigenous people with two friends, one a Maori person, and one an Aboriginal person. She writes, “We laugh in recognition, we laugh like old friends, like people who live in the same country. Later we cry through the play and more when the actors step out of the play and tell the audience their own stolen stories.”<sup>63</sup> All three are linked by a shared understanding of loss, and here, are sharing in a sort of collective story-telling project that centers on the experience of locals (even if these stories are not specifically about Brand’s local space). The use of “stolen” indicates that Brand feels as if a crime has been committed and that this theft is an experience collectively felt by all diasporic peoples whose land was taken and whose bodies were made to perform exploitative labor.

Her emphasis on how “childish” her plans are dovetails with Christopher Iannini’s discussion of Hans Sloane’s use of first person to heighten the tension between “youthful inclinations” and being a “settled adult.”<sup>64</sup> Here, Brand reprimands herself by calling her beliefs “childish.” The use of “childish” is disparaging and underscores with how little she knows about actually performing labor as she seeks to distance herself from that earlier, more sheltered, self. This is a different move than Ligon’s, where youthfulness is a sign of a type of masculinity. Brand’s youthful inclinations are tied to her inheritance of

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<sup>63</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 80.

<sup>64</sup> Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (North Carolina: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 36.

an economic relationship to the land which sees the land purely in terms of property. This is the model she inherits from the likes of Ligon, one that was created by a type of youthful longing that does not include her in its adventures and discoveries. Brand changes her conception of hoarding land by reconsidering whether property is the only way in which land can be viewed. She does this when she actually begins working the land and realizing what skill and strength it takes to tend to and produce from the land. By disengaging from thinking about the land as property, she is able to start to view the land on its own terms and sees the locals' labor as valuable and as a demonstration of skillful knowledge. While she believes they are not compensated for their labor properly, she also previously did not believe that the farmers had anything to teach her. She believed her analytical skills were better than their physical skills and that she was arriving as a savior of sorts to rescue them from their labor and gift them with property. What is childish is not recognizing the knowledge of others who have different experiences. Brand realizes that her childishness comes from believing that her knowledge gained in institutions of higher learning is not only better, but the only kind of knowledge.

Narratives of discovery are passed down through novels, classrooms, and the required classes that Brand took. Not only has the knowledge of the colonized been coopted, but their skill as well. Brand's project of recovery highlights the talents that are subsumed in the inherited narratives of discovery and warns against wasting future talent based on preconceived ideas about who does and who does not have a place in the room of history. She writes, "But the records of what and how are in the living, in our habits, our tastes, our styles—a sweet tooth, a love of starchy foods, a sudden hatred of fields, a

desire for big cities, an insistent need for loud colours, beautiful shoes, excesses of all kinds whether we can afford them or not.”<sup>65</sup> Brand seeks out collective desires and collective traits in an effort to trace that which was lost, yes, but also that which is shared. By repositioning the emphasis on what the local thinks and desires, narratives of recovery resist systems that constantly seek to belittle the islanders in terms of their ability to contribute as well as the contributions they have already made.

Brand uses and refines her desire for belonging by recognizing the agency and intelligence of the locals. Although she initially wants to save the locals because she believes them to be economically (and therefore intellectually) lesser, she realizes that this is a learned—and colonially-derived—conflation. By focusing on signs that indicate shared desire—whether it be in poorly funded local museums or storytelling—she is able to underscore the collective local *recognition* amongst the locals of theft by the colonists. She shows, through focusing on desire that is collectively felt, the ability of the locals to store and pass on knowledge despite deliberate attempts to disenfranchise the local both economically and culturally. In doing so, she shows the endurance of the local to survive through resistance and maintain a home space because of their desire.

## Conclusion

Dionne Brand resists the domination of narratives of discovery by constantly drawing attention to the violence that such narratives try to obfuscate. She confronts the inherited shame in physical labor and underscores the problems with the belief that only property ownership is a mark of desirable success, by considering different forms of

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<sup>65</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 204.

leisure that do not rely on making labor invisible. She seeks out the moments of deliberate erasure as well as the deliberate presentations of Otherness dictated by the colonial imaginary. She even ends her text by drawing attention to the violence and constant reminder of this violence by writing, “A map, then, is only a life of conversations about a forgotten list of irretrievable selves.”<sup>66</sup> This is a much different vision than that of Ligon or Ford, where the Caribbean’s value as an object of knowledge lies in what can be drawn, measured, mapped and named. By constantly drawing on the local’s subjectivity, Brand disrupts the power of the narrative of discovery and reimagines ways of being on the island as the descendent of the people who were made to perform physical labor. Through a narrative of recovery, Brand creates a local space that is knowable to other islanders descended from laborers, both those based in the Caribbean and those in diaspora. This local space is no longer flattened into colonial intellectual property, and inside indicated the lived experience of those who were disenfranchised by colonialism and no longer seek to appease the colonial gaze.

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<sup>66</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 224.



## Chapter Three

**Plenty-plenty Bush: Privacy, Safety, and Garden Space in *Cereus Blooms at Night*  
and *In Another Place, Not Here***

The women protagonists in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Dionne Brand's *In Another Place Not Here* desire escape from the violence they experience and witness.<sup>1</sup> Embedded in this desire for escape are needs for privacy and safety, and the provision for these needs manifests in their use of garden spaces. Actively maintained socio-economic hierarchies use violence to cast these women protagonists as figures of ridicule and scorn. Older, more established members of the novels' island societies condone this violence and the local communities follow suit. Garden spaces in the novels offer privacy and function as sites of escape from violence embedded in the histories of the Indo- (Mootoo's novel) and Afro- (Brand's novel) diasporas.<sup>2</sup> Gardens, as used by the women, provide privacy because they exemplify a use of land not tied to the economic systems rooted in a vexed colonial past.<sup>3</sup> For Mala in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, and Verlia

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the relationship between violence and witnessing, and the complicity of some witnesses in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, see also, Donna McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 41-70. McCormack looks at queer trauma in the postcolonial setting and the role of surveillance in policing the behaviors of those in the contemporary postcolonial world. McCormack argues that witnessing the trauma experienced by queered people can, itself, can become its own trauma and is a tool for creating a new future in the postcolonial world.

<sup>2</sup> For more on gardens in Afro-Caribbean discourse, see also, Beth Fowkes Tobin, "'And There Raise Yams': Slaves' Gardens in the Writings of West Indian Plantocrats," *Eighteenth Century Life* 23, no. 2 (1999):164-176, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/10497>. Tobin looks at the use of subsistence farming among the (former) enslaved African diasporic peoples to argue that gardening, for them, was a creolized act due to the use of hybridized plants for food.

<sup>3</sup> For more on how gardens can be used as symbols of colonial power, see also, Donal McCracken, *Gardens of Empire: Botanical Institutions of the Victorian British Empire* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997). McCracken looks at the role of the botanical

and Elizete in *In Another Place, Not Here*, gardens are a refuge from the constant abuse they face in their household and in the local community.

Both authors also posit the presence of queer love as an escape from domineering, masculinist power structures. They aim to create a new and inclusive space for the all the descendants of laborers, including those who do not adhere to strict heteronormative gender roles. The women protagonists' desire for escape—and the escape they find in the gardens—highlights the collective villainy of their communities that are aware of the violence both women are subjected to. The desire to escape manifests in the creation of a paradisaal space for the women that no longer adheres to the desires of the colonizers, nor to the desires of men who wish to control the women.

In both novels, the perpetrators of violence against women face no repercussions, because the women who are victimized do not belong to privileged groups. Privilege is based on the socio-economic system on the islands, where normative masculinity, non-manual labor, land ownership, and heterosexuality are idealized as ways to create and perpetuate property as a symbol of human value. Violence in both novels is physical, sexual, emotional and mental and is perpetrated by established and privileged members of the novels' island societies.

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garden in creating a sense of national identity for the colonial powers. For more on gardens and colonialism in Caribbean literary discourse, see also, Robert S. Anderson, Richard Grove, Karis Hiebert, Lansdown Guilding, *Islands, Forests and Gardens in the Caribbean: Conservation and Conflict in Environmental History* (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean 2006). In another contemporary work, Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), fleshes out the tensions of the garden space as both influenced by colonialism and as a place that brings her joy. Kincaid looks at how the plants in her private garden were part of the colonial cataloguing project while also attending to her own pleasure in the act of gardening.

Garden space becomes part of a decolonizing project aimed at reclaiming the identity of islanders and the islands. These two novels dismantle the model of tying land only to producing profit, indicative of the owner's wealth or status and commodified through legal documents. Garden space broadens who can feel a sense of belonging on the island and what code of conduct is socially acceptable among the islanders, by providing safety and acknowledging the islanders' justified desire for dignity. Privacy means spaces of solitude that also provide safety.

The moments of dissociation that the women adopt when they are being raped or beaten are not examples of privacy. Those are mental strategies for coping with the violence they suffer. In contrast, garden spaces challenge the legacy—and perpetuation—of violence legitimized in the continuation of an economic system that drives social codes of conduct and that places women of color and those who do not conform to strict conceptions of respectability in vulnerable positions.<sup>4</sup> This vulnerability does not make the women sympathetic to the community. Instead it renders them objects of scorn. People are allowed to be violent to these women in the house, on the streets and in institutions. The only place of escape for them is the garden.

Gardens also represent the use of land to create a sense of beauty, something pleasing to the senses, where the women characters can express themselves and where

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<sup>4</sup> For more on codes of respectability in the Caribbean as applied to women, see also, Elaine Bauer, "Racialized Citizenship, Respectability and Mothering Among Caribbean Mothers in Britain," *Ethnic and Racial Studies: Special Issue: Migrant Mothers' Creative Interventions into Racialized Citizenship* 41, no. 1 (January 2018): 151–169, doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1317826. Bauer looks at how contemporary cultural and social values among the Caribbean creole is influenced by Eurocentric models and is used as a tool of assimilation.

they achieve the safety the surrounding world does not permit them.<sup>5</sup> Gardens do not refer to the use of the land to produce cash crops, nor for subsistence farming. Gardens are not tied to land as personal property, for the garden-use of the land is not always undertaken by the legal owner of the land. This motivation by something other than the quest for property allows Mala, Elizete and Verlia to establish a sense of privacy despite systems that do not favor their subject positions as women of color who are not independently wealthy. Privacy requires the freedom to exist in a space without hoping to gain economic power from, nor social status through, the act of observation (and by extension, written cataloguing for an audience). This means curiosity about the land without desiring or attempting to gain power by exposing this knowledge to others explicitly for profit.

*Cereus Blooms at Night* and *In Another Place, Not Here* trace the violence enacted on the bodies of women at the hands of members of the local community to show the women's need to create a safe space. Part of that safety involves disengaging from problematic elements of the Edenic in the Caribbean context. Jana Evans Braziel shows how myth of Eden establishes new beginnings for Caribbean writers.<sup>6</sup> Ian G. Strachan

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<sup>5</sup> In this way, gardens are separate from yards in Caribbean literature. Yards are on private property but are open to the public and provide an intimate meeting space for the local community. For more on yard fiction in the Caribbean, see also, Stanka Radović, "The Performance of Communal Intimacy and the Limits of Ownership in the Caribbean Yard Narrative," *The Global South* 10, no. 1 (2016): 40–55, doi:10.2979/globalsouth.10.1.03. Radović looks at how the yard functions as an extension of the limits of the house that is communal as opposed to personal property and therefore is a signal of local resistance to restrictive land ownership.

<sup>6</sup> Jana Evans Braziel, "Caribbean Genesis: Language, Gardens, Worlds (Jamaica Kincaid, Derek Walcott, Edouard Glissant)," in *Caribbean Language and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth M DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 110-126.

cautions, however, against regarding the Caribbean as a remote Eden for the ways this perpetuates a colonial imaginary.<sup>7</sup> Helga Ramsey-Kurz argues that paradise cannot be divorced from the concept of home in the postcolonial context. She writes that, “while settled societies have been the ones to invest in the development of means and infrastructures optimizing movement, migrant communities should have been inventing visions of belonging potent enough to sustain the human wish to settle down even against the most dire of odds.”<sup>8</sup> The “settled societies” she refers to are the Europeans who moved to the islands, while “migrant” communities applies to the diasporic people brought as laborers. The two groups have very different relationships to the land. The descendants of laborers, despite the many forms that their economic disenfranchisement take, make the island their home, and gardens are an extension of that process.

Part of that process of creating a home involves the decay of the plantation. The plantation was the site of much violence, and it presents a physical demarcation of who is believed to belong to what parts of the island. The workers live nearer the plantation and are privy to all the shoddy infrastructure and maladies associated with this site. Michelle Cliff’s concept of ruinate engages with the environmental discrimination discourse as she attends to how labor practices cannot be divorced from how the land is used.<sup>9</sup> Cliff defines ruinate as: “When a landscape becomes ruinate, carefully designed aisles of cane are envined, strangled, the order of empire is replaced by the chaotic forest....A

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<sup>7</sup> Ian G. Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Helga Ramsey-Kurz, “Introduction- Some Uses of Paradise,” in *Projections of Paradise Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature*, ed. Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), xix-xx.

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Cliff, “Caliban’s Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 2 (January 1991): 36–51.

landscape in ruination means one in which the imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin.”<sup>10</sup> The women protagonists create garden spaces in land that is considered “wild.” These are the spaces that are allowed to rewild and are no longer forced into providing profit. Instead of cash crops, these spaces are overrun with local flora and local insects and birds and reptiles. Their construction of a space that acknowledges their vulnerability and their dignity is an agentive response to the historical and socio-economic processes that marginalize them. The women protagonists navigate the land in ways that are not tied to dominant economic systems, and of using and going to spaces that the locals do not value because of the apparent wildness of these spaces.

Garden spaces in these novels provide safety and privacy, which are essential to a means of escape from the local communities’ constant access to the women’s bodies. These women wish to escape the knowledge that their positions are discussed by members of the community who deride their circumstances but do nothing to rectify these circumstances through action or through empathy. The local community is a ready audience to the plight of these women and, in Mala’s case, take pleasure in perpetuating her vulnerability. Colleen Gleeson Eils questions the “passivity of looking and the innocence of curiosity,” and argues that this passivity is itself violent.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Jonathan Clifton locates the “invisible audience” as necessary to policing systems of oppression.<sup>12</sup> Clifton explores the veracity of oral storytelling given the power dynamics

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<sup>10</sup> Cliff, “Caliban’s Daughter,” 40.

<sup>11</sup> Colleen Gleeson Eils, “Narrative Privacy: Evading Ethnographic Surveillance in Fiction by Sherman Alexie, Rigoberto González, and Nam Le,” *MELUS* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 48, <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.1093/melus/mlx026>.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Clifton, *Master Narratives, Identities, and the Stories of Former Slaves* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016), 65.

between African-American interviewees and white interviewers. Borrowing from the concept of the panopticon, he cautions that those being watched know that they are being observed and adapt their behavior accordingly. Similarly, Mala and Elizete are always aware of being observed and the gossip that spreads about them. The gossip is not always untrue: they *are* being raped; they *are* being abused. However, the gossip is cruel as none of the gossipers offer any help, nor wish the women well. This constant observation and judgment highlight the women's difference and make the women vulnerable and visible to their communities' scorn but invisible to their empathy.

The invisible audience maintains colonially derived norms while emphasizing how conceptions of land can shape access to privacy. The men in these novels assume that owning property secures privacy. For them, privacy means the ability to enforce their property rights, and to prioritize their emotional needs. These homes become an expression of power validated by property.<sup>13</sup> Heather Waldroup explores the power dynamics evident in the photographs two male colonists took of two local Samoan women in private spaces.<sup>14</sup> She argues that even in these private spaces the colonized women were objects of the colonial gaze. These are not private spaces for the colonized people because these spaces do not provide the colonized people with safety.

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<sup>13</sup> For more on power and property in a Caribbean context, see also, Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). For a sociological and historical look at the power of generational property, see also, Nicolette Bethel, "Generation Property: A Consideration of Customary Land Tenure in The Bahamas," *International Journal of Bahamian Studies* 11, (February 2008): 11–16, doi:10.15362/ijbs.v11i0.42.

<sup>14</sup> Heather Waldroup, "The Snark in Samoa: Photography, Privacy, and the Colonial Gaze," *Studies in American Naturalism* 12, no. 2 (2017): 171–199, doi:10.1353/san.2017.0010. For an expression of how property rights allowed for sexual deviancy among the slavers, see also, Trevor G. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

The women protagonists find privacy within garden spaces through their ability to see themselves outside of the dominating colonial gaze and outside of persisting power dynamics. Their relationship with the natural world engages with environmental discrimination discourse because their relationship to the land acknowledges the violent history of colonial labor practices. For these women, garden spaces do not exist to serve humans, nor do they use their knowledge of the natural world for socio-economic gain.<sup>15</sup> One articulation of this knowledge acquisition for colonists is through cataloguing. Cataloguing provides evidence of the powers of observation, recording, and ability to spot usefulness, where usefulness is determined by the colonists. The women challenge these legacies of colonization by engaging in a decolonizing project. This decolonizing project acknowledges the role of colonialism in making them vulnerable. It offers a model that respects both the land and the people on the land and affords dignity to both without denying the histories of violence that create the contemporary Caribbean. The women use garden spaces as a site of creative expression. Given that this space is used by both the descendants of the Indo- and Afro- diasporas in a Caribbean context, their search for garden sanctuaries douglarizes this pursuit to escape social policing, gossip, and observation.<sup>16</sup> The garden space is a douglarized response to neocolonial socio-economic

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<sup>15</sup> The women do not display their knowledge to influential foreigners in exchange for socio-economic gain like the colonial natural historian. For more on a critique of the role of natural history in the colonial project in the Caribbean, see also, Mukund Belliappa, "A Natural History of Colonialism," *New England Review* 36, no. 3 (September 2015): 10–24, doi:10.1353/ner.2015.0099.

<sup>16</sup> Douglarizing is a blend of the Indo and Afro diasporas in the Caribbean. For more on douglarization, see also, Sarah England, "Reading the Dougla Body: Mixed-Race, Post-Race, and Other Narratives of What It Means to Be Mixed in Trinidad," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2008): 1–31, doi:10.1080/17442220701865820; Rhoda Reddock, "Jahaji Bhai: The Emergence of a Dougla Poetics in Trinidad and Tobago," *Identities* 5 no. 4 (1999): 569–601,



models of oppression seen in the codes of respectability that enforce and encourage observation, gossip, and social policing.

In addition, the idea of enjoying the land, the idea of experiencing leisure, is not historically meant to be the purview of people of color on the island. People of color were meant to work the land. This idea of working the land as manual labor is associated with shame. The garden space changes this relationship and is an expression of local pleasure grounded in the flora and fauna of the island. The relationship between labor and nationalism in the Caribbean and in the postcolonial world more broadly is fairly well-established by such scholars as Frantz Fanon, Eric Williams, and C.L.R. James.<sup>17</sup> Shona Jackson adds to that discussion in *Creole Indigeneity*, arguing that the relationship between labor and land became part of a contemporary Caribbean nationalist understanding whereby labor (particularly labor done by the ancestors of Afro-Caribbean people) establishes a right to the land and dismisses the indigenous people's history of labor.<sup>18</sup> Brand critiques this dismissal, and points to the damage it does to all the islanders, as well as the damage this does to the land.<sup>19</sup> Mootoo's novel complicates the

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doi.10.1080/1070289X.1999.9962630. Reddock looks specifically at the blending of musical traditions as a means of pluralizing national identity in a contemporary Caribbean context.

<sup>17</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); C.L.R. James, *The Case for West-Indian Self-Government* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933).

<sup>18</sup> For more on the indigenous labor and literary representation in the Caribbean, see also, Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> For more on how Afro-Caribbean people were able to maintain some agricultural practices, see also, Frederick C. Knight, *Working the Diaspora the Impact of African Labor on the Anglo-American World, 1650-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

move to emphasize the labor done by one group over another by highlighting the Indo-Caribbean diaspora and the violence they experienced.<sup>20</sup>

The garden space expresses the women's desire for escape from the colonial systems because they cannot leave their physical location due to a lack of options.<sup>21</sup> Both novels break from the colonial-derived models of success that are displayed through status symbols and colonial-style taste. The novels present ideas of success that are not based on perpetuating exploitative hierarchies among the locals. This creates a way for both groups to confront the internalized racism and colorism present in the local communities, issues which lead to violence and the creation of systemic vulnerability. This ecological concern underscores erasures and representations of people that can provide an alternative model of success for the locals that considers both their environmental needs and their economic desires. Money is of course necessary, but they also need access to beautiful spaces that are not sterilized and packaged, as they are in resort areas.<sup>22</sup> Making the garden space douglarized as opposed to broadly creolized

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the violence of indentureship particular to women, see also, Chantal Persad, "Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments," *Women & Environments International Magazine* no. 98/99 (2017): 48-49, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1999053358/>.

<sup>21</sup> In terms of having a less powerful passport, access to money, and the presence of gossipers who observe and report on the villagers every move. For more on the creation of safe spaces for queer individuals in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, see also, Jaspal Kaur Singh, "Transnational Multicultural Feminism and the Politics Of Location: Queering Diaspora In Nisha Ganatra's *Chutney Popcorn*, Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, And Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms At Night*," *South Asian Review* 26, no. 2 (2005):148-161, doi:10.1080/02759527.2005.11932406. Note that Singh suggests that there is no Afro-Caribbean presence in *Cereus*. This is not strictly true as the Alms house is coded as a blended space that caters to the Indo- and Afro- diasporas. In addition, several characters are described as being in interracial romantic relationships (of note being Otoh, an Indo-Caribbean trans character, and Mavis, a local Afro-Caribbean woman).

<sup>22</sup> For more on how the idea of Paradise harms the local environment, see also, Gerd Bayer, "Subverting the Tropical Paradise," in *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewhere in*

allows for an escape specific to the labor practices and economic system directly affecting descendants of the Indo- and Afro- diasporas—particularly women. Garden space does not adhere to the tamed, servile, colonial aesthetic. It is messy, sensual, and wild. The garden space survives colonial trauma and is an expression of the desires of the douglarized women. In creating their own versions of paradise, the women are engaged in a decolonization project that reimagines the land that was formerly meant to be the paradise of colonizers.

### **Portrayals of Paradise: The Role of Violence and the Illusion of the Edenic in Shani**

#### **Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night***

*Cereus Blooms at Night* is set on the fictional island of Lantacamara, in the town of Paradise. The story is told by Nurse Tyler, a transgender woman who comes to know the horrific story of abuse Mala suffers at the hands of her father, Chandin.<sup>23</sup> Tyler is

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*Postcolonial Migrant Literature*, ed. Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2011), 49-73. Bayer argues that by looking at both nature and environment in a postcolonial context underscores the artificiality of imposing a colonial idea of Paradise elsewhere given the sheer amount of administrative control one side has over another. However, Bayer is drawing on the Edenic but does not address that traditionally, while Eden is Paradise, it is also ruled by an all-seeing and all-knowing God thereby making the colonial context an accurate representation of Eden. It is also worth noting that the move to eco-tourism favors landowners and so perpetuates a cycle of economic disenfranchisement.

