

**Global Queer Literary Resistance:  
Contemporary Caribbean Communal**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the critical importance of contemporary queer Caribbean writing as a disruption of boundaries: this disruption is important because a group belonging based on identity and community recreates a familiar binary, of insiders and outsiders, that can form an impasse for the global reach of queer resistance. By critically engaging with writing by Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo, Marlon James, Nalo Hopkinson, Shivane Rumlachan, Staceyann-Chin, Karen Lord, Kei Miller, and Andre Bagoo, this thesis highlights the transnational impact of queer Caribbean literary resistance through queer communality.

The chapters in this thesis interpret the movements, relationalities, modes, ethos, and fights of contemporary queer Caribbean writing that resist straightness as a force inseparable from racism, both British colonial impositions in the anglophone Caribbean. My first chapter interprets the twisting movement of queer resistance informing my second chapter's position in favour of relating against straight-forwardness. My third chapter reads queer Caribbean life writing as a mode for mapping survivorship which connects with a communal ethos of non-conformity examined in my fourth chapter. My final chapter proposes queer Caribbean writing as a globally focussed Carnival fight, amongst the embedded queerness of Carnival as a defiance against a straight status quo. The intersections of oppression which remain exceptional to the anglophone Caribbean inform my argument that contemporary queer Caribbean writing is an apex of anti-colonial resistance.

The queer Caribbean writing explored in this thesis is read to expose queer freedom as a phenomenon created by each queer person against their specific local context, in lieu of waiting for the end of anti-queerness as a global condition. This thesis interprets the importance of queer Caribbean writing for understanding connections made through difference; specific literary texts are explored to inform and reflect forms of queerness and Caribbeanness without a homogeneity, but instead a queer resistance within the global resonances of queer communality.

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## Introduction

Contemporary queer literary resistances and communality related to the anglophone Caribbean are of transnational global importance. In this context, transnational means aspects of queer resistance in local spheres that contain a wider potential to influence strategies of queer living against a worldwide straight status quo. This importance stems from the revelation that lies within queer Caribbean writing: that queerness is fundamental to globally actualise anticolonial practices of resistance, and an anticolonial drive is necessary to globally actualise queer practices of resistance. This revelation comes as a result of the specific intersections of oppressions related to the anglophone Caribbean, under the global powers of contemporary white supremacy, amid the contemporary power and reach of anglophone literature. These oppressions remain exceptional — through the legacy of British colonial atrocities — because they involve defiance against arguably the worst, and inarguably the largest scale, of colonial crimes against humanity, globally.<sup>1</sup> These realities are coupled with the scale and power of anglophone literature being in a problematically global language, due to its colonial oppression onto the largest swathes of the globe which is further enforced by the superpower of contemporary North America. In this thesis, I interpret how writing queerness and Caribbeanness has a global literary resistance, because it necessarily defies not only the racism of white supremacy but the inseparability of

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<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to compare historical atrocities or to create a hierarchy of oppression in this thesis. However, I base my propositions on the unparalleled global impact of The Middle Passage, and the chattel enslavement of African people in the Caribbean, amid the reality that the British empire colonised more of the globe than any imperial system that the world has yet known.

heterosexism, or straightness, in white supremacy as a global legacy of British colonialism. The inseparability of racism from straightness, and vice versa, in white supremacy is read as a continued global legacy tied directly to British colonialism which I encapsulate as the global condition of anti-queerness.

Thomas Glave queers British imperial imaginings of its colonised globe by reframing how, although ‘the sun never set’ in the British colonies, ‘everywhere you look there’s so much darkness’.<sup>2</sup> This is a darkness in which hide ‘British bayonets, and British truncheons, and British flames’.<sup>3</sup> It is this background to which the writers I examine in this thesis write back, by writing their queer truth as a light against the continuation of ‘so much’ colonial ‘darkness’ — the colonial darkness of anti-queerness in the Caribbean which is reflected and refracted across the globe.<sup>4</sup> The above ideas inform my readings throughout this thesis: that contemporary queer writing from the Caribbean is vital for conceptualising global queer resistance, because when queerness is linked to Caribbeanness they become coterminous as a global anticolonial resistance.

### **Caribbean Reflections: The Global Condition of Anti-Queerness**

Queer Caribbean writer Shivane Ramlochan has declared that ‘reading the Caribbean means you read the world’.<sup>5</sup> This is because, as Shalini Puri explains, the

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Glave, *Among the Bloodpeople: Politics and Flesh* (Brooklyn, NY: Akashic Books, 2013), p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Shivane Ramlochan explains in a publicly accessible Instagram post: ‘When I imagined and wrote this tagline to accompany my book reviews for #CaribbeanBeat Magazine in 2018, I wanted it to reflect what I already believed: that #CaribbeanLiterature was already its own centre. I didn’t know how strongly these eight words would strengthen my faith, politics, and determination to not only ask for a seat at the table for our literatures, but to show others that we are our own accommodation. We are our own house, even without the titanic industry support of US and UK

contemporary Caribbean is 'both an instance and interrogation of postcoloniality' because its 'modalities, and consequences, are unparalleled' globally.<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, I suggest that the brutal colonial creation, and postcolonial transition, of the anglophone Caribbean means that it is queer on the contemporary world stage. The contemporary Caribbean is queer because it both unsettles the coloniality of accepted global knowledge, and its received wisdoms of straightness and racism, whilst complicating fixed notions of nation, citizenship, and identity. I propose in this thesis that the connection between queer Caribbean writers and their creative work share no similarity based upon their identity, but that instead, they create a communal queer resistance which exists as a transnational solidarity. This distinction is necessary so that communality can be understood in both queer and anticolonial terms — to highlight that one cannot exist without the other — and to disrupt extant structures of a straight status quo that is the global condition of anti-queerness.

This thesis argues that contemporary queer Caribbean writing is a conceptual mirror reflecting the global condition of anti-queerness, whilst it also refracts the knowledge that queerness is anticolonial. The Caribbean as a definition is a contested term which has been read to homogenise and reduce the vastness and uniqueness of differing Caribbean nations. For example, the anglophone Caribbean is sometimes, incorrectly, understood as a fixed and defined locality that

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publishing, editing, and literary prize institutions. We are not marginal to them. We are not marginal to anyone. This motto affirms how resolutely I want always to fight, agitate, and worldbuild towards that. Remember, Reading the Caribbean Means You Read the World' (@novelniche, 13 August 2020) <<https://www.instagram.com/p/CD1qMSCpHay/>> [accessed 1 September 2023].

<sup>6</sup> Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post/Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 1.



shares a similar spatial location on the global map. Potential crossovers with queerness also exist in mysteries of indigenous Caribbean settlement in the, as yet inexplicable, movements of Caribbean culture prior to colonial dominance. As explored by archaeological anthropologists William F. Keegan and Corinne L. Hoffman,

[A] key issue for physicists is explaining why subatomic particles in some experiments act like waves and in others like particles. The colonization of the Caribbean offers the same enigma. Migration models often are based on the movement of individual propagules (Carbone 1980; Moore 2001), yet the distribution of material cultures appear as waves (Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza 1984).<sup>7</sup>

These waves which move culture are important amongst the reminder of misconceptions of the Caribbean as a geographical unity similar to countries such as the UK and the US. In brief, the falsity of geographical unity related to the anglophone Caribbean is exemplified by the 1,915 kilometres of Caribbean Sea between Jamaica and Trinidad. This means that, if not employed with careful consideration and explanation, then academic descriptions of Caribbean regions — for example, anglophone, francophone, or hispanophone — can normalise the contemporary existence of continued colonial categorisations. However, I read a strength in the contested nature of terminology surrounding the Caribbean in relation to queerness, because it lends itself to a global queer critique by remaining open, unfixed, and controversial. This is coupled with the exceptional possibilities of queerness amid anglophone writing, because of the problematic dominance of

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<sup>7</sup> William F. Keegan and Corinne L. Hofman, *The Caribbean Before Columbus* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 60.

English as a global language. This means that my use of anglophone, related to queer Caribbean writing in English, seeks to make boundaries related to nation states more porous amid the resistant potential of writing back against the dominance of straightness related to English in transnational terms.

I argue in this thesis that anti-queerness is a global condition because, no matter their multiform iterations, there is a worldwide essentialism of national, social, and community belonging surrounding identity. I propose that this essentialism is a continued colonial mindset because the naturalisation of national, social, and community belonging based on identity — for example, that being British, or being Jamaican, or being white, or being black means “something” in and of itself — supports global white supremacy as a legacy of colonialism. Again, thinking of the exceptional global scale of British colonization, and the global proliferation of its epistemologies, the concept of the Caribbean is already a queer rejection of colonial oppression because it refuses a fixed and homogenised identity. This Caribbean queerness is important in global terms because, to paraphrase Gil Scott-Heron’s 1971 musical demand for active resistance strategies, the revolution will not be straightened. In this thesis, I suggest that this queer revolution cannot be achieved unless there is a foundational critical disruption of current conceptions of identity, community, nation, and family as benign or neutral when they remain straight concepts.

My argument in this thesis thus sustains the controversial idea that subscribing to any existent formation of identity, community, nation, or family supports the global condition of anti-queerness. I read how contemporary queer Caribbean writing advocates for connecting with a difference by connecting

through difference via a queer communality. This is so relevant for queer Caribbean writing as a global resistance against straightness, because of the complexities and paradoxes of the Caribbean in global terms which mean it has directly impacted the creation of the contemporary world. For example, Curdella Forbes explains that

not the least of these paradoxes is the ironic circle of Europe being birthed by the Caribbean, even as the Caribbean was fathered by Europe. The anomalous confluence of rape, incest and serpent tail maternity/paternity are part of the liminal quality that renders the Caribbean unreadable by traditional modes.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis reads queer communality as a spirit based upon this 'liminal quality', which I explore as a way to defy straight and racist global dominance by resisting these forces within yourself. This means disconnecting from existent modes of belonging, to make yourself 'unreadable by traditional modes', which disrupts and subverts a macrosocial straight conformity that supports the global condition of anti-queerness.<sup>9</sup>

Anti-queer violence is global and thus is not unique or exceptional to the Caribbean; I sustain in this thesis that rhetoric to the contrary serves to fuel particular nationalistic aims in countries which seek to present themselves as implicitly safe and providing more freedom for queer people. This cannot be the case amid the reality that, amongst other notable tragedies, in the UK transphobia informed the murder of Naomi Hersi in Heathrow, Hounslow, in 2018; 2021 saw homophobia fuel the murders of Gary Jenkins in Bute Park, Cardiff and Ranjith

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<sup>8</sup> Curdella Forbes, 'Review: *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective. Second Edition* by Antonio Benitez-Rojo and James Maraniss', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 46:1 (March 2000), 73-80 (p. 76).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Kankanamalage in Tower Hamlets, London; 2023 saw the transphobic murder of Brianna Ghey in Culcheth, Warrington. Tellingly, each of the press engagements with these murders has been accused of bigoted language and insensitivity, and each has also been severely underreported when the murder victim was a person of colour.<sup>10</sup> These remain horrific reminders of the global realities of anti-queer violence that cannot be reframed away to an issue in specific global locations and not others. There is a need to think globally and act locally related to anti-queerness, because violence against queers is globally sanctioned by the continued proliferation of bigotry in racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia. These remain intersecting symptoms of global anti-queerness which are only ever aided and abetted when they are seen as “worse” or “better” in one or other global location.