<sup>23</sup> Nurse Tyler's identity as a trans person matters because they are subject to deliberate bullying by staff members as well as systemic discrimination due to their identity. At the start of the novel, they alone do not partake in the slander against Mala. Mala is also one of the few characters to befriend Tyler. She also encourages Tyler to feel proud of their identity. For more on the progressive sexual politics of *Cereus*, see also, Grace Kyungwon Hong, "'A Shared Queerness': Colonialism, Transnationalism, and Sexuality in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7, no. 1 (2006): 73-103, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40338718>. Hong argues that natural history played an integral role in the racial and classed stratification of Trinidadian society.

empathetic to all of the characters, Mala in particular.<sup>24</sup> The main thread of the narrative deals with the sexual abuse Mala and Asha, her younger sister, suffer at the hands of Chandin after his Indo-Caribbean wife, Sarah, leaves him for Lavinia, her white lover who is Chandin's adopted sister and his object of desire.<sup>25</sup> Isolated from the local community because they see her as degenerate, Mala manages to maintain a friendship with Ambrose, a young neighborhood boy. Later as adults—and after Asha's escape—Ambrose and Mala have a brief affair. When Chandin discovers the affair he mumbles, “no damn body go tief my property again. I go kill he. I go kill she too, if it come to that. I go kill meself too. I sharpenin' cutlass tonight.”<sup>26</sup> He brutally rapes Mala and threatens Ambrose. Mala kills her father and leaves his corpse to rot in the house. She then lets the garden turn ruinous. Chandin wants to control Mala's body and her experiences. These

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She goes on to show that Mootoo employs a historical, pre-independent setting in order to trouble the role of natural history on the island.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the role of empathy specific to the almshouse that Mala is sent to, see also, Chris L. Fox, "The Paradise Alms House: Siting Literary Thirdspace in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Canadian Literature*, no. 205 (Summer 2010): 70–84, <http://link.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/apps/doc/A267975673/LitRC?u=new67449&sid=LitRC&xid=89f83188>.

<sup>25</sup> Lavinia is the daughter of Reverend Thoroughly. Her father adopts Chandin when Chandin was a young boy. Chandin is deeply attracted to Lavinia and wanted to marry her before he eventually married Sarah. Chandin only marries Sarah after Reverend Thoroughly forbids him from marrying Lavinia on the grounds that the two are basically related. Chandin becomes enraged when he discovers that the Reverend intends for Lavinia to marry her blood cousin and marries Sarah instead of voicing his rage to the Reverend. For more on queer relationship involving Indo-Caribbean women, see also, Suzanne Persard, “Queering Chutney: Disrupting Heteronormative Paradigms of Indo-Caribbean Epistemology,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 26, no. 1 (April 2018): 25–102, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2052781208/>; see also, Evelyn O'Callaghan, “Sex, Secrets, and Shani Mootoo's Queer Families,” *Contemporary Women's Writing* 6, no. 3 (November 2012): 233–250, doi.10.1093/cww/vps023. For more on *Cereus Blooms at Night* as a queer coming out novel that uses the bildungsroman form, see also, Eddie Whyte, ““(Un) Manacled Sexuality! Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms At Night* as a Queer Bildungsroman?”,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 19, no. 2 (April 2011): 85–100.

<sup>26</sup> Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996), 238.

experiences include policing her pleasure in her surroundings. By attempting to rob her of feeling pleasure, and by extracting pleasure of his own through his aggressive abuse, Chandin tries to make Mala into an object he can own. Once Mala kills him, all manner of life thrives on the property. This thriving comes at the expense of the structure of the house due to the decay Mala permits. Mala creates something new with multiple beginnings and endings. She never sees her sister or her mother again. The story is told by Tyler in a plea to find Asha. The novel covers themes of colonialism, marginalization, and the need to care for those who are most vulnerable.

Critical interpretations of *Cereus Blooms at Night* address the depiction of marginalization and systemic vulnerability. Anna Royal focuses on the role of colonialism in shaping the violence Mala suffers at the hands of her father and argues that Chandin adopts the role of colonizer in his home.<sup>27</sup> Royal focuses on Chandin's desire to emulate Reverend Thoroughly and how Chandin vents his frustration with his failure to do so on his brown family, creating a center of colonial-style violence in his house.<sup>28</sup> Royal argues that, "Not only has the house become a prison for the children, however, it has also become a kind of panopticon."<sup>29</sup> For Royal, the trauma Mala and Asha

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<sup>27</sup> Anna Royal, "Imagining Home at a Snail's Pace in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Transnational Literature* 6, no. 2 (May 2014): 1–10, <https://doaj.org/article/4bd2a45f5e4443c9bef51034e906df8e>. It should be noted that Royal, at times, conflates tyranny and colonialism in order to argue that Chandin is a colonist. While Chandin is a tyrant in his house, he is incapable of the administrative and systemic reach of (neo)colonialism. Indeed, it is his failure to have the reach of the colonist that drives some of his violent behavior.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the narrative use of houses in Caribbean literature, see also, Stanka Radović, *Locating the Destitute: Space and Identity in Caribbean Fiction*, *New World Studies* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014). Using twentieth-century fiction, Radović, looks at how the figure of the house can serve as resistance to colonial hierarchies.

<sup>29</sup> Royal, "Imagining Home at a Snail's Pace," 6.

experience in the house is a microcosm of colonial violence where marginalized groups—including queer people, transgender people, and women—do not find solace.<sup>30</sup> Sarah Phillips Casteel moves away from the site of the house in *Cereus*.<sup>31</sup> She focuses on the garden and argues that it disrupts the trope of the Biblical idea of the garden as a “site of the recovery of prelapsarian identity.”<sup>32</sup> In addition to disrupting the concept of the garden as a traditional site of fixity, Casteel looks at how “the fabulous pastoral world of the garden is offset by a problematic scientific and ethnographic plot.”<sup>33</sup> Casteel is deeply invested in how the plantation system and the role of commerce create the Caribbean garden and mirror identity constructs.<sup>34</sup> While Casteel says that the garden “is the site of father-daughter incest” as Royal points out, no actual incest occurs in the garden.<sup>35</sup> These

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<sup>30</sup> Royal conflates transgender people like Nurse Tyler and Otoh with survivors of sexual abuse, like Mala. Royal argues that Mala’s position as a survivor of abuse makes her queer. While Royal may perhaps mean that both Tyler and Mala are maligned by the local community, it is important to note that they are both not queer. This distinction matters given the particular history of conflating queer identities with a reaction to sexual abuse. For more on the role of queerness in *Cereus*, see also, Curdella Forbes, “Yearning for Utopia: Earth, Body, Deviance and Festive-carnival Failure in *Cereus Blooms at Night*,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 41, no. 1 (2010): 111-142, <http://link.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/apps/doc/A253225749/LitRC?u=nw67449&sid=LitRC&xid=6ca99973>. Forbes uses carnivalesque imagery (particular to the rituals of Carnival in Trinidad) to show how *Cereus* critiques Indo-Trinidadian heterosexism.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Phillips Casteel, “New World Pastoral,” *Interventions: Global Diasporas* 5, no. 1 (January 2003):12-28, doi: 10.1080/13698032000049770.

<sup>32</sup> Casteel, “New World Pastoral,” 16.

<sup>33</sup> Casteel, “New World Pastoral,” 19.

<sup>34</sup> Casteel, “New World Pastoral,” 26. For more on the Caribbean pastoral, see also, Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2009), 174-188.

<sup>35</sup> Casteel, “New World Pastoral,” 21. For more on incest in *Ceresus*, see also, Evelyn O’ Callaghan, “Caribbean Migrations: Negotiating Borders,” in *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*, ed. Faith Smith (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 125-135. She asks why the community was willing to accept Mala as a victim of incest and questions if child abuse is more palatable to respectable members of the community if it is incest, 130.

horrific acts happen in the house. The garden is Mala's safe space and has been throughout the novel even before (though to a lesser extent) it becomes ruinate.

Meanwhile, Nicole Seymour focuses on "organic transgenderism" in *Cereus*.<sup>36</sup> She defines organic transgenderism as "treatment of gender transitioning as a biological phenomenon on the same order as puberty, an obviation of the medio-technological complex and its commodification of the body."<sup>37</sup> As with Casteel, Seymour draws attention to Mootoo's suspicion of the commodification of scientific knowledge. Seymour clarifies that through "organic transgenderism," Mootoo explicates that queerness is not the result of trauma, but happens naturally.<sup>38</sup> She ties shifts in new models of gender and sexuality to shifts in ecological consciousness to show new value systems that "can combat the logic of capital accumulation."<sup>39</sup> While Seymour does not use this example, Mootoo exemplifies this in the interactions between Hector, the gardener and Tyler, when Hector discusses how his mother removed his gay brother from

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<sup>36</sup> Nicole Seymour, *Strange Natures Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press; 2013), 50.

<sup>37</sup> Seymour, *Strange Natures Futurity*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Seymour, *Strange Natures Futurity*, 50, 65-66. For more on the presence of trans characters in *Cereus*, see also, Belinda Deneen Wallace, "Queer Potentialities and Queering Home in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Cultural Dynamics* 30, no. 1-2 (February 2018): 59-75, doi:10.1177/0921374017752051. Wallace looks at how queer bodies can create for a more inclusive idea of home and draws on the experience of transgendered people living in the Caribbean as well as fictional representations. For more on how trauma is incoherent, see also, Cassel Busse, "Who is a Victim? Difference and Accountability in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 37, no. 1 (2012): 82-99. Busse focuses on the relationship between the victim and the witness in acts of trauma to argue that the need for identification can itself create a fetishization of trauma that is itself victimizing.

<sup>39</sup> Seymour, *Strange Natures Futurity*, 58. For more on the body and environmentalist discourse, see also, Deborah Slicer, "The Body As Bioregion," in *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*, ed. Michael P. Branch, Rochelle Johnson, Daniel Patterson, and Scott Slovic (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1998), 107-116.

their house in order to stop the father's brutal beating of the child. Hector is speaking to Tyler in the garden and says, "I miss him too bad, but if I talk about him Mammy used to cry, so I stop and as time pass it was like he didn't ever exist. Is like you bring Randy back to me, boy."<sup>40</sup> Rebecca Ashworth, like Seymour, is interested in *Cereus*'s potentiality for a new value system that is not rooted in commodification.<sup>41</sup> She locates this in the role of empathy in *Cereus*. She follows Tyler's progression as the narrator to argue that the act of caring is the value system in *Cereus*. While she believes that Tyler is unreliable, she argues that empathy provides a way out of negative reactions to violence and abuse by juxtaposing empathy and shame.<sup>42</sup> That said, she focuses on the male characters Ambrose, Tyler, and Chandin and very little space is given to Mala, her mother, or Asha.

As with Ashworth, Emy Koopman is interested in the role of shame in a colonial context.<sup>43</sup> She looks at the humiliation Chandin feels in Reverend Thoroughly's house, his unrequited desire for Lavinia, and his wife's leaving him for her gay lover (who happens to be Lavinia, Chandin's own romantic interest). She troubles the idea of internalized violence, specifically whether "becoming an incestuous rapist [is] a 'logical' consequence of being 'colonized.'"<sup>44</sup> She looks at Mala's different response to both

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<sup>40</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Ashworth, "Reading Through Shame: Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 19, no. 2 (April 2011): 34–51, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1013602465/>.

<sup>42</sup> For more on shame and violence, see also, Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Emy Koopman, "Incestuous Rape, Abjection, and the Colonization of Psychic Space in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 2012, no. 1 (July 2013): 1–13, doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.691647.

<sup>44</sup> Koopman, "Incestuous Rape," 304.



humiliation and being colonized and argues that “being a victim of (incestuous) rape is different from being a victim of colonization; a victim of incest stands alone, while a victim of colonization is humiliated within her own social group.”<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, Koopman attends to Tyler’s role as the narrator to caution that Mala, “the [victim] of incestuous rape [is] not in possession of [her] own [story]. In that sense, the extent of [this] rape [victim’s] abjection is emphasized at the same time that it is employed to stress less fundamental types of abjection.”<sup>46</sup> Jill Casid looks at queer longing in *Cereus* and argues that the garden space exemplifies resistance to the empire because it does fulfill the goals of empire (namely: biological reproduction or cultural production).<sup>47</sup> Casid goes on to argue: “The European landscape garden, and the colonial order of imperial and heterosexual dominance it has so often upheld, are subsumed by their very own gardening practices. Transplantation and intermixing release the garden’s uncanniness, making of Paradise an unsettling queer place of overwhelming and excessive beauty and stench.”<sup>48</sup> The garden then, becomes the space where desire can be both experienced and expressed.

While much of the criticism of *Cereus* focuses on Chandin’s complicated relationship to colonialism, the humiliation and trauma Mala endures, the physical house, Mala’s desire for safety and privacy and her *success* in finding these in the garden, is neglected. Mala creates a safe and private space for herself and for the organisms that inhabit this space. As Nicole Seymour points out, caring about others becomes the value

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<sup>45</sup> Koopman, “Incestuous Rape,” 311.

<sup>46</sup> Koopman, “Incestuous Rape,” 313.

<sup>47</sup> Jill Casid, *Sowing an Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxi.

<sup>48</sup> Casid, *Sowing an Empire*, xxi.

system of *Cereus*. However, in addition to caring about others, Mala is able to care for *herself* in the garden. Mala displays this care through her appreciation for organic wildness. Mootoo writes, “The scent of decay was not offensive to her. It was the aroma of life refusing to end. It was the aroma of transformation. Such odour was proof that nothing truly ended, and she reveled in it as much as she did the fragrance of cereus blossoms along the back wall of the house.”<sup>49</sup> In allowing the ruinate, Mala lets vestiges of colonial order rot in her garden and fosters the resulting untamed ecosystem. This safety manifests in the wildness of her gardens that departs from the orderly gardens that signal wealth and conform to the ideals inherited from the colonialists.<sup>50</sup> She makes no attempt to adopt the role of the natural historian when she collects dead insects that are unknown to the (neo)colonial scientific world. Her only concern is that all organisms are treated with dignity. The wild garden space is a site of mutual respect where marginalized people can find both safety and privacy without needing to adhere to the colonial derived modes of respectability.

In addition, the ruinate functions for Mala as a way to make decay in the garden a generative act. This generativity allows Mala to reimagine her role outside of the colonial system and create her own version of paradise. Her father and the Thoroughlys instill a dominant idea of the garden space as a way to display command over nature, a viewpoint that is informed by Reverend Thoroughly’s Christianity. In “Caribbean Genesis: Language, Gardens, Worlds, (Jamaica Kincaid, Derek Walcott, Edouard Glissant),” Jana

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<sup>49</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 138.

<sup>50</sup> For more on the importation of orderly gardens as a colonial status symbol, see also, the “Royal Palm Estate,” in Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2009), 293-298.

Braziel focuses the binary of man and nature in a Caribbean context. She examines the region's history of ecological and human violence at the behest of colonial powers. The symbol of Eden in Genesis serves as an instructional tool for explaining what type of behavior is acceptable.<sup>51</sup> Ideas of Eden are instrumental in creating a hierarchy of people, animals, and plants, with humans being dominant and the others meant to serve. Mootoo highlights the harm in maintaining such a belief system because the imposed order creates and maintains vulnerable positions. These differences then extend into specific strictures in relation to the possibility of property ownership. The distinction matters because while indenture-ship was a fraught practice that exploited workers, it was less absolute and inescapable than slavery. Mala is on her father's land. Furthermore, Mala is the daughter of Chandin, who is selected by the Thoroughlys for adoption. He is taught religion, etiquette and academics by the colonists, and he believes in the superiority of the colonialists. One of Chandin's childhood desires discloses his need to establish his worth through distinctions in property ownership. As Mootoo writes, "[he] felt immense distaste for his background and the people in it. Gazing awestruck at the chandelier, [in the Thoroughly's home] he would daily renew his promise to be the first brown-skinned

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<sup>51</sup> For more on the Garden of Eden and representation in colonialism see also, Siti Nuraishah Ahmad, "Malaysia as the Archetypal Garden in the British Creative Imagination," *Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2014):49-84, doi:10.20495/seas.3.1\_49\_\_8211\_8. Ahmad discusses for the fertility of the tropics gets coded as Edenic in the colonial imagery as a way to couch the commodification of the land into a more virtuous endeavor for the colonists. Ahmad also discusses V.S. Naipaul's appreciation for the lushness of Malaysia. For more on the garden and the body in *Cereus*, see also, Vivian M. May, "Dislocation and Desire in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 37, no. 2 (October 2004): 97–123, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2002.11932273>. May focuses on how Mala and the garden share the same scent and that this scent subverts the colonial rule her father tried to impose in the house.

person in Lantanacamara to own one just like it.”<sup>52</sup> Chandin’s training with the colonialists is evident in his belief that the land should appear as an orderly signal of the owner’s mastery of the land and colonial conceptions of taste.

In establishing the “wild” garden as the best garden, Mootoo’s novel interrogates what it means to be useful, the relationship between use and success, and how those models are tied to an inherited economic gaze.<sup>53</sup> The novel questions whether success must always be tied to economic success and if such a model contributes to Mala’s childhood abuse. Mala’s letting the land become a site of decay that then breeds a wild implosion of plant and animal life is an agentive rethinking of proper land use. Mala’s garden is in stark contrast to the other properties in the town, but hers is more like the land was prior to colonization.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Ambrose himself comments on how domesticated Paradise has become, saying: “Paradise, he noticed with bewilderment, had grown from a village with a house here, plots of raw land there and then another house way over there, to a town with houses crammed against each other and hardly any wild land in sight.”<sup>55</sup> Mala’s garden is the last remaining wild land in Paradise, and it is only wild because Mala does not care to display the signs of socio-economic status as the

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<sup>52</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> For more on the garden as a status symbol for colonists, see also, Shirley Lau Wong, “The World and the Garden: Ekphrasis and ‘Overterritorialization’ in Jamaica Kincaid’s Garden Writing,” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 5 no. 1 (2018): 36–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2017.45>.

<sup>54</sup> As Monique Alleweart points out, in *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), the land is forever changed because of colonialism. Some of the plants and animals on Mala’s property have changed (or were brought to the island) because of the movements of diasporic people to the island and because of the clearing of land for the plantations. Still, Mala is able to return to an expression of an unorderly garden space that does not need to signal wealth, nor display the owner’s command over nature.

<sup>55</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 181.

other townspeople. Mootoo dismantles the hierarchy of humans and other creatures, a hierarchy Monique Allewart also attends to in her coinage of the term "parahuman" to explain the creolized exchange between humans and other organisms in a Caribbean "bound up in processes of touching and proximity."<sup>56</sup> In this dismantling and parahuman commingling, garden-space exists outside of current economic channels and offers vulnerable members of the local community, who do not conform to socially desirable norms in terms of gender, sexuality, and education, a space to express and experience sensuality.

Mootoo also resists order by showing the act of cataloguing as a colonial endeavor that translates the local into something for foreign consumption.<sup>57</sup> In *Cereus*, Ambrose is the resident cataloguer. He acknowledges that his interest is borne from his childhood relationship with Mala, when they collected small animals and freed them before the neighborhood bullies could torture or kill the creatures. For Mala, saving the lives of the helpless is a moral issue. Ambrose later becomes famous for his knowledge of plants and insects, and he is awarded money and time to catalogue these specimens based on his academic performance in the SNW.<sup>58</sup> Once, when Otoh, Ambrose's son asks

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<sup>56</sup> Allewart, *Ariel's Ecology*, 8.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the need for a postcolonial critique of ecocriticism that addresses the labor practices and economic disenfranchisement of locals, see also, Lorna Burns, "'Politicising Paradise: Sites of Resistance in *Cereus Blooms at Night*,'" *Journal of West Indian Literature* 19, no. 2 (2011): 52-67, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1013602459/>. For more on a posthumanist critique that decenters human exceptionalism and looks at how Mala creates a space that blurs the line between human and nonhuman, see also, Sara V. Press, "Terrestrial Cosmopolitanism, Posthumanism, and Multispecies Modes of Being in *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2019), doi:10.3390/h8020092. Press contends that Mala presents an alternative to the colonial aspirations maintained through hierarchies of humans versus nonhumans.

<sup>58</sup> For more on Ambrose as a natural historian, see also, Sarah Phillips Casteel, "New World Pastoral," 9, 11, 13, 15.

him whether or not he saved snails, Ambrose, the now respected natural historian, responds, “‘Well, the truth is that she was the one who initiated the whole thing and I went along until it became something I looked forward to. There was an urgency to the whole business, you know.’”<sup>59</sup> Although he acknowledges that Mala is the reason he knows as much as he does, he is the one who receives credit. True to form, Mala does not mind that she will receive no credit and is happy to be in Ambrose’s presence. For Mala, kindness is its own reward, and she seeks to create a kind world through her interactions with nature.

*Ceresus* includes two gender fluid characters—Otoh, Ambrose’s child, and Tyler, Mala’s nurse, who understand and demonstrate Mala’s focus on kindness toward the natural world. Both of these characters are empathetic toward Mala from their initial encounter with her. Mala is also kind to them from the start.<sup>60</sup> Tyler and Otoh both extend this kindness beyond her person to her garden indicating a respect for her desire for nothing in nature to be harmed. This extension of their kindness is at odds with the general bullying of Mala. Otoh comments while walking with a woman who describes throwing stones at Mala’s garden, “like an insidious, long drizzle, his sadness had turned to drenching anger. Forever a gentleman, he checked his reaction and managed, with only a margin of hesitation, to pull her closer, a gesture intended to comfort him more than

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<sup>59</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 129.

<sup>60</sup> On one of Mala’s first excursions around the alms house premises, she steals address for Tyler to wear (82). Tyler is surprised and touched by her action. She is the first person Tyler fully dresses as a woman in front of. He is at first sad that she is not more enthusiastic by the dress, but realizes that it is simply because she recognizes that the dress is simply natural to him. She expresses more disdain for his masculine clothes because she feels that he is harmed by wearing such articles.

her. Why had he never engaged in such callousness when he was a child?”<sup>61</sup> Otoh did not know Mala at the time, and yet he, like Mala, did not engage in cruelty. Even in this moment, Otoh’s first instinct after feeling anger is to embrace another person. He does not succumb to violence and instead, he tries to understand why he never felt the urge to engage in the neighborhood bullying which took the form of vandalizing her garden. In trying to understand his lack of violence, Otoh is trying to understand those who do engage in such behavior (even while never condoning their actions).

Mala’s experience with violence is, of course, worse in her house as her father beats and rapes her repeatedly. This abuse is worsened by Chandin forcing Mala to listen to his belief that her mother’s act of leaving him to be with her lover is an affront to his property rights. Mala feels sympathy for what he might have experienced when her mother left, but she also declares about herself, using her childhood name, “Hardly anyone, in her estimation, ever cared for Pohpoh. Now that she was grown-up, she herself would take care of little Pohpoh.”<sup>62</sup> This is an unfortunately realistic assessment of Mala’s homelife and childhood. She has been victimized by almost everyone she knows. Her father sees his property rights as extending to his right to use Mala’s body to fulfil his sexual needs because she is *his* daughter. Mala understands everyone’s pain, but realizes that none of them care for her, and based on this, she realizes she needs to become her own hero figure and save herself by comforting Pohpoh, the *child* version of herself. She emphasizes the littleness of the childhood version of herself by using both “little” and “Pohpoh.” However, along with chastising her father, the phrasing: “Hardly

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<sup>61</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus*, 147.

<sup>62</sup> Pohpoh is Mala’s childhood nickname. Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 185.

anyone” also implicates the local community, many of whom knew what was happening in her house and not only did nothing to stop it, but also, made her a figure of ridicule.

The extent of Mala’s experience with bullying and abuse includes the country’s officials. The police attempt to take the adult Mala away even before they find her father’s body. During this scene, as the police treat her with derision Mala speaks to an imaginary childhood version of herself saying, “‘Mala will take care of you, Pohpoh. No one will ever touch you again like that. I will never let anyone put their terrible hands on you again. I, Mala Ramchandin, will set you, Pohpoh Ramchandin, free, free, free, like a bird!’”<sup>63</sup> Mala refers to herself using all of her names: her legal name that she prefers as an adult, her childhood nickname and her family name. It is Mala Ramchandin, the grown-up who kills her father, who is able to save the young Pohpoh. Her proclamation of Pohpoh having the freedom of a bird takes on extra significance as Mala has allowed the birds in her garden to be free. She identifies with these birds, and this freedom that Mala offers the little creatures is in direct opposition to the bird-catchers who live in the local community and discover that Mala has pricey peekoplats living in her compound. Ambrose and his wife call Mala “a bird” prior to her being captured.<sup>64</sup>

In the end, Mala survives her father and her belief system guides the narrative. Nurse Tyler explains Mala’s belief system, saying: “‘I am beginning to understand some things about her and I think that she does not like things in nature to be hurt. To her, the flower and the plant would be both suffering because they were separated from each

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<sup>63</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 186-187. For more on how this knowledge comes to the reader by way of Nurse Tyler’s narration and how this spirals the novel into incredulity, see also Nurse Tyler’s position as an unreliable narrator in, Sarah Phillips Casteel, “New World Pastoral,” 19.

<sup>64</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 117.



other. You know what I mean? It would be as if its arm had been cut off or something. I think it would upset her greatly and set her back.”<sup>65</sup> Mala thinks that cutting the flower would hurt the plant and does not like this version of dying. As seen in her own garden, Mala is not afraid of death, provided that the organism is allowed to die naturally. The idea of allowing organisms to exist as they naturally are is integral to Mala, who is uninterested in possessing nature and using the natural world as decoration. For her, what is natural ought to simply exist on its own terms. Her lack of interest in ornamentation also means that she does not create a hierarchy of beauty in her garden and therefore all the organisms there are equally important.

Mala’s garden resists the ordered lifestyle represented in a strictly maintained garden that mirrors the code of respectability upheld by the agents of the colonial powers. The garden space is, in fact, on her father’s property and is legally his, but it is her garden as demonstrated through how she shapes and experiences the garden space. She, not her father, constantly seeks out this space and understands the organisms in her garden. Mootoo’s novel begins with the messiness of Mala’s garden and establishes that messiness as the “good” garden. This is the garden as it would exist naturally. Mootoo writes, “She did not intervene in nature’s business. When it came time for one creature to succumb to another, she retreated. Flora and fauna left her to her own devices and in return she left them to theirs.”<sup>66</sup> The garden Mala’s father wants, and which he creates before Mala and is meant to establish him as more of a colonist than a local. In establishing the chaotic garden as the first garden of the novel, and as the closing garden,

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<sup>65</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 74.

<sup>66</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 137.

this becomes the scene of perfection to be aimed for as opposed to the stringent order the father wishes.

While the island has been permanently ecologically changed to serve the plantations, Mala resists the dominant desire to tame nature into a socio-economic symbol or in order to gain wealth through the wildness of the garden. The wildness of Mala's garden is due to her allowing the space to become ruinate and therefore no longer conform to the order that her father desired. The garden is her paradise and it underscores the brutality of the more colonial version of paradise that most of the island inherits.

### **Environmental Discrimination and Vulnerability in *Cereus Blooms at Night***

Mala's garden highlights how the legacies of the hierarchies between humans and nature contribute to the enshrinement of vulnerable positions outside the garden and makes clear why the women need to create safe spaces. These legacies are tied to models inherited from colonialism where people of color were treated as less human than the European colonists and simultaneously seen as part of the natural landscape in ways that need to be addressed in ecocritical discourse.<sup>67</sup> Braziel posits the question: "What would it mean for those historically denied their humanity (denigrated to 'savages' or livestock) to be called upon by posthumanist ecocritics to renounce the ego- for eco-, when such a call merely reiterates historical locations of erasure (and collapses them into a dominated

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<sup>67</sup> For more on the problematic alignment of people of color and the natural world in a postcolonial Caribbean context, see also, Wayne Modest, "We Have Always Been Modern: Museums, Collections, and Modernity in the Caribbean," *Museum Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2012):85-96, doi:10.1111/j.1548-1379.2011.01124.x.. Modest argues that the Caribbean gets problematically seen as lacking modernity because of the emphasis and cataloguing practices of natural history that neglected the region's cultural history.

nature)?”<sup>68</sup> She critiques the eco-tourism that traps the Caribbean in a neo-colonialist narrative that promotes an imagined Caribbean greenness while denying colonial ecological violence. As Braziel warns, there is a danger in renouncing “the ego- for eco- ” because this move denies the humanity of women like Mala, given that people of color were problematically aligned with nature by colonists.<sup>69</sup> *Cereus Blooms at Night* does not dismiss the ecological damage done to the region, but engages in environmental discrimination discourse in order to attend to how marginalized women were “historically denied their humanity.”<sup>70</sup> One way that the humanity of marginalized women is denied, is by ignoring their emotional needs while catering to the needs of more powerful members of society.

Mala attends to everyone else’s need for safety. Even as a child, Mala displays this concern when she tries to protect little snails from the young neighborhood boys who were bent on torturing the creatures. Mootoo writes, “She [Mala] and Boyie began fervently collecting the periwinkles in the heavy cotton bag she had crudely stitched especially for this purpose.”<sup>71</sup> Mala, with very little skill, still attempts to make a bag to collect the snails showing that her heroic action is premeditated.<sup>72</sup> Boyie accompanies

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<sup>68</sup> Braziel, “‘Caribbean Genesis,’” 111.

<sup>69</sup> Braziel, “‘Caribbean Genesis,’” 111.

<sup>70</sup> Braziel, “‘Caribbean Genesis,’” 111. For more on how ecocritical discourse can dehumanize historically disenfranchised groups in a postcolonial Caribbean context, see also, Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: the Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Heise problematizes idea of idealizing nature in nationalism in ecocritical discourse and draws on the Nazi interest in the environment.

<sup>71</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 98-99.

<sup>72</sup> Although Mala always displayed concern for creatures, Lavinia, her mother’s lover (and the woman Chandin covets), is partially responsible for Mala’s interest in snails. Lavinia tells the child-Mala that if she protects snails that, “everyone whom you love will be ensured the fullest protection of the benevolent forces in the universe,” (58). However,

her, but it is she who makes the sack, and it is she who first suggests this action. When she finally gets the chance to showcase her sensibility, she provides helpless creatures escape from trauma and objectifying gazes. For her, gardens are an expression of her compassion for the ecological world *including* other humans like her sister.

*Cereus* presents the disorderly garden space as a way to experience beauty and is an acknowledgement of Mala's humanity and dignity. The text is imbricated with the pervasive experience of violence on the island resulting from efforts to tame the Caribbean into an imported image of Eden. Mootoo's novel links this imported image to the Thoroughly family who train Chandin to be their version of a Christian, to act as they do and desire what they desire, and as a side effect, to associate his biological parents and the locals as backwards, disorderly, and dirty. Mootoo writes, "but Chandin bought land cheaply in an underdeveloped section of Paradise called Hill Side, and hired two men to clear all but one tree from its stand of mudras. Using the hardy wood he contracted them to build a two-story house typical of modest dwelling in the area. The house stood atop mudra stilts."<sup>73</sup> Chandin not only wants the land cleared but, like the Thoroughlys, hires others to do the actual physical labor of clearing the land. He builds his house from expensive mudra wood so that it does not at all resemble the house he had envisioned in his youth, and then spends the rest of his life oppressing everyone inside of his house. The wood from this structure will eventually rot under Mala's care while the tree he

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while Mala does give extra care to snails, she gives up hope for receiving protection herself and instead acts like the protector of those around her. Indeed, Mala very rarely acts like a child, and more often than not, she takes on parental responsibilities in her home even before her mother left to live with her lover. It was child-Mala who constantly hid her mother's affair, it was child-Mala who tried to protect her sister from rape, and it was child-Mala who considered her father's hurt and his violent temperament.

<sup>73</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 53.

saved will flourish until it is cut down when Mala is sent away to trial. Chandin, who tries so hard to emulate the colonists, finds destruction to be beautiful. However, as much as Chandin tries to tame the land in the fashion that he learns is proper, he is unhappy and discontented. The image he seeks to emulate only causes him pain and he reacts to this pain with violence.<sup>74</sup>

Chandin does not understand different ideas of beauty, being, and knowledge. For him, knowledge needs to be useful to those in power in order to be worthwhile. Mala contradicts this because for her, beauty does not need to be tamed in order to be considered beautiful. Success does not need to mean striving for symbols of success in order to gain happiness from making oneself a figure of envy. The wildness of Mala's garden space indicates her difference and a more sustainable manner of living on the island.<sup>75</sup> Mala's garden becomes legendary among the townspeople of Paradise because the wildness of it does not match with their belief in what property should look like. John Hector, the gardener of the alms house in Paradise, speaks of Mala's garden: "They say the yard also had some plants that was ugly like snake-face and dangerous like snake-bite, but plenty-plenty bush. It look like she used to take care of it—useful, pretty, bad,

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<sup>74</sup> This is not to suggest that all of Chandin's violence can be blamed on colonialism, but that some of his violence is his reaction to it. Many others on the island experience violence because of colonialism (like his own daughter, Mala, and her friend, Ambrose) but do not respond in the destructive and violent way that Chandin does.

<sup>75</sup> Mala is at times presented as more attuned to the natural world than those around her. For more on Mala as a posthumanist figure, see also, Sara V. Press, "Terrestrial Cosmopolitanism, Posthumanism, and Multispecies Modes of Being in *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *Humanities* 8, no. 2 (May 1, 2019), <https://doaj.org/article/16fddccabe404e32b35efcb5198d419b>. However, it is worth remembering Braziel's caution about subsuming the human given that people like Mala were historically seen as less human than the colonizers.

whatever.”<sup>76</sup> The townspeople comment that her garden has “plenty-plenty bush” which indicates that what they call “bush” refers to plants that are seen as dangerous and worthless.<sup>77</sup> They believe that the sheer quantity of plants in her garden space displays disregard for their more orderly spaces—spaces that conform to what they learn to value because the schools and churches privilege the colonial perspective.<sup>78</sup>

By destroying the idea that there should be a hierarchy of nature, Mala has no need for the categories of “useful,” “pretty,” or “bad.”<sup>79</sup> For Mala, these plants do not mean her harm, and she recognizes and protects them in the way that she is not protected by the local community. Mala’s difference in sensibility serves as an indictment of the local community’s complicity in the violence she suffers as they speak about her garden but never speak of her tender-heartedness. Their gossip reifies her vulnerability and emphasizes her gender. Mala is a daughter of a landowner, but her father’s alcoholism has affected her reputation more than his because she is his daughter and men have more permission for their socially renegade behavior than women. The townspeople know that Chandin rapes her. They also know that she was a child when this started. They never intervene yet continue to gossip and shun her, while always observing her nonetheless.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 73.

<sup>77</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 73.

<sup>78</sup> For more on how the colonizers used the Caribbean as a space to consume, see also, Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>79</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 73.

<sup>80</sup> For more on child abuse in Mootoo’s text, see also, Vivian M. May, “Trauma in Paradise: Willful and Strategic Ignorance in *Cereus Blooms at Night*,” *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 107–135, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hypatia/v021/21.3may.html>. May argues that individual traumas within *Cereus* exist as part of a space itself inflected by historical traumas. She looks at how willful ignorance and strategic ignorance work together in *Cereus* to expose the corruption of colonialism.

Throughout *Cereus*, Mala finds comfort in gardens, both at her home and on the grounds of the institution she is sent to. She escapes those who try to instill ideas about what a woman's role in the house is, how property works in the Caribbean, and who should be granted social and economic success—and what that success means. After her mother leaves—and throughout her subsequent years of abuse—the garden grants her the power to enact kindness and an ability to re-imagine herself. Her father teaches her and her younger sister to fear the house, as evidenced by the aftermath of her first rape and the subsequent abuse of both her and Asha. Mootoo writes, “That is how it started. The following night he sent the two children to sleep in their own room, but they both came to know that he would call for one or the other to pass at least part of the night in his bed.”<sup>81</sup> This is how Mala learns to associate the house with the terror of her father’s abuse. In addition to horrendous sexual abuse, Mala is forced to hear about the emotional pain her abuser feels because of the actions of other women (namely her mother and Lavinia). For her the garden space is hers insofar as it affords her privacy. Mala does not attempt to list the names of plants and animals in order to consider their function or to display her knowledge of them for profit. While nature provides Mala a sense of comfort and safety by affording her privacy, this is a one-on-one interaction and does not depend on having an audience.

Because the garden space is not meant to be economically profitable, it does not create or reflect a hierarchy of labor where those working the land are seen by the landowner as part of the plantation machine with the landowner’s rights superseding the rights of everyone else. The representation of the garden space is part of a decolonial

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<sup>81</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 70-71.

project that confronts inherited notions of property and how those models continue dependence on the former colonial powers and a continued disrespect of the locals. The garden space privileges the dignity of the islanders by allowing them the possibility to exist without needing to be economically relevant to the former colonial powers. This is not to say that the plants could not yield profit; indeed, the mudra tree and the peekoplats (a type of small bird) in her backyard can fetch a high price. When Mala is being escorted by the police, some poachers approach the garden commenting, ““You know how much one peekoplat fetching these days?””<sup>82</sup> Another poacher adds, ““[A] mudra that size would make each one of us a rich man.””<sup>83</sup> However, Mala does not wish to sell them, and because of this, both thrive on her land and neither are cut before maturity nor overhunted. Mala does not prune plants, nor does she designate which animals are pests because she does not intend to use any of them for profit. This action signals that there is no concept of a pest or a weed as all organisms are allowed space to thrive. Mootoo’s text shows that locals are defined by their tastes, and that these tastes are seen as inferior to the colonizers’ because they are generally linked to poverty, physical labor, and a lack of order and cleanliness.

Mala expresses delight and sensual pleasure in her garden—two feelings that she cannot and does not demonstrate in her house or in the local community. In gardens sensuality occurs naturally and consensually for the women of color. Mootoo presents the possibility for a new sensibility in Mala evidenced in the wild sensuality in her garden. She shows this through the scent of the cereus plant in Mala’s garden. Mootoo writes,

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<sup>82</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 201.

<sup>83</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 201.



“[Mala] knew that when the footsteps slowed it was because someone was sniffing the heady perfume [of her cereus in bloom]. It was a change from the odour of age, filth and rot that normally permeated her yard... The pair [Otoh and a local woman] stopped to see what it was that so perfumed the entire neighbourhood.”<sup>84</sup> She attempts to cultivate her own tastes regarding social decorum, plants, and food, none of which is tied to signaling socio-economic power. Part of Chandin’s belief, and what Mala is working against, is the internalization of the idea that owning property would bestow upon him the power of the colonists and give him the right to see others as inferior. Mala displays her break from his belief through this plant that provides no economic profit and only blooms once a year. The cereus plant is perhaps one of the most hopeful images in the novel because despite all the rot and decay, there is this beautiful experience that is created from its blossoms. There is an element of secrecy to the imagery given that it blooms only at night and that it is usually a forgettable plant. It produces no profit and is not part of the colonial aesthetic. However, once the plant blooms, it is inescapable in its beauty and it is responsible for the communal pleasure the neighborhood experience as they choose to walk by her garden (and as she lets them do so).

By rewilding the land, Mala does not replicate inherited models of colonial standards of beauty. Her creation of a space of safety and beauty in the garden is an act of resilience. It shows that her relationship with the land respects those on the land, as opposed to the community’s existing mode of respectability, which weakens the land in the pursuit of foreign tastes and standards. Mala wonders how these standards became internalized and believes it originates in part in the priority of speaking correctly, which

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<sup>84</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 145.

then taints everyday experience. She thinks, “A flock of seagulls squawking overhead might elicit a single word, *pretty*. That verbalization, she came to understand, was not the feeling itself but a name given to the feeling: *pretty*, an unnecessary translation of the delight she experienced seeing the soaring birds. Eventually Mala all but rid herself of words.”<sup>85</sup> Her rejection of standardized language does not mean that she rejects all language. Mala learns to communicate with the animals and plants around her. Her re-wilding of the garden and her description of it which uses the symbolic language of birds and plants is a kind of re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe*.<sup>86</sup> She counters Crusoe’s relationship to the island. In inverting some of the elements of *Robinson Crusoe*, the narrative shows the damage done to the land by the colonial powers in both their material use of the land, and the violence enacted on the bodies of those on the land. By having Mala’s father act as a neo-Crusoe figure, the text highlights the violence of that colonialist narrative. Furthermore, as Mala foils her father the text shows what a relationship between land and those living on it could be if both are dignified.

### **Building a Local Paradise**

As Cereus creates a local space for vulnerable people of color to safely experience pleasure, so too does Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*. Brand’s novel is a non-linear novel set on an island that resembles Grenada during the Grenadian Revolution. The novel is told by two characters: Elizete and Verlia, both black women. Elizete is a poor black woman who works on a plantation. She did not have a happy

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<sup>85</sup> Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 136.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

childhood. She lived with an abusive woman as an adopted child and was then sent to live with Isaiah, a man who beat and raped her regularly. Verlia is more privileged than Elizete.<sup>87</sup> She has a fairly stable childhood, moves to Canada as a documented immigrant, and is educated in a Canadian university. Elizete and Verlia fall in love when Verlia comes to the plantation Elizete works on. Verlia is there in hopes of encouraging the workers to revolt. Elizete becomes estranged from her husband when he discovers the two women in a compromising position. During the revolution, Verlia jumps off a cliff and dies, prompting Elizete to go to Canada as an undocumented immigrant where she is raped and exploited. The novel is told in two parts. The first, “Elizete Beckons” follows Elizete’s childhood, life with Isaiah, relationship with Verlia and departure to Canada. The second is called “Verlia Flying.” This section follows Verlia’s childhood, her radicalization and her side of the relationship with Elizete. The novel ends with Verlia’s jump, though in terms of plot, the jump is the middle of the story.

Kristina Quynn calls Brand’s novel a “love story between mobile women of the Caribbean.”<sup>88</sup> Quynn argues that “Brand explores another kind of radical experience—one that is intimate and personal: the erotic potential of women who seek other women in the elsewhere to narrative convention and representation.”<sup>89</sup> For Quynn, the novel’s framework of same-sex desire creates a “narrative structure [that rearticulates] the

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<sup>87</sup> While Verlia is more economically privileged than Elizete, Verlia is a black woman who lived as a queer immigrant in Canada during her youth and faced discriminated because of these categories (black, woman, immigrant, queer). For more on Dione Brand’s work and queerness, see also, Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Kristina Quynn, “Elsewheres of Diaspora: Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 48, no. 1 (2015): 121-146, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43549874>.

<sup>89</sup> Quynn, “Elsewheres of Diaspora,” 121.

cultural narrative of African diaspora and the exile of the immigrant to privilege a view *from*, rather than *toward*, a desired elsewhere.”<sup>90</sup> Quynn argues that it is the ever-moving desire for elsewhere itself that drives Verlia and Elizete and their romance. Quynn traces this idea of elsewhere in the novel’s nonlinear narrative structure, elsewhere as an unattainable place fueled by the desire to belong. She focuses on Verlia’s jump at the end of the novel as the beginning, middle, and end of the plot of the novel, arguing that this incident shows that both the love story and the revolution do not follow a linear narrative with heteronormative goals.<sup>91</sup> For Quynn, the desire to belong creates the potential for an elsewhere that is forever rooted in concepts of alternate futures.<sup>92</sup>

Laurie Lambert is also interested in the inventiveness of imagination in *In Another Place, Not Here*. Like Quynn, she focuses on same-sex desire between black women and argues that, “*In Another Place* positions black queer love as a constitutive part of political revolution at the same time that it resists the heteronormativity of revolution as it is conventionally defined.”<sup>93</sup> Lambert critiques the denial of the violence

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<sup>90</sup> Quynn, “Elsewheres of Diaspora,” 122. For more on the Brand’s emphasis on the marginalization of lesbian women and diaspora discourse, see also, Joanna Luft, “Elizete and Verlia Go to Toronto: Caribbean Immigrant Sensibilities at ‘Home’ and Overseas in Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* no. 77 (Fall 2002): 16-49, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/197248818/>. Luft argues that as queer, immigrant women of color, both women are constantly desiring to be elsewhere because their experience with trauma is met with aggressive silence. Neither woman can fully assimilate and therefore are in a continual state of imaginative desire.

<sup>91</sup> Quynn finds these goals to be ideas of “closure” that include children, marriage, owning property as markers of heteronormative success.

<sup>92</sup> For more on narrative, exile, and the desire to belong, in Brand specific to concepts of futurity, see also, Bina Toledo Friewald, “Cartographies of Be/longing Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” in *Mapping Canadian Cultural Space: Essays on Canadian Literature*, ed. Danielle Schaub (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Magnes Press, 2000), 37-53.

<sup>93</sup> Laurie R. Lambert, “When Revolution Is Not Enough: Tracing the Limits of Black Radicalism in Dionne Brand’s *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* and *In Another Place, Not*

inherent in the types of revolution brought to and encouraged among marginalized racialized communities. She specifies the denial of the contribution made by intersectional communities to these revolutions that purport to help *all* racialized members.<sup>94</sup> She looks at the relationship between Elizete and Verlia in the build up to and the aftermath of the revolution on the island.<sup>95</sup> She argues that queer “desire demands a feminist decolonizing politics to expose the exclusive practices of black radicalism and revolution.”<sup>96</sup> Recognizing the role of intimate desire, she asserts, the novel allows for a more inclusive revolution praxis.

Critic Vikki Visvis also posits a social focus but hers is centered on trauma and how remembering can be a privileged act. She argues that “[t]he novel recognizes that for the disenfranchised, deliberate forgetting is often a means of both contending with personal trauma and engaging in political resistance.”<sup>97</sup> Visvis looks at the presence of willful forgetting, as in the case of Adela’s refusal to name plants that she knows and Verlia’s attempt to forget past lovers and present emotions. She argues that this forgetting

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*Here*,” in *The Postcolonial Contemporary: Political Imaginaries for the Global Present*, ed. Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 57.

<sup>94</sup> Lambert, “Revolution is Not Enough,” 59. For more on the role of women in the Grenadian Revolution, see also, Shalini Puri, *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present: Operation Urgent Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> For more on Brand’s involvement in the Grenadian Revolution, see also, Susan Gingell, “Returning to Come Forward: Dionne Brand Confronts Derek Walcott,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6, no. 2 (May 1994): 43-52; see also, Thomas, H. Nigel, “A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand,” *Kola* 21, no. 1 (2009), 10-20, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A204205444/LitRC?u=new67449&sid=LitRC&xid=577fd31>.

<sup>96</sup> Lambert, “Revolution is Not Enough,” 67.