### **Queerness of the Anticolonial Voice**

Queerness and Caribbeanness collide in this thesis in order to highlight a contentious proposition unexplored by Caribbean literary history, queer theory, and postcolonial theory: that queerness must be anticolonial for either to exist at all. This proposition interrogates a lack of foundational focus on queerness in

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<sup>10</sup> Press Association, ‘Man murdered transgender woman’, *The Guardian*, 23 September 2023, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/25/man-murdered-naomi-hersi-three-day-sex-and-drugs-old-bailey-told>> [accessed 22 August 2023].  
Steven Morris, ‘Three found guilty of murdering Cardiff doctor in homophobic attack’, *The Guardian*, 2 March 2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/03/three-found-guilty-of-murdering-cardiff-doctor-gary-jenkins-in-homophobic-attack>> [accessed 22 August 2023].  
Miriam Burrell, ‘Man jailed for brutal hammer murder in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park’, *Evening Standard*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/erik-feld-ranjith-kankanamalage-tower-hamlets-london-hammer-murder-lgbt-b1087843.html> [accessed 22 August 2023].  
Josh Halliday, ‘Brianna Ghey: two teenagers appear in court charged with murder’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/15/brianna-ghey-two-teenagers-charged-murder> [accessed 22 August 2023].

postcolonial studies, and on postcolonial cultures in queer studies. Rahul Rao explains the need for interventions which reposition colonialism and queerness because postcolonial nations remain the 'unentitled and excluded whose demands are not seen to constitute the universal'.<sup>11</sup> Caribbean literature in English has often been framed as a form of oppositional resistance to its marginalisation against English literature, which includes the notion that it subverts the coloniality of English discourse. Kamau Brathwaite continually returned to the question 'can English be a revolutionary language?', and, in reply, coined the term nation language to include the revolutionary difference of English when it is used in Caribbean literature.<sup>12</sup> For Brathwaite, the nation language of Caribbean literature means that it 'may be in English: but it is an English which is like a howl or the wind or a wave'.<sup>13</sup> Brathwaite's conception of nation language was an important critical intervention surrounding the ability for the English language to be used against its violent inception in colonised countries. However, my own queer questions are posited and given answers in this thesis: can nation language resist colonialism if it reinforces anti-queerness? If Caribbean literature ignores the coloniality of straightness, can it be anti-colonial?

I propose that beyond a familiar critical history surrounding Caribbean literary aesthetics and nation language, there exists a communality to Caribbeanness and queerness which has a global power for resisting straightness. Caribbean English as nation language is explained by Brathwaite to be

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<sup>11</sup> Rahul Rao, 'Queer Questions', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16:2 (2014), 199-217 (p. 213).

<sup>12</sup> Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London, UK: New Beacon, 1984), p. 311.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you might hear them are English to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>14</sup>

My argument in this thesis surrounds the need to reorient — or, as my initial chapter proposes, twist — understandings of nation language to highlight its further queer possibilities. Queer Caribbean writing is thus read to reflect Teresa Zackodnik's description of nation language in the work of queer Caribbean writer Dionne Brand. Zackodnik posits that 'while nation language may create a place for her [Brand] to articulate and affirm her blackness', it 'exiles her as a woman and a lesbian'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, 'while nation language may create a place' for Caribbean queers to speak, 'it exiles' queerness as too radical an individuality to 'articulate and affirm' their speaking in a nation language as it has been previously theorised.<sup>16</sup> With these realities in mind, my thesis proposes that its chosen writers speak with the queerness necessary to create an anticolonial literary voice.

I also see the possibilities of queerness amid communality and an anti-colonial voice, as a formation for counteracting contemporary realities of gay and lesbian imperialism from the global North, which are understood to empower white supremacy. This means writing against the demand to accept that queer freedom exists in one homogenous form, and that it is provided by any dominant outside force: family, community, nation, or otherwise. My arguments in this thesis entail a

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<sup>14</sup> Brathwaite, p. 311.

<sup>15</sup> Teresa Zackodnik, "I Am Blackening in My Way": Identity and Place in Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral*, *Essays on Canadian Writing*; Toronto, 57 (Winter 1995), 194-211 (p. 198).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

globally focussed queer resistance movement, against what Jasbir K. Puar describes as an 'exceptional form of national heteronormativity' which has now been 'joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity', that Puar terms 'homonationalism'.<sup>17</sup> By interpreting the global condition of anti-queerness, as a force that destabilizes any fixed understanding of identity, nation, family, and community, my thesis seeks to interrupt the normalisation of these existing structures and categories as always in benefit of straightness. This is achieved through understanding the necessary queerness of an anticolonial voice, which also shouts against gay and lesbian imperialism in the straight assimilation of LGBT+ homonationalism.

### **Disrupting the Dominant Narrative**

It is important to note here that despite frankly representing the difficulties of living a queer life, the writers of this thesis also evidence the need for queers to empower themselves against the global condition of anti-queerness. Ronald Cummings describes this self-empowerment as the 'connections between queer desires and postcolonial longings', which exist as 'interrelated sites of possibility'.<sup>18</sup> I argue that the experiences of embodying difference from whiteness, straightness, and their intersections allow for the unique and multiform variations of queer Caribbeanness to commune. Specifically, I suggest that there is a commitment to non-conformity against the dominant narrative of a straight status quo which is queer, and

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<sup>17</sup>Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017) p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Cummings, 'Between Here and 'Not Here': Queer Desires and Postcolonial Longings in the Writings of Dionne Brand and José Esteban Muñoz', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55:3 (2019), 308-322 (p. 311).

therefore also rebels against the reflections of a dominant straight narrative within an LGBT+ community framework. By this I mean an LGBT+ (purposefully minus the Q) group identity based on conformity to a grouping of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities which, arguably, at best legitimises current versions of identity, whilst at worst essentialises persons into an LGBT+ identity which becomes singular, fixed, categorizable, and thus easier to minoritize, repress, and oppress.

Queer resistance from the anglophone Caribbean is of specific global interest because the only Caribbean islands which continue to criminalise sexual activities understood as not the norm are British Commonwealth or ex-British Commonwealth. These laws, colloquially known as “Buggery Laws”, have unique iterations in each anglophone Caribbean country, and were created by colonial powers but remain supported by a public majority. The so-called “Buggery Laws” also remain indeterminate in their legal framework, which I read as their anti-queer rather than homophobic nature because they prohibit an ambiguous otherness of gender and sexuality. For example, so-called “Buggery Laws” are arguably anti-queer because these laws do not prohibit same-sex desire per se but rather, for example, ‘anal intercourse by a man with a man or woman, or vaginal intercourse by either a man or a woman with an animal’.<sup>19</sup> Popular misconceptions related to queerness and gayness are a global phenomenon, whose visibility in the Caribbean region in law is important because, in being visible, they are not hidden under a veneer of social acceptance or whispered so as not to cause offence. I suggest that

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Gaskins Jr., “Buggery’ and the Commonwealth Caribbean: A Comparative Examination of the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago’ in *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* ed. Corinne Lennox and Matthew Waites (London, UK: University of London Press, 2013), 429-454 (p. 435).



this reality allows anti-queerness to be more easily placed and framed within a globally focussed critical dialogue, and to disrupt the dominant narrative of “progressive” and “regressive” locations for queer freedom. To be clear, these Caribbean realities are always a reflection of the global condition of anti-queerness and are not understood as any form of exceptional Caribbean bigotry.

M. Jacqui Alexander explains her experience of “coming out” in Trinidad where ‘anticolonial nationalism had taught us well about heterosexual loyalty’.<sup>20</sup> The strictness of adhering to heterosexism remains so vital for post-independence nationalism that, ‘it reneged on its promise of self-determination’ for queers, by ‘delivering criminality instead of citizenship’.<sup>21</sup> Following Alexander’s writing surrounding queer Caribbean citizenship in a Trinidadian context, it is the continued ‘policing of sexualised bodies’ which is informed by ‘the colonial fiction of locating subjectivity in the body’.<sup>22</sup> Crucially, this sexual and gender policing exists ‘as if the colonial masters were still looking on, as if to convey legitimate claims to being civilised’.<sup>23</sup> Therefore queerness cannot be understood as cultural markers, for any conception of national citizenship predicated solely on a straightness that rejects others as national citizens. Thus, queer Caribbean stories are able to write with the most freedom away from ‘the colonial masters’ and their dominant narrative.<sup>24</sup> So queer Caribbean writing remains most able to ‘convey legitimate claims to being

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<sup>20</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 260.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies*, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> 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 (1994), 5-23 (p. 14).

civilised' even though the masters are most definitely 'still looking on'.<sup>25</sup> This queer autonomy also refuses to be rejected as an otherness defined by any status quo norm, in a refusal which highlights Rosamond S. King's reading of the tenacity of queer Caribbeanness, which simultaneously critiques 'Caribbean heteropatriarchy and binary gender' whilst 'highlighting how individuals and groups live, love, and fight within and beyond these restrictions'.<sup>26</sup> Although conventional critical thinking remains rightfully wary of universalising statements, queer Caribbeanness characteristically defies this boundary as never a victim and always a survivor because 'individuals and groups live, love, and fight within and beyond these' seemingly impossible 'restrictions' that are a dominant social narrative.<sup>27</sup> This queer autonomy remains distinctly Caribbean because it has to resist conformity at multiple levels of oppression, within the global condition of anti-queerness, as the face of conventional knowledge is a combination of straightness and racism.

My writing converges with thinking by Nadia Ellis and her understanding of connectivity as a queer form within diaspora which moves against the dominant scripts of straightness and whiteness, and which in her writing is specifically related to a black diaspora. My writing in this thesis engages with the multiple additional issues faced under the global condition of anti-queerness by people of colour, whilst not separating racism from straightness in global terms. I argue that queer Caribbean writing is informed by an embodiment of Ellis' conception that there is 'a persistent sense of the insufficiency of existing modes of belonging' which 'is

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander, 'Not Just...', p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Rosamond S. King, 'One Sustained Moment: The Constant Re-creation of Caribbean Sexualities', *Small Axe*, 52 (March 2017), 250-259 (p. 259).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

matched by an awareness that new forms remain inspiringly elusive'.<sup>28</sup>

Caribbeanness and queerness are terms which already remain 'inspiringly elusive', with this elusiveness becoming further persistent when queer expressions of being meet an already queered sense of Caribbeanness as a global queer literary resistance. This means that a fixed racial identity and its communities are most often not engaged with in this thesis, to reflect the racial and cultural milieu of the Caribbean and by extension the world, because instead of collecting around identity we need 'new forms' of connection through difference, despite the fact that these remain 'inspiringly elusive'.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation follows Kate Houlden's reading of the critical potential lying between world literary theory, (which draws on world systems thinking) and queer theory where

both approaches are concerned with the failings of normative order—whether that is the bourgeois, heteropatriarchal family or the capitalist system itself—while both relate such failure to narrative disjuncture and a literary politics of excess.<sup>30</sup>

This engagement centres, but is not defined by, a state of sustained anti-teleological discomfort which remains successful at critically transgressing binaries, or straight-forward thinking, against the global condition of anti-queerness. These convergences include, but are not limited to, the violent colonial destruction of indigenous conceptions of gender and sexuality; the hyper-eroticised nature of the colonial gaze proposing the colonial subject as perverse; nationalistic rhetoric

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<sup>28</sup> Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in Black Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015) p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Kate Houlden, 'Queering the World or Worlding the Queer? New Readings of Anna Kavan's *Who Are You?*', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 28:4 (2017), 295-311 (p. 295).

ascribing queerness as a colonial import, and rejections of queer as a solely white-centric term. Straight dominance is inseparable from racism in my readings in this thesis because racism relies on the naturalization of identity. This means that you can be many things and be queer, but logically you cannot act from racism or support any idea of gender and sexual norms because these both rely on essentialising identity as the dominant narrative of straight-forwardness.

### **The Coloniality of Straightness**

A necessary reminder is useful here, that I do not understand straightness as only cisgender heterosexuality but as a metonym for the global status quo of white supremacy that is intrinsically anti-queer. In regard to the Caribbean, the links between anti-queerness and white supremacy stem from colonial-era legislation. So, for example, present-day homophobia and transphobia in the Caribbean are 'white' insofar as they are closely associated with colonialism, particularly through the legacies of missionary Christianity, which have continued through contemporary resurgence of American Evangelical Christianity in the region, that have morphed into the dominance of strict binaries of good and bad, straight and queer, throughout the Caribbean. This reality is a lens from which to view the many variations of bigotry as a straight-forwardness which fuels the current global status quo of white supremacy: racism is straight, transphobia is straight, misogyny is straight and so on.

The links I propose between straightness and colonialism across the anglophone Caribbean remain tied to ways that, as Holly Lewis explains, 'European colonial forces eradicated queer cultural norms' throughout their empires 'during

the earliest phases of capitalist development'.<sup>31</sup> This is coupled with the reality explained by Jarrod Hayes that colonization creates the 'imposition of a specifically European form of patriarchy'.<sup>32</sup> It is this specific imposition of European straightness, amongst the development capitalism, which situates my argument for the exceptionality of the anglophone Caribbean in contemporary global terms. If, as Peter Drucker notes, it is broadly understood that the 'hetero/homo binary took clear shape only in a specific regime of capitalist accumulation, classical imperialism', because as recently as the mid-nineteenth century' there was no 'distinguishing between 'heterosexuals' and 'homosexuals', then the global ties between colonialism and contemporary straightness are stark.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, I continually return to the fact that if it is clear that connections between colonial legacies and contemporary straightness are stark then queer Caribbeanness related to resisting British colonialism always has a global exceptionality. This is because British colonization created the largest empire the world has yet known, meaning that queer Caribbeanness thrives directly against a colonization that arguably shaped and informed all other forms of European colonization globally. Gloria Wekker describes Suriname as never 'on the margin of the world system but, historically, squarely in the system's foundation', and this is true insofar as the global influences of British colonialism were copied and enacted by other European powers, including the Dutch in Suriname, and beyond. This positions queerness in relation to the anglophone Caribbean as an exceptional

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<sup>31</sup> Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2016), p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) p. 225.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti Capitalism* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2015), p. 99.

region ‘squarely in the system’s foundation’ of contemporary capitalism amongst white supremacy in global terms.<sup>34</sup>

I propose in this thesis that global white supremacy is supported wherever a recognisable straightness is viewed as the singular “norm” of a nation, and from which otherness to this “norm” is policed. The inverted commas I use throughout this thesis around “norm” or “norms” seek to highlight, and disrupt, that there is any normative way of being human because this is a fantasy ideal that should be treated with the suspicion implied by air quotes. Briefly, this decision reflects my conceptual aim to subvert essentialised imagining of convention and order related to straightness, which includes white supremacy, in reference to colonial dominance and its global legacies. This single world “norm” is not only cisgender and heterosexual but is also informed by colourism, because, globally, privilege is hegemonic related to a person’s proximity to whiteness as an underlying legacy of colonial oppressions which have been oppressed onto global regions either directly or by proxy. Those who uphold “norms” of straight white supremacy can be embodied by anyone regardless of their presupposed identity, which means that no characteristic of identity makes a person immune from this critique. This important distinction supports the wider argument of my thesis: that fixed identity categories are remnant colonial tools in the Caribbean which uphold the global supremacy of whiteness and straightness because these remain synonymous in the colonality of straightness. This intersecting of straight white dominance informs my conception that anti-queerness is a global condition, which is evidenced by a single world

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<sup>34</sup> Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 56.

“norm” being borne of colonial epistemologies. Colonial epistemologies are concepts and categories of an idealised straightness and whiteness which were oppressed onto colonised countries, whilst destroying indigenously defined cultural norms, that I suggest have made racism and heterosexism inseparable.

Although the exact particulars of straight and racist dominance remain contingent upon differing global contexts, I maintain that straightness and racism function in tandem on both microsocial and macrosocial, or local and global, levels. This is because although racism and straightness are informed differently in all global nation states they also remain accepted “norms”. For example, straight and racist dominance in North America is informed by both the continued dispossession of Native Americans and the historical enslavement of black persons, which scholars including Ruth Wilson Gilmore read as continued within contemporary US carceral systems.<sup>35</sup> Genocide and enslavement have always involved a single idealised race, gender, and sexuality of straightness as the “norm” against which societal scapegoating and fears of miscegenation are proliferated. In the anglophone Caribbean, because indigenous populations were eradicated or severely oppressed by British colonial powers it is impossible to know if racism and straightness would have become dominant. However, this reality only ever underscores the fact that the dominance of racism and straightness in the anglophone Caribbean remains a continuation of British colonial epistemologies.

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<sup>35</sup> For reference, Gilmore explains that in the US the ‘California state prisoner population grew nearly 500 percent between 1982 and 2000, even though the crime rate peaked in 1980 and declined, unevenly but decisively, thereafter. African Americans and Latinos comprise two-thirds of the state’s 160,000 prisoners’, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 7.

My thinking in this thesis on the intersections between racism and straightness, in regard to queerness and colonialism, is informed by Jack Halberstam's description of 'the relation between the universal and the particular that allows for the elevation of white male experience' at the 'level of generality' against all others.<sup>36</sup> I read this 'white male experience' as the straight experience supported by the global condition of anti-queerness, and whose elevation can be adopted and evidenced by any iteration of human being regardless of their presupposed identity.<sup>37</sup> Roderick A. Ferguson has explained the ways that 'racialization has helped to articulate heteropatriarchy as universal'.<sup>38</sup> This universality of straightness connects with Halberstam's conceptions for whiteness and straightness as an entwined global supremacy. However, this is not meant as a simple reduction of straight white males as villains, because some of the most ardent elevators of straightness, whiteness, and maleness are those who desire power regardless of their own presupposed identity.

A relationship between what Gayatri Gopinath dubs racialised heteropatriarchy, amid the global North and white gay subjectivity, are examined by her as 'Euro-American metronormativities' which include those 'queer and otherwise'.<sup>39</sup> This is arguably true of the 'Euro-American metronormativities' of an existing academic queer canon, that has been pedagogically founded through an Anglo-American and Eurocentric academic system. These systems of teaching on

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<sup>36</sup> Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Colour Critique* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 61.



queerness tend to take a (now almost clichéd and often uncritically adopted) linearity via Lauren Berlant's and Michael Warner's *Sex in Public* (1988), through Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990); into Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), whilst ending up somewhere around Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) with an, unfortunately, infrequent engagement with writers like Audre Lorde as a nod to queer "diversity".

In a recent interview with Mariam Pirbhai, queer Caribbean writer Shani Mootoo states the problematics of this queer canon as she suggests that 'in maintaining a canon put together some twenty years ago' there might 'be a mindless kind of ghettoization'.<sup>40</sup> This 'mindless kind of ghettoization' remains the exclusion of race, colonialism, and the global South related to queer studies. This system of excluding race, colonialism, and the global South from the academic study of queerness is somewhat undone by the reality of which Njelle Harrison reminds us: that Caribbean writers

[Shani] Mootoo, [Lawrence] Scott, Michelle Cliff, Dionne Brand, Patricia Powell and others challenged us as early as the 1980s and 1990s with intersex, non-binary, transdressing, same-sex-loving characters for whom readers and scholars didn't yet have language.<sup>41</sup>

The reality of this existing queerness for which 'readers and scholars didn't yet have language' remains part of my thinking in this thesis, to complicate the divide of the global North and the global South related to queerness as read through Caribbean

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<sup>40</sup> Mariam Pirbhai, 'On 'Moving Forward' Toward the Un/familiar: An Interview with Shani Mootoo', *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 40:1 (2015), pp. 227-241, p. 234.

<sup>41</sup> Ronald Cummings, Rand Njelle Hamilton, 'Dialogues: Reviewing the Queer Caribbean', *Anthurium*, 17:1 (2021), <<http://doi.org/10.33596/anth.465>> [accessed 6 July 2023].

writing. Although, as mentioned, the Caribbean as a term can have a limiting effect on understanding the region and totalising it into a false understandability, Antonio Benítez-Rojo understands the Caribbean as a postmodern expanse, and as

the last of the great meta-archipelagos. If someone needed a visual explanation, a graphic picture of what the Caribbean is, I would refer him to the spiral chaos of the Milky Way, the unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe's firmament.<sup>42</sup>

Benítez-Rojo explains that the intention behind reducing the Caribbean is that 'the great powers' need to recodify the world's territory' in order 'better to know' and 'to dominate it'.<sup>43</sup> This thesis proposes that any attempts to conceptually fix the Caribbean remains linked to similar demands for classifying queerness, because capturing them into a static and knowable category would mean their possession by colonial epistemology: the 'better to know' them with and the better to 'dominate' them with.<sup>44</sup> The global scope of queer literary resistance related to the Caribbean which I read in this thesis resists the 'need to recodify', which means that its capture is evaded, because the irreducible and incalculable queerness of the Caribbean 'really is that and much more' as it disrupts the binary divide of queerness related to the global North and the global South.<sup>45</sup>

This thesis will suggest that Caribbean queerness helps to make sense of the 'discontinuous conjunction' of the Caribbean, as Benítez-Rojo's 'meta-archipelago' in its 'spiral chaos of the Milky way'.<sup>46</sup> My readings are informed by theories of the

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<sup>42</sup> Antonio, Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992) pp. 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Benítez-Rojo, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Benítez-Rojo, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Benítez-Rojo, p. 5 and p. 2.

syncretic formation of Caribbean culture as a global milieu. As with Benítez-Rojo's Caribbean Milky Way, the queerness of Caribbeanness and the Caribbeanness of queerness will be shown to disrupt the ideals of fixed order in the coloniality of straightness. This has global resonance in this thesis by positing a queered form of an intersectional mode of analysis, a way of reading a particularly vital set of texts (and writers) that are hard to pigeonhole for reasons of location, genre, form, and overlapping "identities".