<sup>97</sup> Vikki Visvis, “Traumatic Forgetting and Spatial Consciousness in Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 45, no. 3 (2012): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mos.2012.0029>.

is meant to be alienating in order to resist colonizing strategies.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, Visvis finds that “Brand’s work situates remembrance, particularly in the form of a therapeutic encounter, as limited to a white bourgeois class.”<sup>99</sup> However, while Visvis says that “Forgetting opens up a space for personal reinvention, and this reinvention is ultimately politically empowering” this empowerment is based on a lack of acknowledging intimate desire.<sup>100</sup> As Lambert shows, forgetting the role of desire can marginalize already vulnerable communities, and valorizing forgetting is problematic. Furthermore, Visvis’s forgetting does not account for the role of forgetting in assimilation as exemplified by Verlia’s aunt and uncle who emigrate to Canada and willfully block out their past in hopes of material gain. Verlia herself comments on this strategic (and useless) forgetting, saying, “In Sudbury, if they [her aunt and uncle] conform to some part of the puzzle, they are convinced that they will be rewarded with acceptance. Ordinariness. Man, woman, husband, wife, couple, parents, Black. They are counting on the first six words.”<sup>101</sup> Forgetting their blackness makes assimilation easier. There is a willful blindness here that is not helpful to the younger Verlia who sees and feels the racism that her aunt and uncle ignore. Part of the reward as well, is, as Brand writes, “Ordinariness.”<sup>102</sup> Forgetting

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<sup>98</sup> Visvis, “Traumatic Forgetting,” 121, 123. For more on the role of memory in Brand, see also, Johanna X. K. Garvey, ““The Place She Miss”: Exile, Memory, and Resistance in Dionne Brand’s Fiction,” *Callaloo* 26, no. 2 (2003): 486-503, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2003.0043>. Garvey focuses on the oceanic in three of Brand’s novels. Garvey looks at the role of traumatic remembering and argues that this is necessary for the creation of home for the African diaspora in the Caribbean.

<sup>99</sup> Visvis, “Traumatic Forgetting,” 128.

<sup>100</sup> Visvis, “Traumatic Forgetting,” 121.

<sup>101</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 141.

<sup>102</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 141.

blackness is also tied then to forgetting past aspirations that in itself perpetuates a type of racism.

Lauren Vegal is also interested in desire, specifically the assumption of a desire for safety, and argues that Canada fails to provide Verlia and Elizete with this safety and that this desire is rooted in dominant white epistemology.<sup>103</sup> Vedal says that Brand, through Elizete, offers a “new sense of safety based not in security but in the belief that change is possible.”<sup>104</sup> Vedal says that Verlia’s “revolutionary thought is structured by Western and first world hierarchies.”<sup>105</sup> This revolutionary thought and concept of safety is rooted in material comfort.<sup>106</sup> Vedal shows that because black women are economically disenfranchised, they do not receive this type of comfort-based safety. She problematizes this type of safety by showing how it falls short of providing a way to heal from psychological trauma that results from economic disenfranchisement and is used by countries like Canada to promote an image of themselves as a haven.<sup>107</sup>

Much of the criticism on *In Another Place, Not Here* focuses on revolutionary praxis and on queer desire among black women. This is necessary criticism and offers a more inclusive look at Caribbean identity. However, the novel’s foregrounding of the ability to create a safe space out of the land is neglected, as is the women’s ability—particularly Elizete’s—to create a paradise for themselves. Elizete is on land both she and

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<sup>103</sup> Lauren Vegal, “Immigrant Desire: Contesting Canadian Safety and Whiteness in Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” in *Race and Displacement: Nation, Migration, and Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Maha Marouan, Merinda Simmons, Houston A. Baker Jr., Philip D. Beidler, and Trudier Harris (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 69-81.

<sup>104</sup> Vedal, “Immigrant Desire,” 77.

<sup>105</sup> Vedal, “Immigrant Desire,” 73-74.

<sup>106</sup> Vedal, “Immigrant Desire,” 70, 69, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Vedal, “Immigrant Desire,” 69, 80.

her husband work on but do not own. Verlia enters Elizete's community specifically to try to get the black working-class to fight for property ownership because the use-value of their labor is not recognized. In addition to these concerns over property, however, both women have a desire for happiness that they do find in the quiet, green spaces of the island.<sup>108</sup> Elizete empathizes with others, even those who victimize her, without losing her desire for happiness. She thinks of her husband's tales of his ex-wife, saying, "What she make him eat, how she tie his mind. It could not compensate for what he do to me."<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, Verlia has to listen to her aunt and uncle in Canada explain all of the opportunities for mediocrity that she now has and they cannot understand why she is not grateful. Verlia laments while recounting her uncle's words, "We lucky to be in Canada... You could do anything here.' Anything, anything he keeps saying but his anything is small. He means there will be no hunger, you will have clothes on your back, you will have shoes on your feet, and that is enough."<sup>110</sup> They are both made to listen to the unhappiness of others, and told to feel grateful for being allowed to survive, but both show that they desire more than just mere survival.

In the novel, Verlia assumes that the black working-class does not know how to, nor why to, revolt. Verlia believes that the labor done by black (and brown) bodies in the Caribbean lends itself to increasing the property of the white landowners. The landowners want to protect their property and to ensure that their property is a financial investment that adds to their exclusive economic power. The labor done on the land

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<sup>108</sup> In Brand, in order for plantation to exist, local flora and fauna are decimated—an act that causes some of Elizete's physical hunger by diverting so much land to produce the nutrient-weak sugarcane, which makes the land vulnerable to environmental elements.

<sup>109</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 148.



becomes part of the owners' property. Verlia sees how poorly the land supplies the basic needs of the locals, how the drive for overwhelming surplus profit on the part of the landowners makes the land less fertile, and the damaging effect on the bodies of the laborers. She is not incorrect. She believes that the landowners create a paradise in the Caribbean where they reap the benefits of labor without performing any of the physical work, instead feeding their imported tastes with imported food. Although she maintains, rightly, that the current owners exploit the locals by never sharing the profits they earn from the labor of the workers, Verlia sees the locals as intellectually inferior and therefore part of her own conception of paradise in the Caribbean.<sup>111</sup> Verlia has a powerful passport that allows her to come and go as she pleases. Her Canadian passport creates a complicated position for her as she experiences privilege in the Caribbean that locals may not.<sup>112</sup> While Verlia does not wish for the Caribbean to exist as a lush space where privileged bodies perform no labor and have their desires attended to, she sees the locals as less sophisticated than her. Upon first meeting Elizete, Verlia reminisces, "when they'd first met she thought that she was the one who knew everything, and how she was going to change this country woman into a revolutionary like her, but then something made her notice that she was the one who had doubts and what she was saying she

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<sup>111</sup> For more on Verlia's ability to feel a sense of belonging in Toronto in the Movement, see also, Maxine Bramble, "'That Really Wasn't Me': A Black, Immigrant, Caribbean Woman's Attempt to Be/long in the Academy," *Canadian Woman Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 134-140.

<sup>112</sup> For more on the privilege of a travelling as a tourist to the Caribbean, see also, Anthony Carrigan, "Preening with Privilege, Bubbling Bilge: Representations of Cruise Tourism in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong For the Widow* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*," *Isle: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 14, no.1 (2007): 143-59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/14.1.143>.

merely said but Elizete felt and knew.”<sup>113</sup> For her, the Caribbean is a space where she can save the locals. Their plight dignifies her work, as she sees the locals as benefitting from her presence therefore making her a sort of hero figure sent to rescue black and brown working-class people. She changes this opinion once she lives with the locals, but even then does not understand why Elizete opts to focus on what Verlia considers to be mundane happiness over larger revolutionary stakes. Verlia’s inability to understand why Elizete opts for these instances of happiness is tied to Verlia’s ability to leave the island in contrast to Elizete’s everyday living conditions.

While Verlia’s intentions might be good in terms of attempting to defend the rights of the local workers, she reads them as part of an imagined Caribbean for her to save. She wants to save them but does not wish to become personally entangled with any of them. Verlia complicates what privilege looks like, given her identity as a queer woman of color who still has passport privilege. She is a Canadian. She is well-educated in a Canadian university. Elizete comments earlier: “I could not help but think that I was the one who would carry the sack into the sea and out, I was the one going to stay and she was laying because she could leave this island anytime.”<sup>114</sup> Verlia expresses sorrow outwardly, and she speaks more academically on historical matters, but that comes from her privileged position as someone who can easily leave the island. She can afford to see only the pain of the island and to constantly think about that pain while on the island for a relatively short time. Elizete has to create a paradise for herself because this island is her home. While Verlia sympathizes with the working-class on the island, she believes that

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<sup>113</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 202.

<sup>114</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 77.

her education makes her knowledge more useful than theirs. This ultimately fails as she is drawn to Elizete, one of the local women who knows more about labor than she does and who highlights Verlia's privileges, albeit while acknowledging their similarities. *In Another Place, Not Here* questions the outsider's right to control how locals view their self-worth and how locals conform to the standards of the outside gaze even to their own detriment (and even when they know they will never attain the socio-economic power of the outsider).

Meanwhile, Elizete wishes for a quiet space of her own where she can look at nature and find peace with her surroundings. This quiet space is the garden for Elizete. Her role in the garden is separate from the gardener role that Yi-Peng Lai articulates where the "gardener is engaged in the process of creating and recreating a landscape. And it is in these recreated landscapes that labor is transformed into representations of culture and of memory."<sup>115</sup> Lai links the gardener to nostalgia, nationalism, labor, and processes of domestication. In contrast, Elizete is an active observer. Elizete is not as trapped in ideas of nostalgia where the past is idealized. Rather, she has empathy for past hurts but sees the present and the future as better places than the past.<sup>116</sup> She is not involved in domestication, but revels in the wildness. Elizete's participation in the garden rests on her ability to relax, to find a space to experience and to express pleasure and not to be expected to serve anyone else physically or their ideas of pleasure and leisure. That these

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<sup>115</sup> Yi-Peng Lai, "Gardening Homeland, Deforesting Nation: Re-imagining the Tropics in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*," *Anglistica* 14, no. 1 (2010): 44.

<sup>116</sup> For more on nostalgia in Brand, see also Eleanor Ty, "Representing 'Other' Diasporas in Recent Global Canadian Fiction," *College Literature* 38, no. 4 (2011): 98-114, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/stable/41302890>. Ty looks at the role of nostalgia and daily, cultural practices in diasporic communities as a way of both mourning a lost homeland and creating a sense of community.

experiences are denied to women of color—particularly those from the laboring class—is a form of environmental discrimination where their bodies do not usually gain access to such spaces without having to fulfil someone else’s fantasies.<sup>117</sup> Brand presents the garden space as somewhere for Elizete to articulate and experience pleasure thereby resisting dominant modes of systemic oppression.<sup>118</sup> The garden space even quiets the abusive parent that Elizete is sent to live with. Brand writes, “All that temper, all that disagreeableness, kneading and tamping and burrowing, it was the smell like burnt bread and green crushed leaves that quieted her.”<sup>119</sup> This is the only peace the abusive woman encounters. It is not the act of gardening that calms her but being in the garden itself. However, due to her need to support herself economically she does not spend much time in the garden (nor is this an excuse for her abuse towards the young Elizete). However, this does not change that it is the garden that brings her peace.

Elizete finds great comfort in the natural world as it exists in the contemporary Caribbean. This is a natural world altered by the plantation system and colonialism, but it

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<sup>117</sup> For more on environmental discrimination in the Caribbean, see also April Karen Baptiste, and Kevon Rhiney, “Climate Justice and the Caribbean: An Introduction,” *Geoforum* 73 (July 2016): 17–21, doi.10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.04.008; see also Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Bagasse: Caribbean Art and the Debris of the Sugar Plantation,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Jill Didur and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 73-94.

<sup>118</sup> This blending of origin stories heightens the inability to extricate oneself in the service of creating a completely individual story and dovetails with Edouard Glissant's concept of creolization in Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999). Glissant states that the starting point of a culture no longer matters, only the mixing which occurs in the aftermath (125). For Glissant, the mixture of cultures is generative and produces something new because of the rootlessness he locates in the creolized Caribbean cultures, and he finds that this mixture is particularly Caribbean.

<sup>119</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 34-35.

is still a natural world that maintains a type of organic blending indicative of the material reality of the history of labor on the island. Brand conceives of the natural world as a balm to some of the violence and shows the importance of garden spaces in providing mental safety for women like Elizete, who values the ability to think and to feel in these spaces. Elizete believes in naming the plants and animals of the land, but not with the same intention as the colonists.<sup>120</sup> She does not know the names of local organisms, so she names them herself, commenting: “Is a lot of bird to name—busy wing, better walking, come by chance, wait and see...I say to myself that if I say these names for Adela it might bring back she memory of herself and she true name. And perhaps I also would not feel so lonely for something I don’t remember.”<sup>121</sup> Elizete finds belonging in the act of naming and does not gain from her act of naming. She wishes to create a sort of community between herself and Adela, her adoptive mother, and believes that the land will forge that relationship for her. Elizete’s loneliness is linked to being part of the black diaspora. Some of her feelings are tied to what her people lost in the horrendous Middle Passage. She believes that knowing the land will atone for some of this loss. These moments of naming the local flora and fauna are peaceful for her—in stark contrast to the violence she often experiences inside houses.<sup>122</sup>

Brand shows the role of storytelling and the point of view of the narrator in perpetuating the existing power dynamic on the island that places women of color on a

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<sup>120</sup> For more on Elizete’s naming of the plants, see also, John Corr’s work on Elizete and the biogram in, John Corr, “Affective Coordination and Avenging Grace: Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” *Canadian Literature* no. 201 (Summer 2009): 113-29.

<sup>121</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> In naming the local flora and fauna, like Mala, Elizete creates her own language with nature.

lower standing. Elizete is forced to listen to the heartbreak Isaiah feels, while he never considers the damage his actions have on her. Elizete comments: “I would stand at the bottom looking at him hoping that the bitter juice from the fruit burn him to death for I know that it is poison. I carried a mountain inside of me... What she make him eat, how she tie his mind. It could not compensate for what he do to me.”<sup>123</sup> Elizete has compassion for Isaiah, but also knows that she deserves better than how he is allowed to treat her. Elizete’s imagination also turns to the land as a source of revenge for Isaiah raping her. She talks of wanting the “bitter juice from the fruit [to] burn him to death.”<sup>124</sup> She wants the land to understand her anger. Furthermore, she showcases an understanding of local poisons, thereby highlighting that she possesses dangerous knowledge. Judging by this knowledge, Elizete could easily kill Isaiah, but unlike him she does not wish to act in anger—even if she thinks it and is capable of seeing vengeance.

Part of the rationale behind the violence Elizete faces at the hands of her husband, Isaiah, is because Elizete is seen as his property. Isaiah rapes her every night while comparing her to his estranged, lighter-skinned ex-wife.<sup>125</sup> He believes that she is more deserving of tender-hearted treatment than the darker-skinned Elizete. Elizete’s treatment of the garden-space shows that she is tender-hearted. This is not to say that she is more tender-hearted than the ex-wife—the novel never gives the reader access to the ex-wife—this is just to say that she is tender-hearted. The dismissal of consent is an act of cruelty

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<sup>123</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Chandin does a similar act with his daughters. Like Isaiah, he assaults girls of color partially out of feeling of being emasculated by the lighter-skinned (or white) objects of desire.

that is inherited and affects both the people and the land. It also has a long history on the island. Midori Saito focuses on how the colonists used women's bodies for reproductive labor.<sup>126</sup> The colonists create the idea that the islands exist for the sole benefit of the colonial power. Saito writes, "[T]he planters believed that, by giving the natives or slaves a drop of white blood, they could 'enlighten' these 'ignorant' creatures. To facilitate their project, they created another myth, namely that—just like the Caribbean landscape—the native women and slave women were willing to be manipulated."<sup>127</sup> The women in *In Another Place, Not Here*, show that there is no willingness in their forced compliance. However, their experiences with men—particularly Elizete's experiences with men both on and off the island—highlight the fact there remains an idea that black women's bodies are owned by men. Elizete and Verlia's actions refute this notion. They underscore that the landscape the men think they control can easily become ruin and caters to the needs of marginalized women while denying the desire to make money and showcase the property owner's power.

That said, Brand draws attention to how Verlia misses agentive acts Elizete performs because Verlia does not recognize the intelligence and lived knowledge of these people. Verlia's tendency to discredit different ideas of beauty, success, and knowledge renders her unable to understand this knowledge. Brand writes about how reimagining the land becomes a source of happiness for Elizete and is a way for Elizete to cope with the everyday violence inflicted on her. In regard to Elizete protecting herself from her

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<sup>126</sup> Midori Saito, "On Representations of Nature and Women in Caribbean Literature," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences* 55, no. 1 (Dec 2014): 27-28, doi: 10.15057/27039.

<sup>127</sup> Saito, "On Representations of Nature and Women," 28 [quotations in original].

abusive maternal figure, Brand writes, “And Elizete would brace her back for licks and the woman calling out something she had done wrong last week or yesterday, not knowing that she could not lift her hand against Elizete without tiring or feeling more pain in her head because Elizete had already prepared. Threw three stones over her shoulder at the door, one spin under the samaan tree before. Elizete’s small magic.”<sup>128</sup> Elizete turns to the land for protection from the woman’s abuse, and she believes in this protection. While this belief does not stop the woman’s abuse, it emphasizes Elizete’s belief in her own power and reinforces the fact that she desires a different reality. This desire shows that despite her seeming compliance, Elizete is not resigned to the abuse she suffers.

The garden offers Elizete quotidian happiness. She does not often experience joy in her life, so the garden becomes a special space in which she can find an escape from everyday violence. By finding happiness in the land, Elizete is able to resist power structures that seek not only to use her body but also affect her ability to experience more than pain. She expresses her humanity by accessing her sense of beauty. It offers a record of her experiences, something that, according to her experience with Abena, her ancestors could not.

### **The Importance of Storytelling in *In Another Place, Not Here***

In Brand’s novel, the blending of origin stories leads to a generative garden space where multiple stories of pain and hope mix together to create something new. This

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<sup>128</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 34. Please note that Elizete’s adoptive mother is referred to as a maternal figure and not mother because Abena does not think of herself as Elizete’s mother even if Elizete would like her to out of sheer desperation.



process, however, hinges on the present. Focusing on the present creates a new culture not beholden to any of the past cultures, and which establishes its own way of being. It recalls Edouard Glissant's argument regarding the generative quality of entanglement that allows the Caribbean to be a site of invention and not solely a reflection of foreign tastes and foreign standards. Acknowledging the generative space that entanglement creates, leads to a path out of the material (and by extension, ontological) dependence on the (former) colonial powers. This new path is a way to confront the learned racism, sexism, classism, and colorism specific to the history of labor practices, ecological destruction, distribution of wealth, and access to artistic expression in the Caribbean. By situating the narrative squarely among the laboring people, Brand creates a douglarized story that addresses the concerns of local women of color who are the descendants of those brought to labor on the plantations. The local whites, while landowning, do not appear in the actual story as actualized characters, though Brand makes explicit that white supremacy is responsible for the economic disenfranchisement of the local people. The story is about people of color and their desires and concerns. The women in *In Another Place, Not Here* escape by finding in the entanglement a source of dignity, and a way to empathize with the pain of others without excusing the violence being done in the contemporary moment.

In the novel, many of the characters tell their origins, revealing moments of violence in their personal stories and in their collective stories, as members of the black diaspora. The murkiness of locating a standard beginning allows Brand to explore how the characters' identities share a common origin that none of them can quite pinpoint, yet all experience. This murkiness is a source of pain for the characters, and they all seek to escape said pain. For Elizete and Verlia, that way is through a romantic relationship with

each other. Verlia believes that the relationship will hurt her ability to think clinically, thereby hindering the local revolution. However, through her relationship with Elizete, she comes to see that her disinterested knowledge in what it means to be a member of the black laboring class on the island—without a powerful passport to facilitate escape—separates her from the people she hopes to represent. Brand writes, “She [Verlia] looked like the young in me, the not beaten down and bruised, the not pounded between my legs, the not lost my mother, the not raped, the not blooded, the not tired. She looked like me fresh, fresh, searching for good luck tea, leave my house broom, come by here weed. It ease me. It sweet sweet.”<sup>129</sup> Here, Verlia’s difference is her lack of experience with the types of violence that Elizete experiences. The implication is that this type of violence is commonplace for the women on the island, hence the reason Verlia stands out. However, Elizete also associates Verlia’s freshness with her own when she is in the garden. Elizete associates the garden with happiness. It is an escape from the abuse she suffers, but it is also a real, physical space where she is able to experience joy and express desire. It is the space in which she feels at home (and where she feels safe).

On the island, Verlia too finds a type of belonging in the land. While in Canada, Verlia experiences cold rain and her mind goes to the island: “So in the November rain Vee is thinking of tamarinds. Tamarinds that cut the roof of her mouth. Tamarinds she never really liked, not as much as Pomeracs, perfumed, velvet and red. Then of pods of purple dust on the road under a lilac tree hanging. Then pink mountains, tumbling mountains of poui petals.”<sup>130</sup> This is not just nostalgia for Verlia. The Pomeracs Verlia

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<sup>129</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 15-16.

<sup>130</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 199.

focuses on are not common outside of the Caribbean, and so they will be nearly impossible to find, but remain part of her idea of happiness and serenity. The poui tree is also singular to the Caribbean region and is again, one of the distinct memories for Verlia.<sup>131</sup> For her to create an idea of home in the coldness of a Canadian autumn, Verlia needs to think of Caribbean vegetation, specifically instances when she is alone in the vegetation. Verlia's quiet type of happiness is based on familiarity and allows her to create her own idea of paradise that does not conform to a colonial understanding of the Caribbean as a (neo)plantation site. By creating this alternative version of paradise in the Caribbean, Verlia signals a different, more inclusive idea of home on the island where marginalized women can experience safety and privacy.

The memories Verlia has that she uses to create an idea of home are not the only encounters she has with the local flora while she is on the island. Verlia observes how others used local nature to try to force her to make them money. As a child, she had the ability to dream in a way that elders could interpret and then play winning numbers in the local lotteries. Her family tried to influence this ability with teas made from local plants. Brand writes, "Tante Emilia ... wrapped [Verlia's] head in aloe and tiger balm and put them to bed. Tante Emilia made her drink chadon beni and razor grass and shining bush grass and threw an egg in water on Sunday just as the sun came to the horizon, which was the wrong ritual but she decided to try anything to make sense of her niece's dreams again."<sup>132</sup> As with the vegetation that Verlia recalls from moments of solitude, these plants are commonplace in the Caribbean, though not in Canada where she is sent to live.

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<sup>131</sup> The poui tree is a flowering tree that blooms once a year in a fashion similar to the cherry blossom tree.

<sup>132</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 128-129.

However, these are not mentioned in Verlia's ideas of a home or a paradisiacal space because these plants were forced on her body in an attempt to influence her to make the family money. Rather, Verlia learns to understand what home means by associating home with a familiarity with the local vegetation in her memories in diaspora when she thinks of the island while living in Canada.

Brand's novel presents garden space as a site where women are allowed solitude and do not need to work, thereby allowing them the space to remove their bodies from the need to labor for those in power. Elizete first finds what functions as her garden space while trying to stay away from her abusive guardian. She uses the wildness of the garden space to create her own idea of beauty. For her, pleasure is separate from ownership, for the latter destroys the form of enjoyment she finds in her relationship with the land. Elizete displays this knowledge even as a child, thinking to herself, "I get to find out these things as a child and in my smallness all I could think was how the names of things would make this place beautiful."<sup>133</sup> She finds escape in her gardens because she starts to feel that she does not need to be subservient to holdovers from colonialism. This space is a priority for her, one that is not easy to find given the poverty she, and women like her, experience in their day-to-day lives. Her poverty limits her access to these spaces that are far from the plantations that these women work on (as is the case when she is sent to marry her abusive husband). Furthermore, her poverty limits the time she has to relax. Brand shows how economic disenfranchisement leads to a type of mental exhaustion that makes it difficult to simply exist in these green spaces as Elizete was able to when she was a child. The novel underscores how safety and privacy become categories of

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<sup>133</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 23.

privilege, and that such privilege is denied to certain bodies because of class, race, and gender.