### **Queer — Caribbean — Global: A Conceptual Overview**

I have chosen to analyse contemporary Caribbean creative writing in this thesis, to explore the impacts of emergent queer visibility across the anglophone Caribbean on anticolonial resistance strategies. I am primarily proposing an unbroken continuum of colonial dominance in the here and now, meaning that contemporary writing is the best fit for my argument. The explicit shifts of visibility and tolerance for queer persons in the anglophone Caribbean have moved relatively quickly during the contemporary period, which I read in the marked urgency of queer contemporary writing to express its autonomy. For example, in Jamaica, consider the difference between the violently opposed Kingston Pride of 1989 and the first sanctioned Pride event in 2015. Cornell Grey and Nikoli A. Attai also present a set of 2014 activities by the Anglican Reverend Father Sean Major Campbell as a pivotal moment of shifting public attitudes towards queerness, as Campbell 'washed the feet of two lesbian representatives', and 'also allowed a transman to give testimony about struggling with identity issues and the difficulty of living a trans life in

Jamaica'.<sup>47</sup> High profile activities such as these carry great cultural resonance in the, predominantly Christian, anglophone Caribbean.

My academic desire is to disrupt boundaries between subjects related to queerness, nation, and identity, because these can create an impasse in the discourse of global queer resistance. This means that remaining bound to a nation or to a race as an identity does not function as queerness. The differences with which a person's nationality and race impact a person are, of course, very real, but my thesis suggests that collecting around a shared level of oppression based on identity separates, categorises, and defines queerness. Instead, I read the ineffability of Caribbeanness and queerness as always and already global in their resistance, because they cannot be reduced to the sum of their identity parts. Hamilton has explained 'that queerness and Caribbeanness might actually be synonymous' and it is this connection which informs my global framing of queer resistance conceptualised through Caribbean writing in English.<sup>48</sup> Rinaldo Walcott's interpretation of Sylvia Wynter's work on being human as praxis is particularly relevant in this vein, in his description that the Caribbean is 'a space of unique invention in the colonial and modern world' which 'has much to offer contemporary global culture on living difference as central to humanness'.<sup>49</sup> I read

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<sup>47</sup> Cornel Grey and Nikoli A. Attai, 'LGBT Rights, Sexual Citizenship, and Blacklighting in the anglophone Caribbean: What do Queers Want, What Does Colonialism Need?' in *The Oxford Handbook of Global LGBT and Sexual Diversity Politics* ed. Michael J. Bosia, Sandra M. McEvoy, and Momin Rahman, p. 7, <<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190673741.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190673741>> [accessed 2 January 2020].

<sup>48</sup> Cummings and Hamilton, <<http://doi.org/10.33596/anth.465>> [accessed 6 July 2023].

<sup>49</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, 'Genres of Human: Multiculturalism, Cosmo-politics, and the Caribbean Basin', *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 183-202 (p. 194).

the ‘unique invention’ and ‘living difference’ in this sense as the importance of queer Caribbean literary resistance in macrosocial terms.

My thesis sustains the view that the lack of legal sanctions protecting some aspects of queer autonomy in the contemporary Caribbean may make oppression more visible in some ways, but not ever “worse” than in ex-metropolises. I will be very clear that it is not my intention to highlight continued colonial oppressions of anti-queerness as exceptional in the anglophone Caribbean. I argue that the continued legacy of colonialism is shared by ex-colonised and ex-coloniser with great difference, but in the same modality of anti-queerness as a global condition. This includes the complexity that if colonial dominance has not yet ended in a postcolonial nation then colonial dominance remains a global force, and that the idea of more queer freedom in certain locations is only a case of shifted goalposts in biopolitical policing. This complexity means that I read prejudice against queer non-conformity in this thesis as a global force, which appears on a spectrum between visibility and invisibility rather than understandings of “worse” or “better”. This means that anti-queer sentiment can be argued as more open in, for example, the Caribbean and more insidious in, for example, Britain, whilst also revoking the ability to fuel a false narrative of supposed “progression”. This is a necessary disruption because it cannot be true that a location has “better” queer freedom if white cisgender gay men gain some rights whilst others remain disenfranchised and dispossessed. Globally, violence against queers has increased within the last ten years. This is not a solely a Caribbean issue, and for context ‘data shows there were 6,363 reports of hate crimes based on sexual orientation in 2014-15 [in the UK], the year same-sex weddings became legal in Great Britain, compared to 19,679 in

2020-21. For reports of transphobic hate crimes, there were 598 in 2014-15 and 2,588 in 2020-21'.<sup>50</sup>

### **Queer — Caribbean — Global: Theoretical Crossroads**

The field of globally focussed queer readings of Caribbean writing remains nascent, but is burgeoning with exciting potential for fresh engagements, vital further development, and important intersectional work. Critical enquiries between gender, sexuality, queerness and Caribbeanness in Caribbean studies had remained niche since the 1990s but have gained prominence into the present day. Makeda Silvera's 'Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians' (1992) was an important intervention, and Jacqui Alexander's essay 'Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen' (1994) was, and perhaps remains, ahead of its time in its critical insight on straight dominance, nationhood, and citizenship. Alexander's critical work related to her own female same sex-desire in Trinidad was joined by the later creative writing anthology *Tongues on Fire* (1998) for the wider Caribbean. Other important LGBTQ+ anthologies followed, including *Our Caribbean* (2008) and *The Queer Caribbean Speaks* (2014). There were broad and ambitious attempts at theoretical intersections of queerness and postcolonialism in Timothy Hawley's edited collection of critical writing *Postcolonial, Queer* (2001), which included engagements with LGBTQ+ rights in the Caribbean. Another later work on postcolonial narratives and queerness came from Donna McCormack's *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing*

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<sup>50</sup> Ben Hunte, 'Don't Punish Me For Who I Am': Huge Jump in Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crime Reports in UK', *Vice News*, 11 October 2021, <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/4avkyw/anti-lgbtq-hate-crime-reports-increase-in-six-years>> [accessed 1 December 2022].

(2015). However, a sustained critical engagement with a specific focus on queerness and Caribbeanness began to make its mark from the 2010s. Faith Smith's *Sex and the Citizen* (2011) and Kate Houlden's *Sexuality, Gender and Nationalism in Caribbean Literature* (2016) both include expert insights into gender and sexual difference related to Caribbean cultural forms, whilst highlighting the global possibilities of such examinations. Rosamond S. King's pan-Caribbean and multimodal critical work *Island Bodies* (2014) includes fascinating insights into the controversial status of queer as a term when related to the Caribbean, and focusses on social distinctions between multiple anglophone, francophone, hispanophone, and dutchophone island nations.

The critical contentions surrounding the use of the term queer in Caribbean contexts can aid fresh literary interpretations of queerness, Caribbeanness, and the coloniality of straightness related to identity. For example, King critiques the term queer as white-centric whilst inviting further critical commentary and debate on the subject. A view that the term queer is white-centric is well founded, yet I propose that it does not do enough to highlight this as having been borne of its poor handling by a dominant Anglo-American and Eurocentric academic system. For example, if the term queer has been reappropriated from straight persons as a slur then it contains the capacity to also be reoriented away from white supremacy. Arguably, rejections of the term queer in Caribbean contexts stem from an understanding of queerness as an umbrella category encompassing all different forms of gender and sexuality that are not straight. Queer, of course, can be this umbrella category but it is never only this umbrella category. King relies in her work on the concept of self-identification as a point of reference which remains centred

around identarian categories. King describes lesbians as ‘people who have identified themselves with that word’ and Caribbean activist organisations for LGBTQ+ persons as having mostly ‘organizers identified as black’.<sup>51</sup> King describes how ‘North Americans and Europeans have historically defined and continue to define Caribbeanness, and especially Caribbean genders and sexualities’.<sup>52</sup> King has also written, in the context of *The Queer Caribbean Speaks*, that she is ‘not sure about your [editor’s] use of the term *queer*’ because ‘it is hardly used in the region’ and ‘its use in the USA is directly related to age, class and education’.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, King asserts that queer is potentially an incompatible term in the context of the Caribbean. However, my conceptual framing of queer Caribbean communality as a global literary resistance continually returns to the slipperiness of what queerness is, as a major strength and justification for the validity of its use in globally focussed critique.

Further critical focus on female same sex desire within Caribbean studies includes *Thieving Sugar* (2010) by Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Desire between Women in Caribbean Literature* (2013) by Keja Valens, and *Erotic Cartographies* (2022) by Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan. Relevant critical work intersecting the fields of Black Studies, Queer Studies, and Caribbean Studies include Michelle Anne Stephen’s *Black Empire* (2005), Rinaldo Walcott’s *Queer Returns* (2016), and Nadia Ellis’ *Territories of the Soul* (2015), which both make clear that a global focus on

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<sup>51</sup> Rosamond S. King, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), p. 94 and p. 111.

<sup>52</sup> King, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> Rosamond S. King, King, ‘Rosamond S. King’ in *The Queer Caribbean Speaks: Interviews with Writers, Artists and Activists* ed. by Kofi Omoniyi Sylvanus Campbell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 153-159 (p.153; original emphasis).



queerness through the Caribbean has exceptional potential for new critical insight. Lyndon K. Gill's *Erotic Islands* (2018) and his wider scholarly oeuvre make similar demands to complicate limitations of identity and race related to queerness and Caribbeanness. The global importance of queerness and Caribbeanness is often returned to in this thesis as a mode which brings Walcott, Gill, and Ellis into conversation. The aim of this thesis is to shift understandings of a global queer communality that is not based on sharing any similarity, including the presupposed safeties and comforts of groupings based on race, gender, and sexuality. Each of the critical writings I mention above do engage with problematising the nature of categorisations of race, gender, and sexuality, and it is these aspects of their work which my writing seeks to push into original areas of queer critique.

A recent important anthology of critical writing on queerness and Caribbeanness, *Beyond Homophobia* (2020), was created as the output from a 2019 conference on LGBTQ+ experiences in the Caribbean at the University of West Indies, Mona Campus. The edited collection brings together academics, artists, and other cultural practitioners, to highlight the need to move away from a reductive notion that the Caribbean is exceptionally homophobic, by considering this rhetoric as continuing colonial epistemology. A key concern in this thesis is to complicate a false global narrative surrounding queerness and anti-queerness, and to highlight that vectors of queer oppression are never exceptional, natural, or essential in any specific location but are rather symptomatic of the global condition of anti-queerness. Scholarship by Ronald Cummings and Njelle Harrison is vital to my thinking in this vein, amid their recent engagements with Caribbeanness as queerness. I also take great inspiration and insight from Andil Gosine's recent work

*Nature's Wild* (2021), which interprets queer desire and animality related to Caribbean laws and which has a neat conceptual crossover with another relevant recent work of queer studies, Jack Halberstam's *Wild Things* (2020).

My critical writing in this thesis has its closest comparison in theoretical intersections with Alison Donnell's *Creolized Sexualities* (2022). My thesis shares a focus with *Creolized Sexualities* on writing by Shani Mootoo and Marlon James, but Donnell takes an approach which also seeks to examine the anti-heteronormative potential of work by Curdella Forbes, Junot Diaz, Sam Selvon, Andrew Salkey, and V. S. Naipaul. My contemporary focus distinguishes my work from Donnell's, as does my continued interrogation of identity and community in the creation of new forms of global queered belonging and relationality. My thesis agrees with Donnell's perspective of the Caribbean 'as a constitutively queer place' which I propose informs the importance of the global possibilities of queer literary resistance.<sup>54</sup> However, Donnell's focus on undoing heteronormativity through theories of creolization mean that our arguments remain distinct in their approach, execution, and critical destinations. Whilst I read queer Caribbean writing as a literary resistance against straight and racist dominance, amid the global condition of anti-queerness, Donnell reads it as 'the undoing of heteronormativity, rather than homophobia' from a localized perspective.<sup>55</sup> My thesis differs from *Creolized Sexualities* as I complicate identity and community into a queer communality of defiance against global straight dominance, whereas Donnell traces a path to creolizing heteronormativity as an act for subverting it. There are exciting

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<sup>54</sup> Alison Donnell, *Creolized Sexualities: Undoing Heteronormativity in the Literary Imagination of the Anglo-Caribbean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022), p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Donnell, p. 5.

crossovers between *Creolized Sexualities* and my thesis, as well as with the other studies outlined above, which bring together a sense of queer Caribbeanness as a form of global resistance.

There remains a lack of critical interaction with work by writers of colour as a focal point in the broad field of queer studies, and aspects of queer studies sustain a preoccupation with white cisgender gays in the global North. This thesis sustains the view that a dominant queer studies that remains predominantly focussed solely on white cisgender gays in the global North continues to categorise itself based on identity. Evidence for this perspective exists in the current lack of queer scholarly engagement with much of the work by writers explored in this thesis. For example, although, arguably, Marlon James is an important queer writer in his generation due to his committed refusal to conform to straight-forward representations of the Caribbean, James' writing is not a popular critical subject for queer criticism outside of queer Caribbean studies. Kedon Willis explains how as recently as 2021, 'a distinctly queer analysis of the novel which brought James international renown [*A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014)] has so far been overlooked'.<sup>56</sup> Alison Donnell does provide a queer character analysis from *A Brief History of Seven Killings* in her most recent critical monograph. However, a distinctly queer analysis that seeks to theorise Marlon James' writing outside of area studies is oddly absent, in contrast to contemporary white queer writers of the global North. By this I mean that there remains a silence of critical writers dedicated to queerness on writers whose work will necessarily demand an

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<sup>56</sup> Willis, p. 76.

examination of race and colonialism. This thesis consistently returns to the need to defy this queer scholarly recalcitrance — as disruptive and imperfect as this will be — pointing towards the myriad of other queer writers of colour whose ethos of non-conformity is not engaged with by queer theorists outside of area studies. This lack of engagement is highlighted in queer-focussed Caribbean writing anthologies, including *Our Caribbean*, *The Queer Caribbean Speaks*, and *Beyond Homophobia* which each explain a need for wide-reaching critical engagements between Caribbean studies and queer theories. To be clear, however, I am not suggesting that the work of queer Caribbean writers needs aid from queer scholarship to defy paradigms of the white, cisgender, gay, global North. I do propose though that the global importance of the Caribbean to queer literary resistance cannot be overstated, due to the Caribbean's distinctly queer relationship to national identity, race, and homeland pertaining to histories of colonialism, enslavement, and diaspora.

I also posit that the fundamental theoretical disjuncture between queer and postcolonial theory cuts both ways, meaning that the foundations of postcolonial theory should always have been queer and vice versa. In practice this would have meant a focus on the colonality of gender and sexuality in *Gender Trouble* (1990), alongside a queer focussed *The Black Atlantic* (1993); an *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) centralizing the global majority, and an LGBTQ+ *In Other Words* (1987). The queer, Caribbean, and global nature of the resistance I read in this thesis exposes concomitant forces which continue to defy colonialism and any fixed identity — because these should always and already reside as central to anticolonial and queer thought. The global communality of queerness has been unable to be tamed by

colonial forces because queers embody a disruption against the ordered categorizations of identity. The global queer resistance I read through Caribbean writing reveals one way in which queerness is anticolonial. This colonial oppression is contemporary in the anglophone Caribbean, and globally, but it is always unique and different in each nation. It is due to the visible and public illegitimacy of queerness within the Caribbean that a respectability politics which often shrouds anti-queerness in the global North is revoked to reveal the global condition of anti-queerness.

### **The Embedded Queerness of Marronage**

There is a connection between the queerness of resistance related to the Caribbean read in this thesis and concepts surrounding Maroon resistance. Maroon resistance related to the anglophone Caribbean is unique, because, in a Jamaican context, Maroon communities were created by those who defied their enslavement and formed outsider settlements, including those in Accompong, St. Elizabeth, Scotts Hall, St. Mary and Moore Town.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the most recognisable Maroon settlement is Crawford Town in the Blue Mountain range of Jamaica, which was renamed Charles Town following a peace treaty with British colonists circa 1760. In this thesis, Maroon resistance has a particular crossover with queer resistance related to interpretations of traditional cultural forms from the anglophone Caribbean, including the religious spirituality of Obeah explored in my second chapter, Anansi storytelling in my fourth chapter, and Carnival in my final chapter.

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<sup>57</sup> For further information on Maroon communities in Jamaica please explore <<https://www.maroons-jamaica.com/home/>> [accessed 3 March 2022].

Maroon resistance as a queer resistance has been read through their powerfully rebellious lives.<sup>58</sup> Maroon resistance remains complex and contested because, as Ronald Cummings explains, 'the historical narrative of Marronage also traces moments of collusion between Plantations and Maroons' as well as Maroons engaging in their own forms of enslavement whilst attacking colonial infrastructures.<sup>59</sup>

The most notable critical engagement between queerness and Marronage comes from Cumming's work, including his interpretation of Jamaica's only female national hero, Nanny of the Maroons, through Jack Halberstam's concept of female masculinities. Cummings cites historical work on Nanny of the Maroons by Kamau Brathwaite and Carolyn Cooper, to explain how a dearth of evidence surrounding Nanny has been replaced by a mythical representation of a nationalistic heroine. For Cummings, Nanny of the Maroons is queer because she is 'marked by various tensions around issues of gendernormativity and heteronormativity'.<sup>60</sup> Nanny's

unruly body emerges as the site of varied apocryphal folk tales, such as the narrative of her being 'able to catch bullets with her backside,' which are retold with such frequency that she has acquired a kind of materiality.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, Nanny is not only Maroon but her reality in Jamaican popular culture makes her a queer literary resistance because her 'unruly body emerges as the site of

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<sup>58</sup> For detailed insight into the connections between queerness and Marronage please see Ronald Cummings 'Queer Marronage and Caribbean Writing' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, School of English, 2012) <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9848292.pdf>> [accessed 8 March 2021].

<sup>59</sup> Cummings, 'Queer Marronage', p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Cummings, 'Jamaican Female Masculinities: Nanny of the Maroons and the Genealogy of the Man-Royal', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 21:1&2 (2012), 129-154 (p. 144).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

varied apocryphal folk tales in its own'.<sup>62</sup> The distinctive crossovers between queer resistance and Marronage are also expressed by the first female Maroon titleholder, Gaama Gloria "Mamma G" Simms. Gaama Gloria "Mamma G" Simms is the reigning Paramount Queen of the Maroons, and the founder of the Maroon Indigenous Women Circle.<sup>63</sup> Gaama Gloria "MaMa G" Simms makes it clear that Maroon empowerment is aligned with a non-conformity of outsider Caribbeanness, meaning those who

are willing and made able through our life of adversity to help others recognize and know how to reap benefits from recurring history. As the feminine energies have great knowledge in cycles, as she is the reflection of the moon and mother earth, time and space will always surrender.<sup>64</sup>

This 'great knowledge in cycles' is, for Simms, that which makes 'the Maroon the "Grandmother of all" indigenous cultures in Jamaica'.<sup>65</sup> Simms explains that 'Maroons of Jamaica are the original custodians of the African/Jamaican Culture' because 'this charge had been bestowed on them by the Taino Native Indians of Jamaica'.<sup>66</sup> This thesis reflects Simms' ideas by positing that figures who may seemingly not fit with queerness or Marronage, when this is based solely only on identity, can exist together in a communality aligned with the non-conformity of an outsider Caribbeanness.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> For more information on the Gaama Gloria "Mamma G" Simms, Paramount Queen of the Maroons, please see this insightful online interview, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XC\\_25Y9OV2l](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XC_25Y9OV2l)> [published 12 June 2019; accessed 3 March 2022].

<sup>64</sup> Gaama Gloria "MaMa G" Simms, 'Maroon Indigenous Women Circle, Jamaica: Historical Recurrences from Indigenous Women's Perspectives', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19:2 (2018), 244-247 (p. 247).