However, the women attain this privacy in the ruinate, a space disobedient to the idea that land must be orderly and constantly toiled on in order to be useful. Elizete's garden space exists away from the home she is sent to. Elizete's garden provides safety because it does not succumb to the destructive forces of the plantation. This is not the manicured pseudo-wildness of tended English gardens. This is the Caribbean ruinate, where through decay the land begins to combat the ecological destruction wrought by the plantation system. It is only considered wild because it is unknown to the sort of people who catalogue specimens in order to gain social recognition from those in power. This garden is wild in that there are no orderly lines of vegetables, no cultivated flowers, no strict reasoning behind the plants in the garden. For Elizete, the garden does not need to be catalogued by writing down names and having those names tied to a written description of a specimen's look and uses. For her, the beauty of the plants cannot be contained by words that need an audience in order to be important. The privacy of the garden, of having experiences that are not known, and that harm nothing within the space, is the priority, not the extraction of money or the display of catalogued knowledge.

### **Creating a Sense of Home through the Local**

The characters in Brand's novel are involved in the process of creating a joyful home space through the use of local flora. Brand is concerned with actualizing one's happiness and she focuses on how the characters are stuck in narratives because of the historical and cultural context in which they were born. However, she also presents ways

to achieve happiness by focusing on the desire to find and express happiness. Those desires are not always rooted in a disinterested understanding of economic systems of oppression, but rather in the messiness of human relationships, and human desires for love and the expression and experience of sensuality.<sup>134</sup> Desire is fundamental to the human experience because it exists in the privacy of a person's mind and tells of a person's character and motivations. It is this form of privacy, especially, that is understood through looking at the gardens in these texts, as they offer a glimpse into the fantastical worlds the women protagonists of these novels create for themselves. This fantastical world is the only space which affords them safety because it is not held to inherited symbols of success that perpetuate systems of oppression.

Elizete has to create a paradise for herself because the island is her home. She does this through the local plants. Verlia does not understand Elizete's relationship to the land, nor the need for Elizete to find comfort in plants and garden spaces. Once, while in the local market, Verlia observes Elizete buying seeds and comments, "I don't know how she can bear it. She's busy looking at okra plants and pumpkin vines and rain and talking about when to plant what and how dry this rainy season is. She has no idea."<sup>135</sup> Elizete believes that the land provides a means to release pain and express beauty and sensuality. Verlia's markers of success are still rooted in survival and in hegemonic colonial ideas of socio-economic success. Elizete's ability to question whether land should be owned at all

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<sup>134</sup> See also, erotic maroonage in Ronal Cummings, "Queer Theory and Caribbean Writing," in *Routeledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael Bucknor and Alison Donnell (New York: Routledge, 2011), 323-31.

<sup>135</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 222.

affords her the ability to escape the power hierarchies by not wishing for their symbols of success.

While Elizete finds comfort in the land she never wishes to possess it. Her ability to find comfort in the natural world leads her to associate knowing a place with having a relationship to the natural world. She expresses this when she moves to Toronto and no longer has such a relationship. She remarks, “No sound that was the usual sound, no chorus of beetles, crickets, frogs beginning with night, ending with morning,” concluding, “And since this was how she knew the signs of things, she was lost.”<sup>136</sup> The “things” Elizete refers to are signs of home. Without a relationship to the natural world in Canada, Elizete feels out of place. She cannot find happiness in Canada because her happiness is linked to the natural world on the island. Her physical escape to Canada then is not what brings her happiness, but her escape in the garden does.

Brand interrogates the harm of the outsider’s gaze as a means of understanding the lived conditions of those on the island. Elizete describes how Verlia sees the Caribbean, specifically the sugar plantation and the pain this memory causes Verlia: “She [Verlia] had sadness enough for all their [former enslaved people’s] sorrow. She remember them in she body. Vein does remember blood. The spirits call she and make their display in she. You don’t ever live for yourself there.”<sup>137</sup> Elizete learns that her pleasures do not matter to her husband or the community.<sup>138</sup> She learns that the labor that

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<sup>136</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 68. For more on how knowledge of the natural world informs an understanding of space, see also, Paul Huebener, “‘No Moon to Speak of’: Identity and Place in Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” *Callaloo* 30, no. 2 (2007): 615-625, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

<sup>137</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 84.

<sup>138</sup> For more on pleasure in *In Another Place, Not Here*, see also, Joanne Saul, “In the Middle of Becoming’: Dionne Brand’s Historical Vision *In Another Place, Not Here*, A

can be extracted from her body is all that matters and that she must supply it. But Elizete's body is just as capable of empathizing with the pain of the ancestors' toil as Verlia's. However, Elizete considers the pain that Verlia feels. She believes that Verlia is more sensitive to the inherited trauma of their shared ancestors because she is the more empathetic of the two. However, Verlia does not afford Elizete the same type of understanding. She views Elizete as less capable of understanding her lived conditions, despite Elizete's clear grasp of both her role and her inability to leave the island. Furthermore, Elizete's explanation of what she thinks Verlia feels indicates that Elizete is very aware of the history of black people on the island, but of the two of them, she is willing to say that Verlia understands it. Verlia does not acknowledge the same in Elizete, due to her initial condescension toward the local. Verlia wants to save Elizete without realizing that Elizete both understands her lived conditions and creates her own form of escape without help from Verlia.

Verlia may express sorrow outwardly, and she might speak more academically on historical matters, but that comes also from her privileged position as an outsider with a passport. She can afford to see only the pain of the island and to constantly think about that pain while on the island for a relatively short time. Elizete addresses Verlia's failure to fully empathize by saying, "I could not help but think that I was the one who would carry the sack into the sea and out, I was the one going to stay and she was playing because she could leave this island anytime."<sup>139</sup> Elizete also questions the seriousness of

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*Map to the Door of No Return*," *Canadian Woman Studies* 23, no. 2 (2004): 59-63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30129775>.

<sup>139</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* 77. For more on the complication of black tourists who are citizens of powerful countries visiting the Caribbean, see also, Philip W. Scher, "When 'Natives' Become Tourists of Themselves: Returning Transnationals and the



Verlia's supposed purpose on the island by using the word "playing." Elizete cannot see Verlia as truly committed to what she is saying because Verlia has the power to leave. Elizete's inability to leave with ease makes her more serious simply because the stakes of her commitment are tied to the island.

Elizete's relationship to the land is separate from Verlia's, whose family teaches Verlia to fear the natural world. Verlia expresses this by saying, "these people [her family] who say a green grasshopper is a visitor, a brown grasshopper, death, a brown moth, death, a brown lizard, death, who had so many signs for death that looking into each other's faces frightened them."<sup>140</sup> Verlia's family's fears express an understanding of the role bad luck played in their oppression. These superstitions then are a way to try and exert control over the uncontrollable. Their inability to control luck, to instead, always find bad luck, is an expression of their understanding of their lack of power and teaches Verlia that survival should be her primary concern. This is not to deny the importance of survival, but to acknowledge that they do not teach her to consider her happiness, things that the colonialists absolutely valued while denying those rights to others. Elizete does not seek to find fear in the land. She does not see those around her as

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Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago," in *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*, ed. Garth L. Green and Philip W (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); see also, Pallavi Rastogi, "'The Leeches Are the Least of the Worries': Blankscapes and Another Other in Jamaica Kincaid's *Among Flowers* and Biyi Bandele's *The King's Rifle*," *Research in African Literatures* 46, no. 1 (March 2015): 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.46.1.19>. Rastogi uses Jamaica Kincaid's *Among Flowers* and Biyi Bandele's *The King's Rifle* to underscore the complexities of travelling as a formerly colonized person into another postcolonial world and how this complicates Otherness and Strangeness.

<sup>140</sup> Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 122.

competitors in a race to eke out an existence nor to, in Verlia's case, make a name for herself.

Elizete wants only to appreciate the beauty she experiences in the flowers and plants. Verlia's upbringing differs from Elizete's, whose experience is limited to the island, where Elizete has such a violent childhood and is on the receiving end of extreme economic disenfranchisement. Verlia comes to see the symbiotic relationship between power and property, where property as a symbol of success leads to hierarchies and violence regardless of which group is in power. Furthermore, Verlia comes to appreciate the agentive power of Elizete's decision to find beauty in the island and to be happy in those moments of beauty. She comes to see that Elizete's happiness is not complacent but is a means of doing more than just surviving on the island.

## **Conclusion**

The belief in land as property, and only as property, leads to cruelty because it inevitably creates hierarchies, and therefore, vulnerabilities. Some members of the community are denied access to spaces where they can safely enjoy green and clean surroundings because these hierarchies inevitably make enjoyment and relaxation a privilege. The vulnerable must constantly succumb to the rights of property owners who attempt to deny them access to private and safe spaces. The women of these novels escape these strictures placed on them by ensuring that the experience sensuality in the garden space despite experiencing violence and oppression in domestic and domesticated settings by rewilding the garden space and therefore no longer tying themselves to the symbols of success inherited from the colonists.

In both novels, Mala, Elizete and Verlia experience a sense of belonging in garden space. For all three women, the plants and animals in this space are local and thrive in decay and rot, while bursting forth with local beauty. None of these spaces are orderly, but their entanglements are comforting to those made vulnerable by the social dynamics inherited by settler colonialism and rationalized in white supremacist racism and misogynist sexism.

The garden space is an expression of the women's agency. It is an act of resilience and resistance to exploitative racialized and gendered dynamics and is based on the women's desire for happiness. Here, they demonstrate respect and kindness for the locals and facilitate the ability for the local ecology and local people to thrive despite the persistence of colonial domination. While the garden space is generally close to the physical home of these women, the next chapter explores how locals create navigate the island in ways that continue to express the locals' desire to not only create a home on the island, but their desire to break free from colonial derived socio-economic norms in ways that preserve their dignity and express their more sensual needs.

## Chapter Four

**The Persistence of Nature: Folklore and Pleasure Practices in *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting and Omeros***

In Shivanee Ramlochan's *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, the persistence of Caribbean nature is made possible in large part by folklore and pleasure practices resistant to the outsized influence of foreign powers. Folklore and pleasure practices are particularly local modes thanks to their douglarized evolution, an organic derivation from the island's laborers, who both wittingly and unwittingly establish their tastes and practices in opposition to foreign standards and expectations. Walcott's imposition of a Caribbean sensibility, history, and knowledge on a series of foreign forms in *Omeros* highlights the tensions of this anxiety, foregrounding local needs and concerns against still-present and powerful foreign demands. Ramlochan goes a great step beyond, engaging deeply with folklore figures, privileging the local dialect in her work, and actively rejecting foreign tastes and the inherited notions of respectability locals of a certain class seek to impose. These direct assertions of local agency work to name the desires of the island's people and help preserve diasporic traditions. Further, Walcott in particular celebrates the local Caribbean landscape's greatness, an emphasis that underscores storytelling as an essential component in preserving local pride in the natural environment. Ramlochan's focus on the douglarized dark eroticism of folklore and pleasure practices gives voice to despoiled human and ecological entities and, in a significant turn, does so by way of local idiom and rhythms of speech. Accessing these voices also allows her to interrogate whose desires are acknowledged by whom, and to demonstrate the power of not only resisting but ignoring the foreign gaze. Folklore as a

generative element in Caribbean culture, from childhood on, demonstrates the power of douglarized culture in the islands. Pleasure practices, when freed from a foreign gaze, work in much the same way, offering a chance to translate the products of a private region of the mind into a cultural sensibility responsive to and reflective of local desires. Yet the conflict between the sensibilities Walcott and Ramlochan present, and the lived experience of contemporary Caribbean locals, only reinforces the central role nature must play in charting a Caribbean future.

In the colonial imaginary, leisure is reserved for foreigners (and local whites) to enjoy in the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> The descendants of those who performed manual labor on the plantation still wrestle with the economic and cultural ramifications of that exploitative system. However, the leisure of the “foreigner” depends on the exploitation of other (usually black and brown) people, most visibly workers in the tourist industry.<sup>2</sup> Locally

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the construction of the Caribbean as a place of leisure for foreigners, see also, Mimi Sheller, “Natural Hedonism: the Invention of the Caribbean Islands as Tropical Playgrounds,” in *Tourism in the Caribbean: Trends, Development, Prospects*, edited by David Timothy Duval, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 23-38. Sheller argues that the visiting tourists use the locals as a way to project their own constructions of luxuriant lifestyles while denying the exploitative labor practices necessary for such constructions to work. See also, Jonathan Pugh, “The Participation Paradox: Stories from St. Lucia,” in *Caribbean Land and Development Revisited: Studies of the Americas*, ed. Jean Besson, Janet Momsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 95-106. For representations of the Caribbean in photography that perpetuate the tourist imaginary, see also, Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For more on the exploitation of Caribbean black and brown bodies in Caribbean tourist discourse, see also, Susan P. Mains, “In/Secure Conversations: Rethinking *Life and Debt*, Tourism and Caribbean Geopolitics,” *Small Axe* 22, no. 3 (2018): 90–104, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-7249174>. For more on the complications of travel in the Caribbean as a member of the diaspora, see also, Angelique V. Nixon, “Caribbean Migrant Writers and the Politics of Return,” in *Resisting Paradise: Tourism, Diaspora, and Sexuality in Caribbean Culture* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 33-61.

in the Caribbean, this type of leisure then becomes linked to ideas of a middle-class lifestyle and part of what Belinda Edmondson calls “aspirational status.”<sup>3</sup> Aspirational status reflects, “the validation of class status yes, but it also may reflect the desire for higher class status—or the reconciliation of middle-class and working-class status.”<sup>4</sup> This aspiration among some people of color in the local community to attain a higher-class status becomes troublingly aligned with the idea that success necessitates signaling exposure to the outside world—the world outside of the Caribbean—thereby positioning foreign tastes as aspirational. However, in order to financially attain this higher-class status, the local people of color, particularly those on islands that depend on tourism or have a robust tourist industry, still trade on ideas of an authentic local based on the exploitation of the working-class.<sup>5</sup> The tourist imaginary continues to see the Caribbean as a space where foreigners extract disproportionate labor from locals. While the colonial imaginary posits Caribbean space as somewhere to perfect and tame in the name of

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<sup>3</sup> Belinda Edmonson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle-Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Edmondson, *Middlebrow*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> For more on how perceptions of “the outside” inform contemporary understanding of cosmopolitanism and the link between cosmopolitanism and travel, see also, Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002). Cocks uses Edward Said and V.S. Naipaul as two vectors in her argument for access to money facilitating a type of intellectually minded physical movement across countries that in turn leads to a new idea of cosmopolitanism. This cosmopolitanism is classed and raced. It is also gendered given that these two men move into different countries with a type of physical safety that women do not generally enjoy. For more on how being a tourist is informed by Western consumerism and the performance of leisure in the Caribbean, see also, Angeletta K.M. Gourdine, “Caribbean Tabula Rasa: Textual Touristing as Carnival in Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Writing,” *Small Axe* 10, no. 20 (June 1, 2006): 80-96. She argues that leisure is instituted in Western countries and an escape from labor with the intention of transformation is an act of “touristing”. She argues that the Caribbean is a site of transformation then for both native and nonnative tourists.

economic exploitation, the tourist imaginary sees Caribbean space as primarily a site for relaxation. In both imaginaries, though, it is the foreigner who is able to enjoy and relax in Caribbean space. This relaxation is aligned with the socio-economic status of the colonists, making this version of relaxation and leisure aspirational in its conspicuous display. Only the foreigners, in Caribbean space, can experience the type of aspirational leisure exemplified in both the tourist and colonial imaginary. This exclusivity lends itself to local voices and movements that posit alternate visions of what might qualify as aspirational.

Folklore, as used by Derek Walcott in *Omeros* and Shivanee Ramlochan in *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, challenges the aspirational desires of the middle-class in the contemporary Caribbean by questioning the value of the type of leisure exemplified in the tourist imaginary. They present a type of leisure not dependent on making local labor invisible.<sup>6</sup> In essence, folklore demonstrates how *locals* experience

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the Caribbean as site for the leisure of foreigners that plays into a neocolonial imagery of problematic labor practices, see also, Gina Wisker, “‘Your Buried Ghosts Have a Way of Tripping You Up’: Revisioning and Mothering in African-American and Afro-Caribbean Women’s Speculative Horror,” *Femspec* 6, no. 1 (June 2005): 71, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/200046311/>. Wisker uses the women characters in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* to trace the iteration of the Gothic in African-American literature to trace the role of black motherhood and the legacy of slavery. For more on how the American occupation of Trinidad informed the locals’ understanding of leisure, and how the shift to conspicuous consumption mirrored the activities of American soldiers, see also, Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (North Carolina University Press: Chapel Hill, 2007). See also, George Boulukos, “The Horror of Hybridity: Enlightenment, Anti-Slavery and Racial Disgust in Charlotte Smith’s *Story of Henrietta* (1800),” *Essays and Studies* (January 2007): 87-109, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A170506581/LitRC?u=new67449&sid=LitRC&xid=3e246ee0>.

leisure in Caribbean space.<sup>7</sup> Divorced from the idealization of servitude, folkloric representations of leisure also confront the history of violent labor practices in the Caribbean. They offer a type of dignity by insisting on the locals' right to experience leisure, thereby making this type of leisure desirable.

Shivane Ramlochan's *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (both works of poetry) use folkloric figures to navigate the local environment and present an alternative way of being in the island that acknowledges and expresses local desires. First and foremost, folkloric figures navigate the land in ways that are divorced from the (neo) colonial economic system. They can also travel in ways that laborers cannot. Folkloric figures do not work on the plantation and are not exhausted by manual labor by evening time. Instead, they are seen at night wandering the land, free from colonial surveillance.

While folklore figures appear in the plantation and in its vicinity, they are mostly interested in the laborers and not in what is being produced by the plantation. They represent a different way of interacting with the local environment and are not tied to the inherited models of success that cater to the colonists' needs. These figures are instead a response to the violent domination imposed on laboring bodies and on the land itself. As

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<sup>7</sup> For more on how folklore expresses collective memory, see also, Kaisa Ilmonen, "Talking Back to the Bildungsroman: Caribbean Literature and the Dis/location of the Genre," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 25, no. 1 (April 2017): 61, 65, 6, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1923715003/>. Ilmonen shows, among other things, how folklore represents a type of collective storytelling practice that Afro-Caribbean women writers draw on. Her main focus is on how Afro-Caribbean women writers use the character of the grandmother to produce a feminist bildungsroman.



such, these figures signal an ecological past subsumed in a Caribbean that has been shaped by the plantation machine.<sup>8</sup>

The creatures of folklore are traditionally meant to be dangerous—they are not human and lure humans into the lesser known parts of the island. Tales involving the La Diabliesse or *duennes* utilize elements of horror that are meant to elicit fear in those not conforming to the plantation economy.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the mythical creatures, stories featuring iguanas or local fauna introduce these local creatures to explain the existence of the creature or the traditional name of the island.<sup>10</sup> In Walcott's and Ramlochan's books of poetry, however, the element of danger attached to these folkloric figures is diminished as these figures present a way of life on the island that does not require adhering to locally policed ideas of respectability limiting how locals navigate the land.

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<sup>8</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> For more on horror and folklore in the Caribbean specific to zombie imagery, see also, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, and Monika Mueller, *Vampires and Zombies: Transcultural Migrations and Transnational Interpretations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016). For more scholarship on the soucouyant figure in Caribbean fiction, see also, Giselle Liza Anatol, *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015). For contemporary iterations of Caribbean folklore in fiction, see also, Tracey Baptiste, *Rise of the Jumbies* (New York: Algonquin 2019), Baptiste reinvents the folklore figure Mama D'Leau, a half woman, half snake creature that rules the river in her story about a young girl seeking to save her family; see also, Imam Baksh, *Children of the Spider* (Kingston: Blue Banyan Books, 2016), Baksh reinvents Anansi as ruler of a kingdom of sentient spider-beings who try to help two young Amerindian children; see also, Pedro Cabiya, *Wicked Weeds: a Zombie Novel* (Simsbury: Mandel Vilar Press, 2016), Cabiya uses the zombie to underscore race and nationality relations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the relationship between folklore and local creatures that have magical importance in the Caribbean, see also, Sandra Turbay, "Folklore and Popular Conceptions Regarding the Fauna of a Wetland Area on the Caribbean Coast of Columbia," *Agriculture and Human Values* 21, no. 2 (June 2004): 105–110, doi:10.1023/B:AHUM.0000029396.05508.93. Turbay uses social science to look at how folklore among pre-Colombian narrative folklore helps preserve the local wetlands.

As the *duennes* freely roam the land, similarly, the iguanas can enter the landowners' property and elicit fear and guilt. And none of the folkloric figures' actions harm the local ecology.

Ramlochan's and Walcott's figures also represent forms of pleasure, be it sexual or the desire for freedom from existing socio-economic norms. These figures demonstrate a mode of existence in the Caribbean that no longer relies on needing to please the (neo)colonial gaze. Folklore figures are used by Walcott and Ramlochan to show how pleasure and leisure disrupt the systemic barriers that the descendants of those brought to perform labor face—particularly when those descendants remain in the working and laboring class on the islands.

*Omeros* and *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* use folkloric figures to resist the colonial imaginary that sees itself as best equipped to both understand and enjoy the land. Colonized, laboring bodies, when present in a green, clean space, are there to provide useful information to the colonizers. Folkloric figures circumvent this colonial imaginary: they never consider the need to be relevant to that economic system; they exist in the green spaces of the Caribbean without needing to produce profit for external benefit. While they do at times appear to colonial agents, they do not wish for any favors from these people and do not care for what colonialism offers. And when they lure humans away from their homes, it is not with the promise of an increase in socio-economic status; they do not, for example, offer property ownership).<sup>11</sup> Instead, folklore figures provide an escape by offering a different way to navigate the physical land.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on local folklore figures that do offer socio-economic success by acting as trickster figures, see also, Anita Girvan, "Trickster Carbon: Stories, Science, and

In both texts, local folklore is tied to local vegetation and to the blending of diasporic pasts on the islands where the blend acknowledges the desires of the descendants of both the Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diasporas and the violence experienced by both groups. This is the local space that both communities carve out for themselves to provide for their local tastes and local desires. It is not space that exists in the Caribbean that apes European leisure norms. As such, folklore figures present a douglarized commentary on the ways in which labor practices are tied to learned navigations of the land, while at the same time not equating the traumas of both groups have experienced in the Caribbean.<sup>12</sup> As forms of exploitative labor practice in the Caribbean, both indenture and chattel slavery were racialized. Both groups and their descendants experience discrimination stemming from colonialism and the use of their ancestors' bodies in the plantation system.

As representatives of these two diasporic groups with their douglarized histories, folklore tales often code the rebelliousness of the folkloric figure in gendered terms, as female. Colonially-derived models of respectability socially police women supposedly to protect their bodies (and their families' reputations).<sup>13</sup> This model of female sexuality

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Postcolonial Interventions for Climate Justice,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 24, no. 1 (September 2017): 1038–1054, <https://doi.org/10.2458/v24i1.20981>.