<sup>65</sup> Simms, p. 245.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Through reading Audre Lorde's queer Caribbeanness in my second chapter, I propose that Lorde is a queer Caribbean matriarch for global literary resistance, because she reflects Carolyn Cooper's description of Marronage as a 'tradition of sustained subversion of European hegemony'.<sup>67</sup> The matriarchal framework of the resistance I read through Audre Lorde could be confused with other forms of collective female resistance such as womanism. However, provocatively, the global queer literary resistance examined in this thesis does not limit womanhood or matriarchy to a fixed notion of gender or sex. Manipulating Alice Walker's canonical statement on the intersectional strengths of womanism, my thesis suggests that if 'womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender' then womanism is to queer Caribbeanness as purple is to Maroon, due to its exceptional commitment to non-conformity pushing against the limits prescribed by an identity.<sup>68</sup> I am not suggesting that simply any person can embody Marronage, but I am inferring that a Maroon spirit is not limited by an identity either in the Caribbean or globally. This position supports Cummings' reading of 'both Maroon and queer identities in their theorization', as 'profoundly intertwined', because 'Maroon identity also represented a site of contestation and difference in relation to the contemporary nation state'.<sup>69</sup> This site of contestation is the space from which I read a global queer resistance interpreted through the writing examined in this thesis. However, my unique critical intervention lies in not accepting identity as applicable with

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<sup>67</sup> Carolyn Cooper, 'Resistance Science: Afrocentric Ideology in Vic Reid's *Nanny Town*', *Maroon Heritage: Archeological Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives* ed. Kofi Agorsah (Kingston, JA: Canoe Press, 1994), 109–118 (p.109).

<sup>68</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. xii.

<sup>69</sup> Ronald Cummings. '(Trans)Nationalisms, Marronage, and Queer Caribbean Subjectivities', *Transforming Anthropology*, 18:2 (2010), 169–180 (p. 178 and p. 171).



either a Maroon or a queer perspective because they remain defined by a selfhood that cannot be reduced by these tools of colonial categorisation. A refusal to link queerness with any identity subverts the categorisations I have read in some queer scholarship, which pertains to disidentify whilst continuing to invoke familiar categories of identity as having a shared or essential characteristic.

### **The Queer Positionality of Failure**

In the context of my thesis, my own positionality as a middle-class white British queer researcher should not be avoided. It is true that, following current scholarly debate in critical race and whiteness studies, I benefit greatly from white supremacy. Paula K. Miller summates white supremacy as including

all ideologies and practices that elevate whiteness at the expense of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and that help perpetuate white dominance and power, however subtle. Most of these ideologies and practices are normative and perceived by many white people as having nothing to do with race.<sup>70</sup>

Following Miller further, white people are ‘encouraged to remain ignorant of the ways life opportunities are stratified by race’; I do not wish to be ignorant of the fact that this thesis is impacted by my own life opportunities as a white person.<sup>71</sup> I am seeking in my position as a white British queer critic to advocate for queer Caribbean literary voices as of fundamental importance for the progression of global queer studies, amid an understanding that anti-queerness is a continuation

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<sup>70</sup> Paula K. Miller, ‘Hegemonic Whiteness: Expanding and Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework’, *Sociology Compass*, 16 (2022), 1-18 (p. 8).

<sup>71</sup> Miller, p. 7.

of colonialism. This thesis creates a chorus of writerly voices which I interpret as a global queer literary resistance that needs to be heard, as opposed to positioning myself as speaking on behalf of queer Caribbeanness. This methodology also seeks to avoid what Miller describes as ‘analysis paralysis’ where ‘white people engage with their own privilege and how it may disadvantage others while fearing the appearance of being racist or offensive’.<sup>72</sup> My position as a white British queer researcher in this field will be necessarily contentious, but also remains part of a discourse which confronts identity as a categorising force. However, despite my place in this discourse I must also pay careful heed to the reality that although categories of identity are socially constructed, they still create different levels of violence against each queer person differently. I am seeking to complicate the boundaries of queerness and Caribbeanness by proposing them as globally resistant, through a desire to disturb any queer criticism which seems to avoid race and colonialism, and wherever area studies hold on tightly to straight “norms”.

Positionality, as I understand it, includes the myriad ways that differences in social power are conferred to a person under white supremacy and is often linked to Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s theories of intersectionality.<sup>73</sup> I am explicitly not seeking to position myself as anything other than privileged as a white and male presenting queer person. I understand that my arguments in this thesis could be

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<sup>72</sup> Miller, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> An interesting, insightful, and detailed critique on the subject of whiteness in higher education can be found in a recent critical collection edited by Crenshaw: *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (2019). Including, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, that ‘whiteness remains invisible as a significant racial characteristic of the biopolitical state’. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ‘Toward a New Research Agenda? Foucault, Whiteness, and Indigenous Sovereignty’, *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 293-306 (p. 298).

read as white queer critic Sophie Lewis' writing on race and family have; as a 'fantastical indulgence', similar to those of 'relatively affluent white socialists or queer settlers or at least atheist feminists at the imperial core'.<sup>74</sup> Although valid in many respects, I suggest that this critique can fall prey to the racism of homogenisation, which can 'excuse or romanticise the political character of all nonwhite, mixed, gay, and/or indigenous' persons. In this thesis I propose that through addressing the existing epistemic boundaries between queer studies, Caribbean studies, and queer Caribbean studies there can be a necessary transgression. For queers, transgression is fundamental. This transgression is fundamental since the discipline of queer studies does not foundationally include examinations of the effects of colonialism and racism; at the same time, Caribbean studies does not focalise undoing straightness as necessary for anticolonial praxes.

In terms of my critical engagement with intersectionality, I can see the gravity that intersectionality has provided for connecting vectors of oppression in theoretical frameworks. This means that I agree with Peter Drucker, that intersectionality 'can', and in my opinion does, succeed in making 'explicit connections that thinkers have been making for over a century from within a range of radical paradigms'.<sup>75</sup> Intersectionality is an important tool for engaging with the unique, individual, differing, and multiple oppressions that a person suffers tied to the crossovers of their perceived identity, as well as the unique, individual, differing, and multiple, privileges of a person tied to the crossovers of their

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<sup>74</sup> Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (London, UK: Verso, 2022), p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Drucker, 'Political Economy of Sex and Empire Homonationalism & Queer Resistance' *Against the Current*, 31:2 (2016), 23-26 (p. 24).

perceived identity. However, my argument in this thesis critiques the identity of nation, family, gender, sexuality, race, and community as each constructed in support of the global condition of anti-queerness. This means that because intersectionality theory does not destabilize the social construction of an identity, it can work to essentialise identity structures or to create a conservative communitarianism where people of specific intersectional embodiments only connect with their own specific intersectional embodiments. As Holly Lewis notes, by intersectionality cutting ‘through the subject at various angles’ it ‘reifies race and strictures on social gender’, which can reform familiar moulds of ‘a static identity’ into a static intersectional identity.<sup>76</sup>

My thinking on the intersectional natures of oppressions under white supremacy involves always paying heed to the very real differences of oppression related to people connected to their intersections of identity under white supremacy, whilst continuously affirming these intersections of identity are not essential to the person. This connects with what Rosemary Hennessy theorizes as ‘unlearning’ and destabilizing ‘the identities we take for granted’, away ‘from ways of thinking that invite us to construe them as natural’.<sup>77</sup> The intersections of oppression related to identity should not define who a person is, because this plays into the hands of a straight-forward desire to categorise, in order to control, which I suggest only plays back into the hands of white supremacy as the global condition of anti-queerness.

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<sup>76</sup> Lewis, p. 273.

<sup>77</sup> Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), pp. 229-230.

I am arguing in this thesis for the global importance of queer resistance from the Caribbean, amid its potential to create further insight into how global relationships can be made beyond identity. My own differences related to identity from the writing that I interpret seeks to evidence a way of recognising the very real differences of oppression related to identity, without viewing this as an end point to the conversation of where and how queer connections can be made. My positionality may fail to transcend the limits of cultural and identity differences for some, but if queerness loves anything it is an artful failure. This is not meant as a failure which invokes loss and tragedy, notably critiqued by Heather Love, but rather the potential that lies in the limitations and ruptures that exist whenever critics write. By this I mean, understanding that no one can speak for anyone but themselves, or for anyone else, and yet we all arguably must speak outside of our comfort zone to learn and to grow. This is especially true for conceptualising a transnational and global queer critique, despite the inevitability of failure where each of us know that no one has the “right” answer. This means the positives of queer failure which Halberstam sees in queers being able to ‘wander, improvise, fall short’ and that make us ‘move in circles’.<sup>78</sup> To ‘move in circles’ as a positive reframing of failure implies no negative in this thesis, because it is a pragmatic view on the failure of all critical thought in regard to a thinker’s positionality as we can each only write and speak from ourselves. However, I suggest that in this thesis any failure remains a queer success because ‘in losing we will find another way to make meaning’ of a global queer literary resistance.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

As a queer researcher who would be identified as white and male, I am in a position to present my lived experience as a complication of the false narrative that anti-queerness is exceptionally “regressive” in some countries, against a “progressive” UK. I am capable of seeing clearly from my positionality through the smokescreen of a “progressive” global North related to queer freedoms, which can both universalise the experience of white queers and vilify bigotry as a problem of the global South. The reality remains that anti-queer violence exists in the Caribbean and the UK because it exists globally. I am reminded here of the tragic murder of sixteen-year-old Dwayne Jones in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in 2013, who was killed for being dressed as a woman at an ostensibly straight party after allegedly not declaring this fact. Many news outlets in the UK, US, and Europe used this horrific murder to further a false rhetoric stoked by the now-infamous 2006 Time Magazine article that declared Jamaica ‘The Most Homophobic Place on Earth’.<sup>80</sup> However, for evidence against the idea that queer freedom is more possible in the UK, the last decade has seen a number of prolific UK serial murderers and rapists targeting queers — including Stephen Port, the so-called “Grindr Killer” who was apprehended in 2015, and Reynhard Sinaga, convicted in 2020 of a staggering 136 counts of male-male rape.<sup>81</sup> The realities surrounding queer safety are not unique to the Caribbean but exist as a reflection of global

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<sup>80</sup> Tim Padgett, ‘The Most Homophobic Place on Earth’, *Time Magazine*, 12 April 2006, <<https://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1182991,00.html>> [accessed 25 July 2023].

<sup>81</sup> Matt Parr, ‘The Met was ill prepared when Stephen Port began killing gay men – and it still is’ *The Guardian*, 28 April 2023, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/apr/28/met-police-ill-prepared-stephen-port-killing-gay-men>> [accessed 25 July 2023].

Helen Pidd and Josh Halliday, ‘Reynhard Sinaga jailed for life for raping dozens of men in Manchester’, *The Guardian*, 6 Jan 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/06/reynhard-sinaga-jailed-life-drugging-raping-men-manchester>> [accessed 25 July 2023].

realities, that effect each queer person differently and queer people of colour the most. Global literary resistance is thus so necessary for queer people, as a tool to maintain agency and autonomy despite the false promises of “progression” to queer freedom.

Queer critical transgressions such as my own in this thesis will, and should, remain controversial. My perspective on queerness, critical failure, and positionality follow ideas by David Scott made in remembrance of the celebrated non-conformist Caribbean philosopher Lloyd Best. Thinking of Best reminds Scott that there is

a certain *attitude* to the calling of — the *duty* to live — a critical intellectual life [...] an existential *compulsion* or a moral *obligation* to refuse to comply with the requirements of the status quo [...] it is not enough to announce our intention to do so when we get the power. We have also, it seems to me, to demonstrate the sorts of changes we are aiming at by starting to live them now . . . so far as is possible [...] the duty of criticism, I now recognise, does not come with guarantees. It is the adventure of the journey that matters, with all its contingencies and risk of failure involved.<sup>82</sup>

Following Best and Scott, my current ‘duty of criticism’ includes the ‘existential *compulsion*’ and ‘moral *obligation*’ to disrupt boundaries related to identity when conceptualising a macrosocial queer resistance.<sup>83</sup> Honouring my own critical intuition means refusing compliance ‘with the requirements of the status quo’ of segregating academic disciplines around identity.<sup>84</sup> In order to address this

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<sup>82</sup> David Scott, ‘The Duty of Criticism’, *Small Axe*, 25:2 No. 65 (July 2021), vi-x (pp. vii-x); original emphasis.

<sup>83</sup> Scott, p. vii.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

segregation, my writing seeks to ‘demonstrate the sorts of changes we are aiming at by starting to live them now’, by interpreting the importance of connecting queerness and Caribbeanness as a global resistance via my perspective as a white British queer critic.<sup>85</sup> As important as I believe this research is, I am aware of the gaps, faults, problematics, and blind spots that my subjective research perspective will create. My lived queerness aids my position but is also limited through the privileges of being a white British person. I am also aware that subjective gaps, faults, problematics and blind spots exist for all researchers which means that, like all researchers, my work is seeking to create the opportunity for further discourse, argument, and challenge. Of course, this work ‘does not come with guarantees’ but I also see the ‘contingencies and risk of failure involved’ as vital for the creation of any original knowledge.<sup>86</sup> These risks are necessary for the continued advancement of knowledge: postcolonial, queer, Caribbean, queer Caribbean, or otherwise.

I thus agree with Ronald Cummings and Njelle Hamilton in the ‘rewards of reading across borders between scholarship’, that often transgress boundaries of where and how queerness is interpreted, lies in the ‘search of connections and sites of critical and narrative embrace’.<sup>87</sup> Subsequently, this thesis reads queer Caribbean writing from my positionality as a white British queer critic to realize ‘connections and sites of critical and narrative embrace’ of a global queer literary resistance. My intervention in this thesis seeks to subvert a critical barrier surrounding race and colonialism as they pertain to global queer studies, because this boundary fuels a continued colonial mindset. Some boundaries were made to be transgressed.

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<sup>85</sup> Scott, p. x.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Cummings and Hamilton, p. 3.



Transgression is uncomfortable, messy, chaotic, and may well be a precursor for failure. However, as José Esteban Muñoz explains, it is from the ‘aesthetics of queer failure’ that we can ‘locate a kernel of potentiality’.<sup>88</sup> So queerness can revel in failure as the means by which newness is created. The transgression of exploring queerness as a necessity for anticolonial praxis disrupts straight order, and the ‘kernel of potentiality’ found in my critique remains the globally focussed resistance of queer communality.<sup>89</sup>

### **Critical Returns: The Foresight of Queer Futurity**

There are a number of central critical themes that I return to throughout this thesis. My interpretative mode for reading queerness remains committed to rejecting exclusions based on identity, as a way to compensate for Lyndon K. Gill’s claims that ‘overemphasizing exclusions’ of queerness related to the Caribbean can ‘prematurely blind us to various kinds of queer embeddedness’ in the region.<sup>90</sup> Thus, I return often to the idea that it is not that queerness is exceptionally forbidden in the Caribbean that makes it of specific interest for conceptualising global queer resistance, but because queerness is always and already fundamentally embedded in Caribbean orientations related to global culture. For example, it seems obvious in my interpretation that Antonio Benítez-Rojo was searching for the word queer, in his description of the Caribbean as

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<sup>88</sup>José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. 173.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 1.

a system full of noise and opacity, a nonlinear system, an unpredictable system, in short a chaotic system beyond the total reach of any specific kind of knowledge or interpretation of the world.<sup>91</sup>

Following Gill and Benítez-Rojo, my interpretation of queer communality is ‘not intended as a subtle side-step of homophobia as a vector of oppression’, or of different identities as being affected by anti-queerness differently, but it is a refusal of these as a ‘stopping point in the conversation’.<sup>92</sup> Thus, this thesis continually posits that queerness in the Caribbean literary imagination is particularly useful for revealing global queer resistance strategies, because it has always remained ‘beyond the total reach of any specific kind of knowledge or interpretation of the world’.<sup>93</sup>

In regard to the queer criticism I engage with throughout this thesis, I adhere to the view of Rinaldo Walcott that the fundamental ill of prior queer scholarship has been that

in book after book that chronicles the queer history of the movement over the last thirty years, people of the global south arrive at the literal end of the discussion as the last set of persons and bodies to come into their queerness.<sup>94</sup>

Against this reality, a queer critical rerouting is vital to reject a false linearity within queer studies, where people from the global majority are narrated as the ‘last set of persons and bodies to come into their queerness’.<sup>95</sup> To combat this false narrative,

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<sup>91</sup> Benítez-Rojo, p. 295.

<sup>92</sup> Gill, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Benítez-Rojo, p. 295.

<sup>94</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, ‘Queer Returns: Human Rights in the Anglo-Caribbean and Diaspora’, *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, 3:4 (2009), 1-19 (p. 10).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

my thesis sustains an exploration of queer resistance in the global North as a facsimile of that from the global South, by reimagining the centre of global queerness as anticolonial. This critical position reads the categorising of human beings based on identity as a contemporary colonial tool, which continues within a straight Caribbean status quo because of the colonality of straightness amid the global condition of anti-queerness.

My critical engagement with queer as a conceptual tool means to centralize the term queer as a rallying force, for transnational connections of resistance, between persons beyond identity categories: created, prescribed, and policed by a dominant straight world. This is a straight world understood as the global condition of anti-queerness, where racism and heterosexism under global white supremacy are bedfellows, in a globalized present informed by colonial histories. My conceptual use of queer informs my critique for imagining transnational versions of a queered solidarity, which I propose as communality; a connection without a reliance on pre-supposed similarities based around identity, and by extension communities based around gender, sexuality, race, or nationality. This queer conceptual engagement has crossovers with Holly Lewis' position on queer anti-capitalism, amid the imperative for queerness to 'expand its solidarities to other oppressed, immiserated, and exploited people, *whether or not they accept queer people*'.<sup>96</sup> I disagree with Lewis' engagements with straightness here, because, in my conception straightness is not a not a byword for heterosexuality; straightness is synonymous for a combined heterosexism and racism. I posit that

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<sup>96</sup> Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2016), p. 271, emphasis in original.

straightness is part of Lewis' own further conception that there remains a distinctly anti-queer position or 'side' — 'the side that says this universe needs to be purified, segregated, and ordered' — that is not simply heterosexual and cisgender, and which, in my readings, is fuelled by colonial legacies that remain tied to extant identity categorisations.<sup>97</sup>

Lewis' clarifying statement '*whether or not they accept queer people*' is important, because, in my queer conception, this is a way that queerness can aid conceptually in promoting fundamental human differences as a way that communal connections are made possible.<sup>98</sup> This validation of fundamental difference is a queerness which means also connecting with those who do not accept queer people, because some who are averse to queerness are exercising an autonomy that is always and already queer. By this I mean that there remains scope in using queer as a conceptual tool by understanding anti-queerness as not essential, fixed, and immutable; meaning that those who do not currently accept queerness will not necessarily always remain within the coloniality of straightness. This means that the coloniality of straightness is empowered by those who continuously choose, and promote, *never* accepting queerness, whilst, crucially, remaining active agents in upholding heterosexism and racism for their own benefit.

I read the coloniality of straightness as having become globally dominant by producing, proliferating, and policing the macrosocial narrative of a single human "norm", which is Audre Lorde's 'mythical norm' that 'each one of us within our

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<sup>97</sup> Lewis, p. 278.

<sup>98</sup> Lewis, p. 271.

hearts knows ‘that is not me’.<sup>99</sup> This ‘mythical norm’ is an essentialised idea of identity where social power is defined by a proximity to whiteness and straightness, which I read as entwined.<sup>100</sup> This thesis works to expose straightness as a synonym for colonialism, because colonialism is the apex of a straight dominance that combines racism with heterosexism and which is internalised regardless of person’s identity. This means that straightness is the vestige of global colonial dominance where any iteration of person can be anti-queer, regardless of their presupposed identity. For example, a black gay man can be both homophobic and support white supremacy, whilst a white trans woman can be both misogynistic and support an immutable gender binary. This internalisation of anti-queerness regardless of a person’s identity is where I suggest Lorde’s ideas of the ‘trappings of power reside’.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, this thesis returns often to Lorde’s demand for the development of ‘new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference’ that have no ‘pretence to homogeneity of experience’.<sup>102</sup> This perception is in line with Michael Bucknor’s description of the wider role of queer interpretation, in that ‘queer hermeneutics’ must ‘be always alert to the ways in which those who hold power feel the need to create “norms” that preserve their positions of dominance over other subjectivities’.<sup>103</sup> This imperative is for any person or group, regardless of identity, that continues to ‘create “norms”’, and

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<sup>99</sup> Audre Lorde, ‘Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference’, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London, UK: Silver Press, 2017), 94-107 (p. 96).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Michael A. Bucknor, ‘Horizons of Desire in Caribbean Queer Speculative Fiction: Marlon James’s *John Crow’s Devil*’, *Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, eds., Bénédicte, Ledent, Evelyn O’Callaghan, and Daria Tunca, 137-160 (p. 154).

even supposedly queer “norms”, of rules and regulations that allow for ‘dominance over other subjectivities’ in limiting the autonomy of an individual.<sup>104</sup>

This thesis also returns often to José Esteban Muñoz’s posthumously published *The Sense of Brown* (2020) and queer readings of Audre Lorde’s oeuvre, as well as their surrounding context, as part of the imperative for queer futurity. This futurity is a queer freedom which is created by queer persons having the foresight to demand more from themselves in the present. This thinking intersects particularly well with Muñoz’s conception of queer connection which reframes Fred Moten’s theorising as ‘knowing a brownness’ that ‘is our communality’, because Muñoz reads a communality composed of ‘the plurality of the brown commons’.<sup>105</sup> The global possibilities of queer Caribbeanness can be found in Muñoz’s queer conceptual and material brownness, which places ‘an insistence on thinking and doing otherwise’, to think and act against the usual or conventional grain. Crucially, Muñoz does not limit this ‘brownness’ by racial identity, although this can be an important dimension of it, as the final published lines of his life’s work explain that

brown feelings are not the sole province of people who have been called or call themselves brown. It is, instead, and more importantly, the sharing of a brown sense of the world, a flowing into the common that nonetheless maintains the urgencies and intensities we experience as freedom and difference.<sup>106</sup>

Muñoz explains, in these final lines of his posthumously published critical writing, that ‘the sharing out of a brown sense of the world’ is a mindset which provides a

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<sup>104</sup> Bucknor, p. 154.