<sup>12</sup> For more on douglarization, see also, Sarah England, “Reading the Dougla Body: Mixed-Race, Post-Race, Other Narratives of What It Means to Be Mixed in Trinidad,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17442220701865820>. For a literary history of dougla characters in Anglo-Caribbean fiction, see also Sheila Rampersad, “Ethnicity: the Dougla in Trinidad Literature,” in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor, and Alison Donnell (Axon: Routledge 2011), 366–373.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the policing of women's sexuality, see also, Elina Valovirta, *Sexual Feelings: Reading Anglophone Caribbean Women's Writing through Affect* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014).

keeps women in particular tied to maintaining codes of conduct and navigating the land in ways that hinder their independence. The model of respectability also perpetuates neocolonial norms that instill shame by suggesting that a woman's nonconformity will affect her and her family's socio-economic standing and well-being. Women who do not act according to the rules of respectability are considered wild. As Ian Strachan describes further: "'Wild' is also a word in the Caribbean used to describe women who do not conform to certain codes of conduct. A woman may be considered 'wild' if she laughs too loudly, curses, fights, dresses in a revealing manner, sits in a certain way, or drinks beer from the bottle."<sup>14</sup> This wildness opposes learned socio-economic normative behavior and is generally indicative of a woman expressing sensuality. In contrast, folklore figures provide a frame where desire and survival are not mutually exclusive, and this combination can be experienced by the descendants of both Indo- and Afro-Caribbean people. Although traditionally meant to evoke fear, in works by these writers, folkloric figures represent a way out of the type of socio-economic stasis and vulnerability faced by racialized and economically disenfranchised groups. Both Ramlochan and Walcott use folkloric figures to discuss past traumas and present a means of escape. By douglarizing the purpose of folklore figures, Ramlochan and Walcott present a more inclusive version of belonging that acknowledges the history of labor in the Caribbean, the locals' pleasure and desires, and the racial and gendered dynamics on the islands.

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Gregory Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 249.

Disengaged from the labor system, folkloric figures help to reconfigure the relationship the working class (and descendants of laborers) have with the land. As figures for “the local” themselves, they function in resistance to dominant representations of laborers and the land. Folklore presents a narrative mode for acknowledging the ecological destruction and violence of colonial labor practices while expressing local pleasure and desire in ways that do not end in understood markers of socio-economic success. The figures become a way to reconsider social dynamics on the island that no longer conform to the inherited rules of respectability created by foreign, exploitative bodies of power.

### **Folklore as an Assertion of Diasporic Traditions**

*Omeros* is a long poem set on the French Caribbean island of St. Lucia, that deals with French colonialism, chattel slavery, neocolonial tourism, ecological destruction and the island’s economic dependence on former colonial powers. It is a Caribbean re-read of Homer. The poem is broken into six sections, each called books, and traces various locals’ fraught relationships to their sense of place and belonging on the island. Helen, a local black woman, features in each of the books although she becomes progressively less of an individual and more of a symbol of the island’s commodification as the poem progresses. *Omeros* starts with Achille and Hector, two local fishermen fighting over Helen. Although both are consumed with a possessive love for Helen, Helen does not care for either with the same intensity. She is more concerned with being independent—a trait that makes many locals resent her. In the second book, Major Plunkett, a local white, wants to write the history of the island from a perspective favorable to the colonists.

Helen is the maid of his wife, Maud. The first and early reference to a folkloric figure occurs when Maud gives Helen her old yellow dress, which looks better on Helen and makes Helen resemble the well-dressed La Diabliesse folklore figure.<sup>15</sup> Like La Diabliesse, Helen is renowned for her beauty, and this beauty is racially coded as the dangerous beauty of a woman of color. Helen is admired by many men and able to get them to assist her because of her otherworldly beauty. However, in helping her, the men ultimately come to some kind of harm, making it seem dangerous to be kind to her. Soon after, Helen leaves her job working for the Plunketts. In the third book, Achille encounters a Creole- speaking God who impresses on Achille the history of chattel slavery, the attempted genocide of the indigenous people, and the ecocide of the local trees. Achille mourns the loss of Helen, who is now the mother of a young child and no longer a part of his life. Here, Walcott references the Indo-Caribbean diaspora with the line, “in the hold of the *Fatel/ Rozack*,” evoking the first ship to bring indentured Indian laborers to the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup> The reference alludes also to chattel slavery, thereby linking both diasporas to the plantation labor system. The fourth book follows a local poet speaker as he goes to foreign lands and deals with the tension between home and cosmopolitanism. This poetic persona sees Helen, but she is more of an idealized beauty than a person at this point. Book five contains temporal shifts between African slaves and a contemporary omniscient speaker who is afflicted by the memory of chattel slavery. In book six and seven, the last books in *Omeros*, the poet returns to the island

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<sup>15</sup> Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 64.

<sup>16</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 156. The *Fatel Rozack* here sounds like the *Fatel Razack*, the first ship to bring indentured Indian laborers to the Caribbean. This event is celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago as Indian Arrival Day, a festival used as a site of queer love in Shivane Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* (Leeds: Peepal Press, 2017).

and Ma Kilman, a local black woman, described earlier as an “obeah-woman/ webbed with a spider’s knowledge,” thereby linking her to Anansi, cures the wound of another character, Philocete.<sup>17</sup> This book culminates with the island’s continued existence and survival, despite all that has happened. The first two books, and to some extent, the third and fourth, are driven by a heteronormative narrative of possessive male love for a woman. The central narrative changes once Helen cements her agentive disregard for any man and the narrative centers on the men’s position on the island and their respective quests to matter in a grand narrative.

The first book borrows from the *Iliad* in terms of invoking the muse, employing (mostly) hexameter, epic simile and long narrative tale. Anthony Carrigan argues that Walcott uses the epic form to resist the destructive land development practices St. Lucia employs in order to court tourists.<sup>18</sup> Line Henriksen argues that while *Omeros* may not strictly be an epic, it is epic in terms of ambition, and that the main reason *Omeros* cannot be considered strictly an epic is because of its intentional wrestling with postcoloniality.

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<sup>17</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 58. For more on the politics of using the term “Obeah,” when describing the Afro-Caribbean spiritual practice, see also, Marie Meudec, “Ordinary Ethics of Spiritual Work and Healing in St. Lucia, or Why Not to Use the Term Obeah,” *Small Axe* 21, no. 1 (2017): 17–32. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/651754>. Meudec focuses on St. Lucia and argues that the term “Obeah” often carries a negative (though not necessarily derogatory) charge, although the practice is also recognized as being anticolonial. She argues that because of the initial (and long-standing) negative charge of the term obeah, many apply the term to practices that are ethically and morally questionable. She also observes that men are more likely to self-identify as obeah practitioners. For more on the representation of Ma Kilman as a healer-figure, see also, Loretta Collins, “‘We Shall All Heal’: Ma Kilman, the Obeah Woman, as Mother-Healer in Derek Walcott’s ‘Omeros,’” *Literature and Medicine* 14, no. 1 (1995): 146–162, doi.10.1353/lm.1995.0001.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Carrigan, “Postcolonial Tourism, Island Specificity, and Literary Representation: Observations on Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*,” *Space and Culture* 13, no. 2 (May 2010): 154–163, <https://doi.org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.1177/1206331209358220>

Henriksen shows that the text employs parody to “undermine the authority of Homeric or Virgilian epic.”<sup>19</sup> Books two and three borrow from the georgic poetic form’s interest in outdoor agricultural labor, and the relationship between labor and land, as Meredith L. McGill describes in defining the georgic as a form that “mobilize[s] discourse about land, value, and human labor.”<sup>20</sup> *Omeros* finally ends by borrowing from the lyric form in terms of first-person narration, trochaic (mostly) meter, and emphasis on the personal and engagement with the pastoral tradition.

Walcott uses folklore to show how the locals retain knowledge of their diasporic past and respect the power of that past to continue to inflect their present. Walcott writes, “They called her Ma Kilman// because the village was darkened by their belief/ in her as a *gardeuse*, Sybil, obeah-woman/ webbed with a spider’s knowledge of an after-life// in her cracked lenses. She took Holy Communion/ with Maud sometimes, but there was an old African/ doubt that paused before taking the wafer’s white leaf.”<sup>21</sup> The villagers believe that Ma Kilman practices Obeah, a Caribbean religion with African roots. Chiji Akoma writes that “the representation of the mythic imagination drawn from folklore is not a question of embellishment. Rather, such a representation is the interrogation of the Caribbean reality, the revisitation of the Caribbean past through the mythic sign, and

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<sup>19</sup> Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety Ezra Pound’s Cantos and Derek Walcott’s Omeros as Twentieth-Century Epics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 235.

<sup>20</sup> Meredith L. McGill, “The Poetry of Slavery,” in *Cambridge Companion to Slavery in American Literature*, ed. Ezra F. Tawil, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 116. For more on a postcolonial response to the georgic, see also, Suvir Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 59. For more on how the contemporary Caribbean uses Greek mythology, see also, Emily Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues Between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).



most important, it is a means of fashioning a different aesthetic paradigm that takes into consideration both their New World and African heritage.”<sup>22</sup> The line “the village was darkened by their belief” highlights that the villagers maintain their knowledge of their ancestors’ traditions, giving a dual meaning to “darkened.” On one hand, the use of “darkened” acknowledges their position as black and brown people on the island. On the other hand, “darkness” can denote a lack of modernity—possibly because of their belief in Obeah. Walcott also refers to her as a “[s]ybil,” an oracle, then, in the Greek tradition, showing that while Obeah is maligned in the colonial imaginary, this position as Obeah-woman is one held in the Greek tradition (where Homer comes from). However, the use of “darkened” shows that Ma Kilman’s practice, and the belief that the villagers have in her practice, makes them seem less modern, and that lack of modernity is linked to their status as people of color.

In writing of Ma Kilman’s “spider knowledge,” Walcott directly evokes the folkloric figure of Anansi, underscoring how old traditions continue to resist dying out through the use of storytelling. While the more canonical Greek myth might be elevated, Anansi is still known by the people and that existence and longevity is a type of resistance and is a part of the folk consciousness of the Caribbean. Serafin Rolden-Santiago describes this aspect of a local “folk consciousness.”<sup>23</sup> He writes that Caribbean

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<sup>22</sup> Chiji Akoma, “Folklore and the African-Caribbean Narrative Imagination: The Example of Roy Heath,” *Research in African Literatures* 29, no.3, (1998): 82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820621>.

<sup>23</sup> Serafin Rolden-Santiago, “Thematic and Structural Functions of Folklore in Caribbean Literature: The Case of the ‘Written’ and the ‘Oral,’” *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 4, no.1 (2005): 4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40986166>. For more on orality and folklore in the Caribbean, see also, Sarah Lawson Welsh, “Experiments in Brokenness: The Creative Use of Creole in David Dabydeen’s *Slave Song*,” *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean*

writers use folklore for: “‘the substance of life’ which is sought for, that is the folk consciousness imbedded in Caribbean texts.”<sup>24</sup> Rolden-Santiago sees folk consciousness as a desire to resist colonialism and neo-colonialism. He specifically looks at the ways folklore can create a type of orality in written works by Caribbean authors, which allows for a type of resistance to more dominant canonical work. In *Omeros*, this folk knowledge marks Ma Kilman as a holder of cultural knowledge and the surviving power of the ancestors. She is the trickster figure who can take the communion wafer without believing in its power, thereby duping those in power to believe her false subservience. Through the Anansi imagery, Walcott constructs the local as never fully submissive, even when locals perform acts inherited from the colonists. Ma Kilman is also understood by the locals within the framework of folklore imagery showing that a separate rubric exists on the island within which the locals understand each other.

Describing Walcott’s use of the lyric specifically in regard to the pastoral tradition, Sonya Posmentier writes: “Walcott explicitly unites antipastoralism with political resistance, but only to reclaim and reframe pastoral poetry for different purposes. Walcott reappropriates the mode to critique a colonial system in which people and place alike were private property.”<sup>25</sup> Walcott directly references the lyric form and its futility in the postcolonial setting, writing, “I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea./...whose grin was a white breaker cresting, but whose frown/ was a growing thunderhead, whose fist of iron// would do me a greater honor if it held on/ to my casket’s oarlocks than mine

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*Literature* eds. Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh (London: Routledge, 1996), 416-442.

<sup>24</sup> Serafin Rolden-Santiago, “Thematic and Structural Functions of Folklore,” 4.

<sup>25</sup> Sonya Postmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: the Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 113.

lifting his own/ when both anchors are lowered in the one island,// but now the idyll dies, the goblet is broken,/ and rainwater trickles down the brown cheek of a jar[.]”<sup>26</sup> The “idyll” here refers to the lyric Nature poetry tradition, but Walcott writes that the idyll “dies” in the Caribbean. This is not peaceful labor done on tranquil land. Walcott’s use of it here in the ending section of *Omeros* suggests that the plantation system cannot be fully actualized in the epic (or georgic) traditions because the land and the labor system were entirely too violent and exploitative. The line, “rainwater trickles down the brown cheek,” links the imagery to a person of color, and the “fist of iron,” “casket’s oarlocks,” and the “Caribbean sea” to slavery, the legacy of that system, and colonialism more broadly. The violence of history, then, leads to the deterioration of poetic, generic form despite the poet’s best intentions. The idyll, in *Omeros*, is a foreign concept. It functions under foreign (meaning settler-colonial) logic, unlike folklore which represents primarily local concerns in local settings. Folklore is a way to render Caribbean space knowable to locals without concern for foreign consumption.

Folklore appears in *Omeros* in the form of Ma Kilman as a symbol of diasporic people’s maintenance of their storytelling traditions despite colonial oppression. Figures from folklore become a way to express a dignity that is denied in the material reality of the colonial, and postcolonial, context. Folklore’s link to diasporic pasts, and to lost flora and fauna, also represent a potential future for local denizens, providing a form of agency that can also address, through storytelling, the violence of colonialism. When this link to the past is coded as “backward,” Walcott shows that such an assumption is based on a valuation of certain ancient traditions (for example, Greek myths) over other traditions

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<sup>26</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 320-321.

(for example African myths). The locals maintain their diasporic traditions, and these traditions are shared in the villages that are home to various ethnic group). By maintaining their folk consciousness, locals create a more inclusive community because folklore both ties them to their past and offers a mode for them to express a more honest iteration of their current lived conditions.

### **The Return to the Forest: The Greatness of the Local Caribbean Landscape**

One of the tensions faced by an author in choosing to work poetically and narratively with folkloric figures is that they are usually confined to the countryside, while the humans in the texts exist in cities that are aspirational spaces for locals who wish to excel in the neocolonial economic system. The countryside is also usually associated with “backwardness” given the prevalence of agricultural and manual labor, both of which are tied to slavery and colonialism. Walcott deals with this tension in *Omeros* in the voice of a West Indian poet who travels to more prominent countries in order to gain fame and to be formally educated. The poet wishes to return, and yet the internalization of the need to be deemed important by (neo)colonial entities remains, as the poet declares, “But before you return, you must enter cities/ that open like *The World’s Classics*, in which I dreamt/ I saw my shadow on their flagstones, histories// that carried me over the bridge of self-contempt,/ though I never stared in their rivers, great abbeys/ soaring in net-webbed stone, when I felt diminished// even by a postcard.”<sup>27</sup> The greatness that the poet sees is in infrastructure—humans’ ability to shape the environment to meet their needs. Walcott is specifically looking at how this infrastructure is meant to

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<sup>27</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 187.

convey an idea of greatness. Walcott's poetic persona comes from a place that was meant to be a temporary stopgap on some colonists' road to economic success. His towns and cities are not built with the same idea of permanence (or even with the same aesthetic sensibility) of the postcard pictures of Europe that he encounters and feels diminished by. This creates the "self-contempt" he feels but starts to also breed the need to gain acceptance from the former colonial powers.

The poet continues to discuss the allure of cities and why cities might seem to be greater than the countryside, especially since he also has no pride in the Caribbean city. He learns to align cities with a type of modernity that the Caribbean is not equated with.<sup>28</sup> He writes: "But there is pride in cities, so remember this:// Once you have seen everything and gone everywhere,/ cherish our island for its green simplicities,/ enthrone yourself, if your sheet is a barber-chair."<sup>29</sup> The omniscient narrator is implying that the wanderer (a stand-in for a younger, less worldly version of the narrator) will return home and, hopefully, not be disconnected from the simplicity of the islands. This discontent in the younger self, who the narrator thinks indicates a shared feeling among local men, is linked to ideas of pride and shame, where shame is rooted in the presumed lack of modernity in the Caribbean—a standard that is set by the foreign powers.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>28</sup> For more on Caribbean modernity, see also, Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa's Gaze* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

For more on how modernity and globalization affect the environment, see also, Philip D. Morgan, "Precocious Modernity: Environmental Change in the Early Caribbean," in *Caribbean Globalizations, 1492 to the Present Day*, eds. Eva Sansavior and Richard Scholar (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 83-104.

<sup>29</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 187. Walcott is also making a pun on "barber" and "Berber" here, recalling the diasporic African past in the contemporary Caribbean.

<sup>30</sup> Walcott is engaging with V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: the Caribbean Revisited* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), where Naipaul famously asserts that "'History is

there is a slight condescension in the phrasing “green simplicities,” given how much money English spends protecting its countryside and the valorization of English countryside in poetry.<sup>31</sup>

When thinking about his Caribbean island home in contrast, Walcott teases out the ways in which stratified labor creates ideas of how the land ought to be used and who gets to decide this. He looks at the tourist industry and writes, “these were the traitors/ who, in elected office, saw the land as views/for hotels and elevated into waiters/ the sons of others, while their own learnt something else.”<sup>32</sup> Walcott uses the harshness of “traitor” to describe those islanders who continue the systemic exploitation of labor. He chastises their deeply individual concern as they flatten the landscape into charming views for tourists. These locals are concerned with the upward mobility of their own families and have no collective feeling. They willingly destroy the landscape and harm the local fauna and flora in order to please foreign tastes. The locals in charge continue catering to foreign ideas of leisure by encouraging a labor system based on serving

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built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies,” (20). By saying that nothing was created in the Caribbean, and linking creation to achievement, Naipaul aligns the Caribbean with a lack of modernity and finds this lack to be appalling. Walcott is questioning what associations are being made when the term modernity becomes aligned with certain nations. For more on the vexed contestations of modernity in a Caribbean context, see also, Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa’s Gaze* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); see also, Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> For more on the importance England places on its countryside, see also, Victor Bonham-Carter, *Land and Environment: The Survival of the English Countryside* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974). For more on the use of the English countryside as a projection of an idyllic England, see also, Anna Jörngården, “A Ruin Amidst Ruins”: V. S. Naipaul Walking the English Countryside,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 64, no. 2 (July 2018): 209–238, doi.10.1353/mfs.2018.0018.

<sup>32</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 289.

foreigners— here seen in the image of waiters from the lower classes that Walcott references. The narrative being sold to foreigners is based on a colonial model where the locals are lesser than the colonists. This narrative keeps the Caribbean trapped in (neo)colonial imagery and only benefits one group at the expense of the working-class.

Walcott counters this dependence on colonial and (neo)colonial values in a scene that centers on another natural figure, the iguanas who take on a mystical significance in the poem. The iguana functions here a bit like the trickster figure of Anansi the spider from older African folktales. Its power lies in its ability to ignore Plunkett, the figure for the European colonist in the poem, while Plunkett is disconcerted by its indifferent presence. St. Lucia was originally named for the iguana and the resident colonist, Major Plunkett, knows this and finds it threatening. He says, “‘Iounalo, eh? It’s all folk-malarkey!’/ The grass was as long as his shorts. History was fact,/ History was a cannon, not a lizard.”<sup>33</sup> Plunkett’s attempt at feigning dismissiveness belies the anxiety he feels when he sees the iguana in his forays into the local forest. His disturbance comes from his awareness of its continued presence on the island, and his inability to control or destroy it. The socio-economic markers offered by the colonists mean nothing to the iguana. Its presence discombobulates Plunkett as it reminds him of how the colonists have destroyed the land and that the locals remember this destruction (even if they do not say anything). Plunkett defensively says that “History was a cannon,” emphasizing the violence it took to cement that history through the play on “canon” and “cannon.”<sup>34</sup> In this exchange, Walcott branches away from the epic form, orienting *Omeros* away from

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<sup>33</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 92.

the tale of an idealized national hero.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, there are no heroes in *Omeros* because Walcott is interested in *everyday* human conditions and in the *everyday* human experience of living in and laboring on (formerly) colonized land. Thus Walcott uses parody when the speaker is an authority figure (God, Major Plunkett, and Maud, Major Plunkett's wife) to show that what keeps *Omeros* from being an epic are vestiges of colonialism and colonial authority. The dramas of Achille, Philocete, and Hector are treated with the loftiness of the epic form, and Walcott never ridicules their concerns, though their absolute humanness keeps them from being the idealized nationalist heroes indicative of the traditional epic.

The poet persona attempts to bridge the inferiority he feels regarding the difference between the local island and metropolitan European countries through his admiration for the Caribbean forests. The forests are a site of protection from the violence of the labor system and represent a place where much can be learned and discovered that does not need foreign approval. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert writes that "one of the most salient causalities of colonial expansion, they [Caribbean forests] emerge in the literatures of the Caribbean as both tangible presences and multivalent, protean symbols—as new Edens, as alternative to the sugar plantation, as vital elements in environmental sustainability, as sites of indigeneity, or as ghostly remnants of ancestral presences."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For more on *Omeros* and the epic's use in nation building, see also, Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety Ezra Pound's Cantos and Derek Walcott's Omeros as Twentieth-Century Epics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 231-261.

<sup>36</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Deforestation and the Yearning for Lost Landscapes in Caribbean Literatures," in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and George B. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 100-101. For more on deforestation in the Caribbean, see also, Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: the Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017). For more on the destructive idea of the Caribbean



She links the ways in which agricultural labor is delegated to the peasant in Caribbean national consciousness with the degree to which this labor is racialized. This link to the peasant is perhaps why Walcott feels “diminished” in the presence of postcards of European landscapes. In *Omeros*, agricultural work is done by the laboring class. The poet figure voices some of this concern about the Caribbean class divide by worrying internally, “Hadn’t I made their poverty my paradise?”<sup>37</sup> He worries that his descriptions of beauty do not account for the role colonialism played in creating the lived conditions of the local, and that he, the poet, profits in some way from describing this historically sanitized version of the local landscape. His self-consciousness about the difference between his labor and the labor being done by islanders draws attention to the artifice of trying to write in a colonial georgic (or a colonial epic) form, and the seeming hypocrisy in trying to profit from the form.

Instead, for Walcott the return of the wildness of the natural world on the island, ruinate, becomes a possible transformation of Caribbean space to the benefit of the islanders, even as it illustrates the tension felt by those who have left and returned. Paravisini-Gebert argues that, “This return to the age-old theme of the forests’ capacity to exclude those who do not belong—which entered the region’s literature with the earlier writings of explorers and visitors—is ... in response to the common sight of plantation buildings and machinery partially obliterated by the bush.”<sup>38</sup> The plantation resembles a hybrid forest containing both endemic species and the new plants and animals brought

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as a type of Eden, see also, Supriya Nair, *Pathologies of Paradise Caribbean Detours* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 228.

<sup>38</sup> Paravisini-Gebert, “Deforestation,” 112-113.

via the plantation system, as well as the new generative space created through ruinate. In his taxi-ride from the airport, the poet narrates the movement away from the airport (a blatantly modern space) over the roads (which come from the colonial era) to the cliffs that buttress both the local forest and the ocean. Walcott writes, “Change lay in our silence. We had come to that bend/ where the trees are warped by wind, and the cliffs, raw,/ shelve surely to foam.”<sup>39</sup> There is an untamable wildness in this imagery and it is in this space that the poet establishes the central driving narrative for the book. In this scene, as both he and the taxi-cab driver are occupying the same space, the “bend” draws attention to the fact that the poet is in a more privileged position. However, despite their class differences, the ocean and the trees in the scene provide the setting for the men’s shared history of violence. The silence gets filled with the story of Achilles, Hector and Helen, in the space before entering the part of the island that is no longer coded as modern.

*Omeros* gives voice to the learned inferiority that certain narratives of modernity instill in the islanders and finds that the natural world is a way to combat such a feeling. By constantly referring to the surviving presence of the local forests, Walcott shows that despite all the violence inflicted through the plantation machine, the island itself will continue. In tying that survival to new stories of the locals that acknowledge past traumas, Walcott makes the surviving, contemporary Caribbean a more inclusive space while wrestling with the tension of needing foreign approval. He ultimately finds solace in the Caribbean landscape, specifically the forests and the local trees, and offers this space as truly local and worthy of the highest regard.

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<sup>39</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 229.

### Environmental Destruction and the Effect on Everyday Storytelling in *Omeros*

Walcott confronts the relationship between ecological destruction and labor practices and links these to how desire and pleasure are denied to the laborers in ways that perpetuate systemic discrimination. Plunkett describes the island's greenness saying: "the way lianas knot their inseparable vine// around two tree trunks sometimes, or a mast grows leaves/ in the heart of a forest, binding every vein,/ rooted in the island for the rest of their lives."<sup>40</sup> These lines speak to the ecological continuation of the Caribbean. They imply that the knowledge of this greenery will live on, and that any losses will be avenged by the contemporary Caribbean that remembers this loss. The imagery shows the land combating the symbols of prior colonial violence, like the "mast" being overtaken intentionally by the vines.<sup>41</sup> Plunkett knows that the forests have been cleared to build the plantation. He is afraid that the new forests will override the mast and that the *decaying* mast will be part of the new forests. Plunkett's language underscores a threat, as he continues to be frightened, throughout *Omeros*, about the endurance of the colonists' legacy in the face of a landscape and creatures that existed before colonialism and remain on the island.

Elaine Savory discusses Derek Walcott's use of plants in her essay "Toward a Caribbean Ecopoetics: Derek Walcott's Language of Plants." She writes, "Walcott's almost obsessive representation of interplay between poetry and plants is of vital importance in raising consciousness about sustainable change appropriate for social and

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<sup>40</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 59.

environmental conditions in the Caribbean.”<sup>42</sup> She clarifies that, “Walcott’s poetry, then, in its deeply thoughtful employment of plants, not only raises the reader’s ecocritical awareness of the place and function of flora in Caribbean history, but also demonstrates that he owes some of his key poetic practices to his ecological consciousness.”<sup>43</sup> Part of Walcott’s “ecological consciousness” is his understanding of the labor practices in the Caribbean and their continued legacy in the denigration of agricultural work, the perpetuation of the tourist economy, and the learned shame in the local that his poetry actively seeks to resist. Major Plunkett speaks to the colonists’ aims in the Caribbean saying: “We helped ourselves/ to these green islands like olives from a saucer,// munched on the pith, then spat their sucked stones on a plate,/ like a melon’s black seeds.”<sup>44</sup> These olives are eaten with no decorum as the colonists spit back the “sucked stones on a plate.”<sup>45</sup> The seeds are coded as useless, but seeds are generative in terms of the life cycle of a plant. Plunkett refers first to the olives (a fruit that appears often in Greek myth) and then moves to the spitting out of the melon (a New World fruit). The colonists take the flesh of the fruit that they transform into a known commodity and then spit out the inedible seeds of a New World fruit. Ian Strachan speaks to this commodification, writing, “Like the plantation that gave birth to it, Caribbean tourism is rooted in export, the export of paradise to North America and Europe. ‘Paradise’—as the place to unwind;

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<sup>42</sup> Elaine Savory, “Toward a Caribbean Ecopoetics: Derek Walcott’s Language of Plants,” in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and George B. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 81.

<sup>43</sup> Elaine Savory, “Toward a Caribbean Ecopoetics,” 81.

<sup>44</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 25. Interestingly, the seeds are left behind as useless, and yet this is generative in terms of the life cycle of a plant.

<sup>45</sup> Ian Gregory Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 112.

to enjoy beautiful, virgin nature; to have fun in the sun; and to party all night—is an image, a collection of promises, and a potential experience.”<sup>46</sup> Plunkett is aware that he benefits from the exploitation of the island. The iguana is fearsome to him because it reminds him of his role as a colonist and warns him of the potential for retribution. Still, he does not alter his actions and instead reacts to his fear with anger directed at the iguana.

Ecological destruction in the Caribbean has made the land vulnerable to climate change and the locals, once again, vulnerable to the actions of more powerful nations. George B. Handley focuses on how Walcott’s *Omeros* addresses the human role in ecological destruction, observing that, “his poetry offers a contingent model of the cosmos that assists in shaping a moral response to the human impact on the planet while keeping human cultural and historical difference visible to the reader.”<sup>47</sup> He goes on to say that, “Nature, in other words, can never be imagined or accessed as something separate from human history.”<sup>48</sup> Walcott shows this in the very beginning of *Omeros*: “The generator whipped/ back to its work, and the chips flew much faster as/ the shark’s teeth gnawed evenly. They covered their eyes// from the splintering nest. Now, over the pastures/ of bananas, the island lifted its horns. Sunrise/ trickled down its valleys, blood splashed on the cedars,// and the grove flooded with the light of sacrifice.”<sup>49</sup> Here, modern technology is being used to destroy the environment. Still, the island is

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<sup>46</sup> Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*, 112.

<sup>47</sup> George B. Handley, “Climate Change, Cosmology, and Poetry: The Case of Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 334.

<sup>48</sup> Handley, “Climate Change, Cosmology, and Poetry,” 337.

<sup>49</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 5.

personified as Papa Bois, guardian of the forest indicated by the “horns,”<sup>50</sup> rising up as the destruction happens. The imagery here is bloody and shows a natural world that is doused in a history of violence, with “blood splashed on cedars.”<sup>51</sup> By personifying the island itself as a horned guardian-figure, this folkloric anthropomorphic figure becomes Walcott’s trope for the island’s retribution for this violence the land remembers. Through folklore, Walcott shows that the local, here represented by an avenging Papa Bois, remembers and combats the violence of colonialism. Folklore presents a literary means to interject decolonial political and economic concerns in ecocritical discourse, by reminding the reader of human cost of colonial directed ecological destruction built on exploitative labor practices rationalized using racist logic.<sup>52</sup>

Walcott explicates that recognizing the greatness of the Caribbean landscape facilitates divorcing from the need for foreign approval as the local audience and local landscape are valued on their own terms. Near the end of *Omeros*, the poet-speaker writes of what it is like to read Homer in the Caribbean. He comments, “the word ‘Homer’ meant joy,/ joy in battle, in work, in death, then the numbered peace// of the surf’s benedictions, it rose in the cedars,/ in the *laurier-cannelles*, pages of rustling trees./

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<sup>50</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> For more on decoloniality and ecocritical discourse, see also, Anna M. Brigido Corachan, “Material Nature, Visual Sovereignty, and Water Rights: Unpacking the Standing Rock Movement,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 50, no. 1 (March 2017): 69–90, doi:10.1353/sli.2017.0006. Corachan looks at Native resistance to the United States government’s attempt to destroy the native people’s environment and specifically the effect on the water. See also, Laura Pulido, and Juan De Lara, “Reimagining ‘justice’ in Environmental Justice: Radical Ecologies, Decolonial Thought, and the Black Radical Tradition,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 1-2 (March 2018): 76–98. Pulido and De Lara use maps and environmental justice discourse to demonstrate how racialized capitalist space is created.

Master, I was the freshest of all your readers.”<sup>53</sup> Walcott traces the legacy of Homer right into the very landscape by calling up the cedars.<sup>54</sup> He shows that this legacy is tied to literature in the wording “pages of rustling trees.” The trees evoke not only paper, but a longer lasting history as trees have longer lifespans than humans. The trees are also part of the landscape, and noticing them will bring to mind the poetry read by the young poet who initially believed that Homer’s literature was greater than his own. However, the poet grows to associate the term Homer with the Caribbean landscape and ends not with Homer, but by asserting his, the poet’s, role as a reader who now sees the greatness of his local home and places this greatness (by calling on the “surf” and the local “cedars”) within the literary landscape. The contemporary Caribbean landscape, then, becomes knowable, in an emotional sense, to the local (here, being the returning narrator).

Walcott’s reverie regarding Homer’s greatness becomes a bridge to his suggestion that a Caribbean poet, such as himself, could do the same for the local Caribbean with his words. The environment encodes local stories and therefore pride and dignity. He uses the constellations to make this point. He writes, “Above us, no stallions paw/ the sky’s pavement to strike stars from the stones, no sword is pointed to recapture the port of Genoa.// There the past is an infinite Sunday. It’s hot, or it rains;/ the sun lifts the sheets of the rain, and the gutters/ run out. For those to whom history is the presence// of ruins, there is a green nothing.”<sup>55</sup> The ruins mentioned here are manmade and are signs of an older civilization, one that attempted to tame the land in order to impose a particular,

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<sup>53</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

<sup>54</sup> The cedar is also an interesting choice given the near complete decimation of cedars in North America because of colonial expansion there.

<sup>55</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 192.

presumably European aesthetic. However, *Omeros* suggests that these ruins may in fact tie the European space to a perpetual, stagnant past. By using the term “green nothing” *Omeros* suggests that there is something generative in the Caribbean landscape because of the aliveness coded in the word “green.” Furthermore, by using the term “green nothing” right after “ruins,” *Omeros* indicates that plantations are themselves a type of ruin that exist because of the decimation of the local environment.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, and most dishearteningly, the ecological destruction necessary for constructing plantations serves as a constant and unavoidable reminder to the colonized people that they have been colonized and is a physical reminder of their vulnerability. Through storytelling, Walcott shows an ability to envision a different material reality for the islanders. Local storytelling is a way to include the interactions the local people have with the local flora and fauna in ways that provide both solace and dignity to the descendants of laborers. Walcott shows this through Achille’s knowledge of traditional stories, writing that Achille knew:

who the serpent-god conducted miles off his course for some blasphemous  
offence and how he would pay for it  
by forgetting his parents, his tribe, and his own spirit  
for an albino god, and how that warrior was scarred  
for innumerable moons so badly that he would disinherit  
himself. And every night the seed-eyed, tree-wrinkled bard,  
the crooked tree who carried the genealogical leaves  
of the tribe in his cave-throated moaning,  
traced the interlacing branches of their river-rooted lives  
as intricately as the mangrove roots.

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<sup>56</sup> For more on the effect of plantations on the local ecology, see also, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Caribbean Art and the Debris of the Sugar Plantation,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, eds. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015). As seen in chapter three, the plantations as a type of ruin is central to understanding the concept of Michelle Cliff’s ruinate.



Until morning he sang, till the river was the only one to hear it.<sup>57</sup>

For Walcott the landscape offers a way to tell stories, and folklore instills a connection to that land that provides a sense of comfort and protection. The story of the serpent-god is a tale that told to Achille by an elder while Achille was learning to carve a canoe out of local trees. The repetition of “and” (“and how he would pay for it,” “and his own spirit,” “and how that warrior was scarred,”) emphasizes the cost of forgetting the tale of the serpent-god, the punishment for that forgetting as it is inscribed in the land. However, that land is not the land that Achille now lives on. Still, Achille retains the story and sings the tale. This action is written in a separate line: “Until morning he sang, till the river was the only one to hear it.”<sup>58</sup> The singing refers to the bard in a traditional epic tale and likens the folklore repeated through oral storytellers on the island with diasporic roots to the bards in imperialist epics as well as the African griot storytelling tradition.<sup>59</sup> Walcott employs parody by writing, “till the river was the only one to hear it,” as rivers (and landscape and natural forces in general) are notorious gossips in myth and folklore.<sup>60</sup> Having the river hear this tale hints that the tale will remain a secret somehow held in the landscape; indeed it points out that the story will survive long after Achille.

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<sup>57</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 139-140.

<sup>58</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 140.

<sup>59</sup> For more on the griot storytelling tradition, see also Thomas A. Hale. “From the Griot of Roots to the Roots of Griot: A New Look at the Origins of a Controversial African Term for Bard,” *Oral Tradition* 12, no. 2 (1997): 249–278, <https://doaj.org/article/03148f518dfd4edb8ce6caa32de2b734>.

<sup>60</sup> Here it is useful to think of the river in the myth of Hades and Persephone where the river throws Persephone’s girdle to Circe thereby alerting Circe that Hades has Persephone. It might be also useful to consider the wind in the story of King Midas that tells the story of his donkey ears in a cornfield and is overheard by the wind (even when he was instructed to keep the story to himself).

To think of folkloric figures as a new type of “local,” then, is not to interpret them as idealized versions of the local laborers, feeding into the colonial imaginary of an invisible—but always present—perpetual underclass. Rather, they present a different model of success that highlights the indignities faced by those tied to laboring bodies either in their present or their past. Folklore creates a type of myth that can be useful to nation-building and can potentially be co-opted by divisive politics. Regarding the polarizing potential of myth, Ian Strachan warns that they, “may inspire revolutionary action, but they can also be manipulated by the clever and powerful to feed hatred, fear, and chauvinism; to consolidate the inordinate power of demagogues, dictators, and their henchmen; as well as to conceal truths and thus allow people to remain oppressed, uncritical, and exploited.”<sup>61</sup> However, Walcott shows that folklore provides a type of balm for the locals: “And every night the seed-eyed, tree-wrinkled bard,/ the crooked tree who carried the genealogical leaves/ of the tribe in his cave-throated moaning,/ traced the interlacing branches of their river-rooted lives/ as intricately as the mangrove roots.”<sup>62</sup> Here, the folklore that Achille repeats happens in a moment of solitude. The singing gives him more than pride, it brings him comfort when no one else is around. He learns to find some comfort in his surroundings and in the natural world. It is not a divisive act here and instead, makes the land knowable in an emotional sense. This provision of access to emotional knowledge works to repair the damage done by colonial modes of knowing and storytelling, by instead offering pride of place to the local register and the particular figures and values underpinning it.

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<sup>61</sup> Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*, 255.

<sup>62</sup> Walcott, *Omeros*, 140.

### **The Dark Eroticism of Folklore in Shivanee Ramlochan's *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting***

*Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* is Trinidadian poet Shivanee Ramlochan's critically acclaimed debut collection. The collection is broken into three parts, each containing thematically linked, but stand-alone, poems. All of the poems are set in Trinidad where Ramlochan resides. The poems deal with sexual, religious, and ecological violence. The "I" of the poems is decidedly local and seemingly timeless. This poetic persona exists, as the title of the collection suggests, as a haunting presence that experiences extreme violence and intense pleasure. Ramlochan brandishes folklore as a means of escape and as a tool against domination. She ends her text in the voice of a survivor of sexual violence—a woman who escapes the learned models of success and respectability and who engages in queer love.

This speaker, described throughout as a folkloric figure (and beautiful because of these comparisons), faces one of her oppressors in the end and says, "You tell him/ I am the queen/ the comeuppance/ the hard heretic that nature intended."<sup>63</sup> The queen, here, is local, and her claim of being a heretic indicates that she does not practice the colonizers' religion. The cadence of the first three lines mimics the sound of gunshots, while the last maintains the sharp staccato of consonance. This queen is going to exact revenge. She also claims that she is not the initiator of violence, but rather, the violence is that which "nature intended." Ramlochan implies that nature itself is angry and uses this queer figure to give voice to that anger. Through queerness, particularly a gender-fluid (and at other

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<sup>63</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* (Leeds: Peepal Press, 2017), 70.

times, female) queerness, Ramlochan disrupts the violent colonial presence. Ramlochan exemplifies a poetics of recovery where queerness is normalized (but never objectified) as the type of ideal love that is never possessive, is part of human experience and is not tied to a problematic narrative of nationalist greatness.

The collection is broken into three sections. In the first book, the “I” in the poem is a grown-up specter at times, and at others is a young child. This “I” tries to assert individual desires while showing how institutions—schools, churches—seek to exploit their vulnerabilities.<sup>64</sup> The “I” is constantly held responsible for the actions of others, primarily their mother who is an abortionist in a country that, according to the poems, does not allow abortions. In the second section, the “I” follows the violent adolescence of a corporeal being who experiences sexual violence. In an attempt to fight off an assailant, the “I” in the second section suffers a “ruined ankle.”<sup>65</sup> This injury mirrors the Diabliesse’s hooved foot, as well as the duenne’s backwards feet. The “I” appears mostly as a young boy who was raped by older men in positions of authority, though at other times, their gender changes. The salient experiences for the “I” are sexual violence and the vulnerability of poverty. The third section is told primarily in Anglo-Creole local dialect. This dialect is sustained throughout the book and indicates a shared avenging contemporary sensibility as opposed to the ways *Omeros* used Anglo-Creole to signal class and a lack of worldliness. The syntax and diction are local, contemporary, and young. An example is, “Wine en pointe an wine to the four stations of the cross,/ dutty

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<sup>64</sup> Ramlochan’s speakers often change sex within the same book of poetry. In order to signal this gender fluidity, the pronoun “their” is used.

<sup>65</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 38.

angel,/ bragandang badting.”<sup>66</sup> Here, bars, alcohol and local Indo-Caribbean religious festivals feature predominantly as the speaker (sometimes, the “I” and sometimes “you,”) has sexual (and mostly nonconsensual violent) encounters. The speaker finds solace in queer encounters while also feeling—and being—trapped by intolerant family members.<sup>67</sup> The “I” in the third section is at times a young girl and at other times a young boy. The “I” here disrupts the conception of the Caribbean as a paradise that serves the colonial imaginary as they are committed to expressing their pleasure and displeasure with no concern for the colonizers, especially in regard to sex.

Ramlochan’s work sits at the intersection of queerness and the supernatural, a conjunction Rahul K. Gairola explores in “Bastardly Duppies and Dastardly Dykes: Queer Sexuality and the Supernatural in Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* and Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*.”<sup>68</sup> Gairola focuses on the figure of the duppy, a ghoulish folkloric figure that haunts the silk cotton tree in the Caribbean. Gairola argues that, “[t]he ghastly form...is crucial for us to consider in relation to themes of migration in postcolonial literature because it signifies differences in culture and practice that mark the boundary between practices of domination and subordination.”<sup>69</sup> Gairola focuses on the presence of queer women. He finds that folklore influences the narrative form of Shani Mootoo’s and Michelle Cliff’s work and says that this is “a strategy for invoking the ghosts of the past and jolting to life the skeletons in the closet lying dormant alongside

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<sup>66</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 67, 69, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Rahul K. Gairola, “Bastardly Duppies and Dastardly Dykes: Queer Sexuality and the Supernatural in Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* and Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*,” *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women’s and Gender Studies* 18 (December 2017): 15-54, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2007414930/>.

<sup>69</sup> Gairola, “Bastardly Duppies,” 21.

lesbian sexuality.”<sup>70</sup> Gairola shows how folklore evokes a haunted quality in the Caribbean, where the present is constantly imbued with specters of the past. He states that this haunted quality, “signifies differences in culture and practice that mark the boundary between practices of domination and subordination.”<sup>71</sup> In addition to the supernatural folkloric figures, Gairola looks to the flora and fauna in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and finds that they, too, provide a haunted quality to the text where the past, as embodied by the ecological, cannot be silenced. In Ramlochan’s work, too, the natural environment is the space that locals retreat to in times of extreme distress. She writes, “Take your own feet as dowry. Turn a poem under Spanish tongue for each green ladder you breach/ into your husband, the mountain’s back./ Trust no one with your straw hat.”<sup>72</sup> Here, the mother is sending her child out into the forest because she is afraid that the school has been mistreating her child. In the poem, she says that her child will marry the forest, implying that the forest is a safe space for the locals. She warns against other duennes by cautioning against those wearing a straw hat—one of the markers of the duennes.

Ramlochan’s work also demonstrates the power of creolized folklore within the Caribbean. Lee Haring focuses on this process of creolization, in particular the ways in which the process of creolization includes the adoption of different words and the mixing of narrative genres.<sup>73</sup> Haring hypothesizes that “[i]f language-mixing lies in the history of all languages, mixing of poetics or genres must lie in the history of all verbal art.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Gairola, “Bastardly Duppies,” 32.

<sup>71</sup> Gairola, “Bastardly Duppies,” 21.

<sup>72</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22.

<sup>73</sup> Lee Haring, “Roger Abrahams, Creolization, Folklore Theory,” *Western Folklore* 75, no. 3-4 (July 2016): 266, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44791370>.

<sup>74</sup> Haring, “Folklore Theory,” 264.

While Gairola looks to the haunting abilities of folklore to evoke the past, Haring attends to the orality of the present.<sup>75</sup> He ultimately argues that “[t]hus creolization is the process whereby folklore is created as a product. It is a means of emotional survival at times when the convergence of cultures is felt as a conflict.”<sup>76</sup> Similar to Haring, Serafin-Roldan Santiago argues that folklore in Caribbean literature is a “vulcanizing agent to create a new form of literature that is autochthonously Caribbean-literature which includes the ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ of a region and its people, and what I call ‘folk consciousness.’”<sup>77</sup> Roldan-Santiago defines this “folk consciousness” as two-fold. One, “the impression of a person telling a story” and as the quality of newness that confronts the “complexities, chaotic differences, and social and ideological contradictions.”<sup>78</sup> For him, this “folk consciousness” grounds Caribbean work in the present. This folk consciousness is seen when Ramlochan wryly comments about a grieving woman who has just had an abortion that, “Some say she sleeps beneath silk cotton, but/ that would be too perfect a fate.”<sup>79</sup> Here, Ramlochan is referencing La Diabliesse, a woman with a hoofed foot who lures men to the silk cotton tree. By saying “Some say,” Ramlochan not only likens the woman to a folklore figure, but shows how the community knows what it means to suggest that the woman sleeps under that specific tree. In this way, Ramlochan is situating her work in the “folk consciousness” that Roldán-Santiago suggests. Ramlochan here is also suggesting that the town sees the Diabliesse a certain way, but that

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<sup>75</sup> Haring, “Folklore Theory,” 266.

<sup>76</sup> Haring, “Folklore Theory,” 268.

<sup>77</sup> Serafin Roldan-Santiago, “Thematic and Structural Functions of Folklore in Caribbean Literature: The Case of the ‘Written’ and the ‘Oral,’” *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 4, no.1 (2005): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40986166>.

<sup>78</sup> Serafin Roldan-Santiago, “Thematic and Structural Functions of Folklore,” 5.

<sup>79</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 27.

the grieving woman is not actually a “devil-woman” because this version of folklore is more traditional, and not her more inclusive iteration.

It’s not only through creolized folklore that Ramlochan points the way to a more inclusive Caribbean present and future. Vahni Capildeo focuses on women in *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, singling out Ramlochan’s ability to offend as a key to greater inclusivity. Capildeo is particularly interested in the queer and “multigendered women born, whose sexual desires are expressed in images of attack and dismemberment: an abundance of queer personae.”<sup>80</sup> Capildeo argues that Ramlochan’s poetry maintains an admirable ability to offend canon-building (and the established canon) because her poetry resists identity category-building.<sup>81</sup> The presence and visibility of queerness in Ramlochan’s text, Capildeo argues, challenges both local and foreign concepts of the Caribbean. Ramlochan boldly reveals this capacity by writing in the closing poem, “Your father said not to take faggots to your bed, so you called them festivals.”<sup>82</sup> Capildeo argues that offending both local and foreign audiences is part of Ramlochan’s strength. Ramlochan’s text includes abortionists, policemen, and mountain climbers. Capildeo does not explicate the purpose of the folklore figures in the collection, but notes that overall the text is rooted in a Caribbean that is not always apparent to the outsider nor welcomed by the middle-class. It’s apparent that for Ramlochan, the folkloric figures explain the type of existence that both the foreigner and the respectable local community deny, but which grants dignity to the more vulnerable locals.

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<sup>80</sup> Vahni Capildeo, “Punishable Bodies: Poetry on the Offensive,” *Poetry* 212, no. 2 (May 2018): 175.

<sup>81</sup> Capildeo, “Punishable Bodies,” 176-177.

<sup>82</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 70.



That this folklore is shared by both the Indo and Afro diasporic people and gives voice to local desires and is set in local space shared by these douglarized communities is ignored by many critics. The duennes in Shivannee Ramlochan's text provide a way to speak about sexual and emotional trauma as the duennes safely navigate the canefields (a site of sexual trauma for many of the humans in her book).<sup>83</sup> The duennes are childlike beings that lure unbaptized children away from their families and turn those children into duennes. For Ramlochan, duennes disrupt the colonial gaze, render the land unknowable to the landowners, and become a means of escape for the laborers. Traditionally, the duennes are coded as children engaged in childlike activities like playing tricks on other children. For the most part, Ramlochan keeps this childlike quality of the duenne, particularly in interactions between children of color or with sympathetic parental figures. However, at times predatory adults sexualize duennes in ways that mimic the treatment of the La Diabesle figure in terms of her terrible beauty. Ramlochan, though, maintains the childishness of the duenne. Through duennes, *Everyone knows I Am a Haunting* allows young girls to describe their pain in a localized context that positions them survivors and witnesses to the types of violence that other young marginalized women and girls face on the island, particularly in the poems "Duenne Lorca," and "Duenne Lara." In "Duenne Lara," Ramlochan subverts the lore and has a predator promising a

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<sup>83</sup> For more on duennes (or douens) in Caribbean literature, see also, Cynthia James, "From Orature to Literature in Jamaican and Trinidadian Children's Folk Traditions," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2005): 164–178, doi:10.1353/chq.2005.0025. The canefields are also a site of sexual trauma in Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). Danticat writes about how local Haitian militia rape women in the fields and how that knowledge gets spread as both legend and news.

duenne that they can “christen [the duenne] away from the devil’s doorstep.”<sup>84</sup>

Ramlochan writes, “Come, // I’ll christen you away from the devil’s doorstep, // duenne suitor, duenne savior, duenne dowry, // Duenne, you are mine.”<sup>85</sup> The implication is that an adult Christian who can perform a baptism is making these promises. However, this adult has possessive and violent designs toward the duenne seen in the line, “[duenne] you are mine.”<sup>86</sup> The adult views the duenne as property and exploits the vulnerability of the duenne’s position as both a feared being, and the poverty of their home. The adult, though, is terrifying and means to hurt the young duenne. All of the adult’s promises are actually threats and will lead to the imprisonment of the once-free duenne.

Ramlochan also uses folklore to fashion a decolonial future that does not need to perform Otherness for a richer, foreign gaze. She portrays the possibility to feel joy and completeness without needing what McClintock calls: “the magical ingredient of social recognition.”<sup>87</sup> The locals do not need to prove their relevance (and by extension their worth) to anyone else. Ramlochan employs festival imagery but highlights local festivals like Holi and Divali that are not tourist attractions in the same way as Carnival but are significant to locals as times and spaces to celebrate non-Christian holidays. In her poem “Crossdressing at Divali Nagar,” she writes of a young queer couple hiding away during a Hindu festival in Trinidad.<sup>88</sup> The Divali Nagar site, while famous among local Hindus,

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<sup>84</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 20.

<sup>86</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 156.

<sup>88</sup> For more on queerness in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, see also, Suzanne Persard, “Queering Chutney: Disrupting Heteronormative Paradigms of Indo-Caribbean Epistemology,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 26, no. 1 (April 2018): 25–102, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2052781208/>. See also, Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan,

is not a tourist destination.<sup>89</sup> The festival occurs in November, well-past the Carnival tourist season that occurs in February. She writes, “On your knees, under the stage full of dancers,// I trace a lotus onto your back, a broken moon between// the segments of your toes,// a trishula in the furrow of your brow,// its three prongs splitting open when you catch me by the wrist[.]”<sup>90</sup> Despite the overt eroticism of the line “[o]n your knees,” Ramlochan quickly moves to the more intimate and less sexualized action of “trac[ing] a lotus on your brow.”<sup>91</sup> Ramlochan never genders either partner and uses both the image of the trident and the lotus in this scene to link these two to the Ramayana being enacted above. This quiet moment exists between two locals in a local space. Their worth is determined by their feelings for each other and is not diminished by anyone outside of their self-created safe space.

The local gaze is central, and all interactions occurring among the locals present create intimate space. This creates a more insular book of poetry, but in a place where being “relevant” to the foreign is aspired to (and sometimes necessary) this move

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“(Un)Settling the Politics of Identity and Sexuality Among Indo-Trinidadian Same-Sex Loving Women,” in *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments* ed. Gabrielle Jamela Hosein, Lisa Outar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 153-170.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the Divali Nagar site in Trinidad, see also, Anil Mahabir, “Trinidad: Indian Arrival Day Fete; Official New Holiday Bolsters Hindu Self-Identity,” *Hinduism Today* (Nov 1997): 48, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/232448142/>. For more on representations of idealized womanhood among the Indo-Caribbean diaspora as performed at the Divali Nagar site, see also, Anusha Ragbir, “Fictions of the Past: Staging Indianness, Identity and Sexuality Among Young Women in Indo-Trinidadian Beauty Pageants,” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies: A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism* 6, (2012): 1-21. Ragbir argues that while India uses beauty pageants to promote a modern image of the nation, Indo-Trinidadian religious communities use beauty pageants to promote a traditional and conservative idea of womanhood.

<sup>90</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 67.

<sup>91</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 67.

becomes subversive as Capildeo exposes in “Punishable Bodies.”<sup>92</sup> The intimacy of the book allows Ramlochan to attend to foreign and local oppression. In “The Abortionist’s Daughter Declares Her Love,” Ramlochan makes the connection between labor and land and how the local can, in time, resist the systems that sought to violently tame them. Here, the figure of the abortionist’s daughter is maligned by the local community because her mother performs illegal abortions. The church is a site for the daughter’s humiliation as the members scorn her for her mother’s profession (though the implication is that these very members use her mother’s services). The daughter says, “Never give a woman more sadness than she needs./ From this fabric, from this persistent earth, she will wrangle/ greater things than men can fathom./ She will wrestle squalling tar infants from the mire, and those children/ shall stumble upwards, slicing through the spines of men/ who have offended their mothers.”<sup>93</sup> The zombie imagery here underscores the women’s ability to survive through struggle while never denying past trauma. The land facilitates the woman’s revenge. Through folklore and the supernatural, the mother and her children are able to supersede the limits of the colonized self.

Folklore offers a transcultural interaction on the island, one I have been identifying here with the term douglarization to denote the way these figures originate from various diasporic groups. Yet they are used in a douglarized fashion in the contemporary Caribbean precisely because of their link to pleasure and their means of navigating space. In “Duenne Lorca,” Ramlochan writes of a young child whose description is very similar to the duennes of Trinidadian folklore with their backwards

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<sup>92</sup> Capildeo, “Punishable Bodies,” 176-178.

<sup>93</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 13.

feet, straw hats, and association with the local flora and fauna.<sup>94</sup> Ramlochan implicitly references the protection that is thought to exist for Christian children when she describes the darkling son in the poem as “neither female nor filial,/ the schoolmistress tried to beat the unchristian out of you./ I rinsed her religion from your blue shirt every Sunday. I kept your khakis clean and my own tail hidden.”<sup>95</sup> The school uses religion as a means to justify beating children. Maria Alonso Alonso says that Caribbean writers use folklore “to reconcile themselves with a history that in many cases haunts them due to the forced silences imposed by the previous generations who tried to forget or hide certain traumatic experiences that marked their exile.”<sup>96</sup> In addition, Alonso uses concepts of “the private” and “the public,” with the public representing the official history of the Caribbean islands, and the private in the traumatic experienced by the person (and usually kept within family history).<sup>97</sup> The mother’s washing of the shirts exemplifies complicity, but

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<sup>94</sup> Oral storytelling that continues on the islands usually credits the *duenne* (sometimes spelled *douen* in the Anglo-Caribbean) with broad African roots. For more on the *duenne*’s (or *douen*’s) African roots, see also, Sarah Winstein-Hibbs, “A Critical Regionalist Reading of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*: Rethinking Magical Realism through Afro-Caribbean Oral Narrative.(Viewpoint Essay),” *MELUS* 44, no. 2 (June 2019): 32-33, doi.10.1093/melus/mlz013. For more on the possible Ashanti roots of the *duenne*, see also, Lucie Pradel, “African Sacredness and Caribbean Cultural Forms,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 44, no.1/2 (March 1998): 147, [www.jstor.org/stable/40654027](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40654027). The *duenne* is similar to the *Tata Duende* in Mestizo culture.

<sup>95</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22.

<sup>96</sup> Maria Alonso Alonso, “The Woman That Turned into a Ball of Fire and Whipped across the Sky at Night: Recreating History and Memory in the Diaspora,” *Journal of English Studies*, no. 9 (2011):15, doi.10.18172/jes.157. Alonso focuses on the figure of the *soucouyant* to underscore how processes of transculturation can provide a pace for marginalized women in the text to have the space to confront trauma.

<sup>97</sup> For more on trauma in the Caribbean specific to the diasporic laboring communities, see also, Adlai H. Murdoch, “A Legacy of Trauma: Caribbean Slavery, Race, Class, and Contemporary Identity in *Abeng*,” *Research in African Literatures* 40, no. 4 (2009): 65–88, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/364567>. Adlai traces the role of trauma in the black diasporic community and how these tensions complicate relations in the contemporary Caribbean.

also speaks to the internalized mental and emotional abuse that she shares with her child as both are made to believe that their religion, bodies and emotions are inferior.<sup>98</sup> The mother, though, has a moment of rebellion as she uses the water from the land to eradicate the schoolmistresses' religion on the Christian sabbath day. The child in question is coded as a child of color and on the island, this indicates being a descendent of those who worked on the plantation. By likening the child to the *duenne* both in descriptions and in the title, the poem demonstrates the ability of the local folk culture to survive the colonial agent's punishment. The douglarized, *duenne*-like figure survives, and it is the very douglarization alluded to in the comparison that makes its survival relevant to and representative of the endurance and resilience of both the Indo- and Afro-diasporic populations on the island.

The genderlessness of the child is also a point of contention for the teacher who wants the child to conform to a binary that is unnatural to their family.<sup>99</sup> The teacher uses violence again to try and force the child to conform and their mother knows this. The mother knows that her child is being beaten to the point of either blood, or soiling themselves, but recognizes that she has no power to change the circumstances. She cleans the khakis both to remove the traces of the teacher's abuse and in order to comply with the rules. However, the mother's tail remains despite these actions and she believes that the forest will help her child as she says, "Tell the woods you will make a faithful

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<sup>98</sup> Ramlochan is also providing a response to Walter Mignolo's assertion in *Darker Side of the Renaissance* that: "a landmark in the idea of modernity, was the beginning of an effort to constitute homogenous linguistic, national, and religious communities, which have begun to disintegrate at the end of the twentieth century," (317).

<sup>99</sup> Note that given the gender fluidity of the characters in Ramlochan's text, this chapter uses gender neutral pronouns where appropriate.

bride.”<sup>100</sup> The mother believes that the forest will provide a kinder future for her child. The forest will not make the same violent demands on her child’s body. The forest is a more inclusive space for the descendants of laborers than the schoolroom—a place tainted by colonialism. The child-duenne can find solace in the forest regardless of gender or race.

Ramlochan’s work undermines the hypocrisy of another layer of colonial moral superiority through the use of folkloric figures. She links folklore to an agentive Nature that has recorded the violence of colonialism and seeks justified vengeance. At the same time, folklore is a way to explore unbridled desires and show that part of the violence of colonialism was the denial of colonial subjects’ sexuality and desire for intimacy. The locals, though, can experience such freedom once they no longer care for the oppressors’ acknowledgement.

### **Folklore, the Body and Reproductive Labor**

Ramlochan is invested in how women resist oppressive institutions of power. By prioritizing sexual pleasure and desire, the use of folkloric figures opens a space to interrogate reproductive labor and women’s agency over their bodies. Ramlochan shows how desire is controlled through violence, shame, and fear. Anne McClintock speaks of the role this specific iteration of a capitalist idea of leisure in *Imperial Leather*, writing “The housewife’s labor of *leisure* found its counterpart in the servant’s labor of *invisibility*.”<sup>101</sup> McClintock is pointing out that the economically privileged housewife

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<sup>100</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22.

<sup>101</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 163 [italics in original]. McClintock does provide the example of a young domestic worker who becomes fetishized by her employer. This

gets to experience leisure at the expense of the disenfranchised woman's labor. This leisure can be extended to experiencing pleasure in the case of the Caribbean. By constantly having to perform labor, the disenfranchised women on the island have little time to experience pleasure. Ramlochan shows that despite this attempt at control, the locals still express and experience desire. These expressions highlight the cruelty of those attempting to prevent the locals from feeling desire and in turn, shows that the locals always maintain their dignity despite being oppressed.

For Ramlochan, one of the key access points to determine what pleasure is and who can experience it is the institution of the family. In "Duenne Lorca" the mother refers to her child as "darkling son."<sup>102</sup> She presents the local forests as a safe place that provides for the dignity of its inhabitants. This safety results from the fact the agents of colonization fear the forested areas, because they do not know them. The poem starts with the lines: "Darkling son, the dark is here. Take your father's bois and skirt/ to the eyelid of forest edge."<sup>103</sup> Both the father and the 'darkling son' are gender fluid and are associated with the land. Bois is the guardian of the forests, and the 'darkling son,' with their straw hat and backwards feet is a duenne. The mother speaks of the land as

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relationship blurs the lines of domestic labor and sexual labor as there is an implied mutual transaction of power. That said, the relationship ends poorly. McClintock also attends to the real power imbalance between both despite the implied relationship between the two.

<sup>102</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22. The title "Lorca" may be a reference to García Lorca, a queer Spanish writer. It is also possible that the title references the Trinbagonian beauty queen, Lorca Chelsea Gatliffe. Gatliffe was Miss Trinidad and Tobago in the 1994 Miss Universe pageant. In the local contest for Miss Trinidad and Tobago, Gatliffe represented the Couva–Tabaquite–Talparo region. This region is predominantly Indo-Caribbean and was historically important for its sugarcane plantation. The Couva–Tabaquite–Talparo area is also home to the Arena Forest Reserve.

<sup>103</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22.



embodied, referencing the forest's "eyelid," making the land a living thing that can be persuaded, given that the child must bring an offering. The mother explicitly says, "Nothing the forest raises is a monster."<sup>104</sup> The bodies in the family are not typical human bodies: the child's legs are backwards, and the mother has a tail. However, their actions are not monstrous. They wish to be in the forest, and the mother tries to train her child to protect themselves through quietness and sharp observations and by understanding how to respect the land (and to trust the land for protection).

*Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* wrestles with the corrosive power of possessiveness. It acknowledges the ways in which that possessiveness might initially be seductive, but it ultimately wreaks havoc on the body of the one being seduced. There is an undercurrent of possessiveness laced with the promise of leisure at a cost in "Duenne Lara."<sup>105</sup> Here, the speaker tries to seduce someone young, calling them a duenne, adding a mythic quality to the individual's beauty. The speaker says, "Duenne, you are mine." There is an undercurrent of eroticism in the poem, and many vocalizations of the duenne's beauty.<sup>106</sup> The speaker in this poem attempts to possess the duenne and implies that this possession is a compliment to the mythic beauty of the duenne. However, the poem shifts to the voice of the duenne who realizes the ill-intent of the speaker, voicing: "No one told you how it would hurt, to have your feet forced against/ family hearth./ The

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<sup>104</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 22.

<sup>105</sup> The title, "Lara," may be a reference to Brian Lara, a popular Trinidadian cricketer. Brian Lara is famous for breaking several world records in cricket. The priest in this poem is directly offering to break the young duenne's feet and phrasing this violence as a gift that would permit the duenne to no longer work. However, if the title is a play on a famous athlete, the poem is suggesting that the priest is offering to destroy the source of the duenne's power.

<sup>106</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 21.

mangroves stroked you taut while the devil cracked your bones right,/ a blister body of devotion/ a casket of cunning charms to stamp you for her service.”<sup>107</sup> Ramlochan uses the feminine pronoun for the seducer-turned-torturer by clarifying that the duenne will be in “her service.”<sup>108</sup> The seducer promises the youthful “you” symbols of upper-middle-class leisure in the ominous line: “I will never make you walk again, if you will be mine.”<sup>109</sup> This leisure comes at the cost of the duenne’s body, as the seducer tries to draw the duenne away from the forest into civility, where the child will never be free again.

Pleasure is juxtaposed with the learned denial that laborers and their descendants adopt in order to work through the day for economic survival. Ramlochan shows how this focus on the material at the expense of emotion is learned in “Song of the Only Surviving Grandmother.” She writes of a grandmother who teaches her grandchild: “to be sad,/ but to be sad and work.”<sup>110</sup> Here, the grandmother passes down her own learned understanding that the child’s sadness is inconsequential and that they must instead focus on productivity. In addition to working through sadness, though, is the lesson “to be sad.”<sup>111</sup> The implication is that sadness is more productive than joy. The poem ends with the lines: “At night, thirty years before I get born,/ your lost children whistle through gaps in the farm floor,/ culling up from the earth,/ ghost-limbs swelling from mapepire snakebite.”<sup>112</sup> Ramlochan invokes zombie imagery that was used in the colonial era to

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<sup>107</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 21.

<sup>108</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 21.

<sup>109</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 21.

<sup>110</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 55.

<sup>111</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 55.

<sup>112</sup> Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting*, 56. Note, a mapepire is a type of local poisonous snake.

frighten slaves into submission linking to the Afro-Caribbean past on the island.<sup>113</sup> Here, that imagery shows the cost of productivity for people of color on the island. Not only do children die, but the ghosts of these children return to haunt the present and remind the parents of their loss. Ramlochan shows how the speaker is part of a story that started before she is born. Her family tries to continue this story of abuse and denied feelings despite the lack of pleasure this compliance brings. This is what adherence to the colonial model of success means: a denial of local pleasure while imposing constant demands of local labor. Here, there is no folklore figure present, and as such, there is no outlet for expressing or experiencing pleasure because the poem is too rooted to the neocolonial socio-economic model.

Ramlochan consistently presents the desire for pleasure as defined by the locals. By showing their ability to experience pleasure, to risk much to experience that pleasure, she draws attention to the extreme oppression of the (neo)colonial island. She also shows that the locals are still capable of resisting that oppression in the pursuit of human desire, even when those human desires are embodied by folkloric figures. In Ramlochan's text,

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<sup>113</sup> For more on the use of zombie imagery as a critique of labor practices in the Caribbean, see also Kerstin Oloff, "'Greening' The Zombie: Caribbean Gothic, World-Ecology, and Socio-Ecological Degradation," *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 16, no. 1 (2012), 31-45, doi. 10.1080/14688417.2012.10589098. Oloff argues that the alterity created through zombie imagery indicates the exploitative extraction methods used by colonists in the Caribbean and signals how the colonists viewed both the laborers and the colonized land as lesser than the metropole. For more on the use of fantastic imagery to describe the violence of colonialism in the Caribbean, see also April Munroe, "'Haunted and Obeah': Gothic Spaces and Monstrous Landscapes in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*," *Studies in the Humanities* 42, no. 1/2 (December 2015): 108-134, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1760351476/>. Munroe argues that the violence of colonial contact creates the monstrous landscape of Rhy's novel. Munroe attends to the vampiric imagery in *Voyage in the Dark* and finds that this horrific imagery is emblematic of the colonial approach to colonized land and colonized people.

these figures are a persistent reminder of thinking about the Caribbean outside of the economic neo-colonial gaze. They show that there can be a way of existing that does not need to harken back to the economic networks created by the colonists that persist in the Caribbean. The figures navigate, use, and preserve the land in a way that does not care for the (neo)colonial models of success. These models of success are built on the policing of local marginalized bodies, the continued destruction of the local environment, and on the refusal to acknowledge and see to the needs and desires of the local community.

## Conclusion

Folklore occupies a generative space in the minds of young children in the Caribbean. It belongs to them in a way that canonical fiction does not. These figures roam their lands and know their history in ways that make them entertaining and familiar to locals. Trinidadian based scholar Patricia Mohammed speaks to this in *Imaging the Caribbean*. Mohammed, speaking of a field trip where her class sees a painting depicting local folklore and the reaction of the class, observes that despite the frightening elements of folklore, the work had the power to captivate the young students. She argues that this ability to inspire the children's imagination is grounds for the creation of a shared inner world among the locals where "the spirit of this past continues to prevail in the present."<sup>114</sup> Both Ramlochan and Walcott show how the part of this "spirit of the past" lies in the storytelling practices of the past, which includes folklore figures who become more than a coping device and are, instead, aspirational. This past is inclusive of both the

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<sup>114</sup> Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation* (Oxford: Macmillan Publishers, 2009), 127-132.

Afro-and Indo- diasporas and provides a more inclusive view for both the present and the future.

Both Walcott's and Ramlochan's works of poetry are aware that they are set on islands that are the site of ecological destruction where continued adherence to (neo)colonial relationships to the land further the environmental discrimination faced by the islanders. The Caribbean, and islands like it, will be some of the first to feel the effects of climate change. The continued desire to perform plantation-style relationships for foreigners will mean that the islands will continue to be destroyed. Disproportionate emphasis on professions that cater to export and performing for foreigners makes locals denigrate local tastes as the local becomes a source of shame, something to be sold and not a place of creation (and not a place that understands creation as it is not the sought-after market). Both authors show that the local can create, that it is a site of pleasure that locals take part in and show desire and in doing so, and both present the local as something that does not need a foreign stamp of approval. Through folklore, there is a sense of both pride and purpose that does not care for the foreign gaze and which expresses the experienced pleasure and desires of the locals.

As a 21<sup>st</sup> century writer, immersed in a Caribbean that actively confronts the environmental legacy of colonialism with the international focus on climate change, Shivane Ramlochan can express a local desire to find pride in the Caribbean forests. In her Caribbean, the plantations are closed, no longer operating and no longer hiring people, unlike Walcott's Caribbean, where the plantations were a part of the everyday economic landscape. Ramlochan is able to extend Walcott's desire for pride in the local by broadening this view to include those made marginal because of sexual identity. While

Walcott describes the fear the colonists feel when encountering folklore figures, Ramlochan revels in this fear and finds a kind of freedom in these figures because she is fully unconcerned with the opinions and tastes of the colonists. The Caribbean of her texts is haunted by the past, but this is a source of shared pride, and is the means for opening up a future Caribbean that has space for all of its citizens.

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