<sup>105</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, eds. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong’o (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Muñoz, *Brown*, p. 149

place within global queer communality.<sup>107</sup> This ‘knowing a brownness’ includes a futurity which can be felt through the pathos of Audre Lorde’s explanation that life is ‘very short’ amid the context of her own and Muñoz’s untimely deaths, which underscores that ‘what we have to do must be done in the now’.<sup>108</sup> This means that the queer communality I propose in this thesis must also be created ‘in the now’, by rejecting the fixed notion of a “better” future for queers, because there is no guarantee of this future which means that queer freedom ‘must be done in the now’.<sup>109</sup> As a result, this thesis reads queer futurity as already involved with the fundamental drives of queer Caribbean writing: a global resistance which imagines queer freedom as if it already existed to support the lived experience of queer freedom in the present.

The global literary resistance of queer Caribbean writing which will be exposed in this thesis, lies in a disruption of a shared interpellation of a singular fixed, or straight-forward, future based upon linear progression. This disruption includes rescinding the idea of the future as a shared straight idyll, or a reformatted version of this straight idyll as tolerant of white gays but that still does not sanction queer freedom. This reformatted gay inclusion reflects Muñoz’s description of an ‘assimilationist gay politics which posits an “all” that is in fact a few’ of white gay cisgender men in the global North.<sup>110</sup> Defying this mode of a “better” future, means that queer writing violates a straight-forward teleology, to conceive of a queer futurity which continuously remains yet-to-come, so that queer freedoms can be

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<sup>107</sup> Muñoz, *Brown*, p. 149.

<sup>108</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (London, UK: Penguin Classics; 2019), p. 42.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Muñoz, *Utopia*, p. 20.

made by each person, from where they are, and on their own terms. So, futurity as foresight allows for queer freedom in the present to remain out of conceptual reach, to evade a presupposed future which looks, and feels, disturbingly similar to a straight here and now. Thus, within the literary imagination of the contemporary Caribbean, all queer Caribbean writers act as world-makers and freedom fighters. This queer world-making and freedom fighting is Muñoz's queer 'brownness', which 'is our communality' within the perspective of queer Caribbean writing as 'a kind of shared reality'.<sup>111</sup> This means that in my readings queer Caribbean stories return to a fundamental principle of futurity: an 'insistence on thinking and doing otherwise' as a queer world-making practice in the present which opposes the theoretical ideal of a "better" tomorrow.<sup>112</sup>

A continued colonial mindset is examined in this thesis as closely connected to the normalisation of identity categories, amid demands for conformity to an identity. For example, identities related to family, gender, sexuality, and the nation state. Therefore, arguably, a Caribbean straight status quo highlights an insidious continuation of anti-queer sentiment in ex-colonised and ex-coloniser countries: the naturalization of identity categories through community, family, and national belonging. Following Theodor Adorno's proposition that 'identity is the primal form of ideology', it is therefore non-conformity to identity which remains the antithesis of a global straight status quo.<sup>113</sup> Non-conformity to an identity is the closest that queerness comes to a stable definition. Therefore, because 'identity is the primal form of ideology', identity is also the dominant form of anti-queerness which

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<sup>111</sup> Muñoz, *Brown*, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London, UK: Routledge, 1973), p. 148.



exhibits itself as a social rejection and shaming of queer people.<sup>114</sup> Patrick Williams explains how, for Adorno, ‘the constituent elements of identity thinking as ideology’ are ‘the rejection or disavowal of difference’.<sup>115</sup> I propose that queer Caribbean writing also refuses a postcolonial ‘rejection or disavowal of difference’ that has not changed despite the “end” of colonial domination.<sup>116</sup> This reading evidences the contemporary relevance of C.L.R James’ statement that ‘we excel our ancestors only in system and organisation: they lied as fluently and as brazenly’.<sup>117</sup> Queer Caribbean writing reminds its readers of each of our own contemporary involvements with colonial dominance; that, the ‘systems and organisation’ of contemporary power have not changed, but have only further excelled in surreptitiously demanding that people categorise themselves by identity and reject the differences of others.<sup>118</sup> This ‘system and organisation’ of a straight status quo is read in this thesis as fuelled by ‘fluently and brazenly’ deployed ideals of fixed identity, that ensure people uncritically categorise themselves as a descriptor that, whether ascribed to or not, comes with an essentialised meaning, whilst sustaining that this is their autonomous decision.<sup>119</sup>

### **Queer Decisions: Thesis Scope**

I do not mean to create a definitive list of queer Caribbean writing in this thesis, but to example a global queer literary resistance which could also be explored through

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<sup>114</sup> Adorno, p. 148.

<sup>115</sup> Patrick Williams, ‘Totally Ideological’, *Interventions*, 1:2 (1999), 282-285 (p. 283).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

a plethora of other relevant writers including, amongst others, Thomas Glave, Faizal Deen, Leone Ross, Nicole Dennis-Benn, and Rajiv Mohabir. The writers whose work is interpreted in this thesis each engage with queerness in individual and unique ways. This means that their writing is queer because it does not fit a dominant narrative of either nationalistic, racialised, or LGBT+ communities. This is important because dominant narratives of community can create exclusions — where some are “in” and some are “out” — that mimic the othering of queers by straight dominance: from queer-exclusionary white gay British nationalist, to queer-exclusionary black gay Jamaican nationalist, and every other possible iteration.

Through both the creative writing I interpret and my position as a white queer researcher, the complexities surrounding whiteness in the Caribbean arise during my interpretation. Although I do not focus on work by white Caribbean writers in this thesis, this is not meant as a rejection or avoidance of whiteness related to queer communality. I am inspired in this thinking by Kei Miller’s essay ‘The White Women and the Language of Bees’ (2018), which, although controversial when it was initially released amid arguments that Miller diminished the lived experience of white Caribbean people, clearly states that

our racial identities matter, but plenty times it is the personalities behind those identities that matter even more. It is our personalities that make us use our black-man-ness or our white-woman-ness in such different ways, as shield and as spear.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Kei Miller, ‘The White Women and the Language of Bees’, *Pre Lit*, 3 May 2018, <<https://preelit.com/2018/04/13/the-white-women-and-the-language-of-bees/>> [accessed: 20 August 2023].

Beyond the identity of the writers, it is the ‘personality’ of the writings that I engage with in this thesis which informs my interpretation of queer communality and global literary resistance.<sup>121</sup> This is because ‘the personalities behind those identities’ often ‘matter even more’; not only in terms of how a person uses their racial identity either as ‘shield’ or ‘as spear’, but also how they use their identity as either an invitation or a rejection to commune beyond racial identities, without reducing the importance that ‘our racial identities’ still ‘matter’.<sup>122</sup>

In this thesis I comparatively critique work by the contemporary queer Caribbean writers Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo, Marlon James, Nalo Hopkinson, Staceyann Chin, Shivane Ramlochan, Karen Lord, Kei Miller, and Andre Bagoo. These writers represent a broad range of differing expressions of queerness presented from varied cultural contexts within the diverse, unique, and multiform regions that make up the anglophone Caribbean. I read these writers’ work through their differences of identity, whilst suggesting that their lack of homogeneity evidences a queer communality that is vital for global queer resistance strategies. I have made decisions to engage with queer Caribbean creative writing without basing these choices on the race, gender, or sexuality of the writer, but on writings which exude a queer ethos of non-conformity against a straight status quo. The writing has guided my interpretation beyond commonalities in favour of solidarities. The works, rather than the writers’ profiles, embody the literary queerness explored in this thesis as a communality that exists beyond identity and without community. The distinctive disorientation of Shani Mootoo’s *Moving*

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<sup>121</sup> Please see footnote 110.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

*Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014) and Dionne Brand's *Theory: A Novel* (2018) and *Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (2018) were chosen for their twisted originality rather than their similarity. Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* (2009) and Nalo Hopkinson's *Sister Mine* (2013) guided my thinking towards the queer concept of Obeah explored in my second chapter, because their representations of this Caribbean spirituality remained so distinctly unlike one another, whilst retaining a shared protective force against being straightened into a defined categorisation. The Caribbean connections of biomythography related to Audre Lorde in her *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) found their critical home through the differences of Staceyann Chin's *The Other Side of Paradise* (2009), and the personal poetics of Shivane Ramlochan's *Everyone Knows I am a Haunting* (2017), because their searingly visceral representations had no belonging through an identity or a community, but through the necessarily queer representation of writing a queer life story.

My engagement with Marlon James's writing a second time in my fourth chapter correlated with the chapter's examination of a queer ethos of non-conformity. I was drawn to James' *Black Leopard Red Wolf* (2019) in its use of a popular Caribbean folk story character that crossed over with that represented in Karen Lord's *Unravelling* (2019) because they each remained rebelliously singular. The use of James' work twice in this thesis is also a way to highlight relevant controversies in reception of his writing. This includes how his commercial global success has been met with critiques of James from both straight and LGBT+ Caribbean perspectives. These contentions relate to James' public expression of his sexuality alongside his negative views on living as gay in Jamaica, from a 2015 New

York Times article, amid his unapologetically explicit representations of queerness in a literary *mis en scène* of Jamaican poverty, corruption, misogyny, and homophobia. Despite a 2018 *Journal of West Indian Literature* special edition in his writing, there remains ‘high praise—from a distance—but mostly silence’, explained by Michael Bucknor and Kezia Page, related to Marlon James’s work and queer criticism.<sup>123</sup> My final chapter saw the complicated joys, wonders, and freedoms of Carnival within the writing of Andre Bagoo’s *The Dreaming* (2022) connect with Kei Miller’s *In Nearby Bushes* (2019), where nothing about the writing or authors is the same, but the queer confrontation they each present sees a distinct and different expression of Carnival as a queer fight. The scope of this thesis has been catalysed and inspired by the writings I have chosen to interpret which make a distinct, difficult, and disruptive truth unavoidable: that queerness is an anticolonial praxis so they must be one and the same for either to be realised at a global macrosocial level.

In critically engaging with this specific selection of writings I am not seeking to codify them as a definitive queer Caribbean canon, but rather to evidence how the connections between queerness and anglophone Caribbean writing continually work as a form of globally focussed queer contra-canon. I propose that this queer contra-canon can be created in real time by critics, without the validation of permission or sanctioning, which does not reject an existing Caribbean literary canon because it signals towards this canon as always and already a queer space. This thinking follows Paul Bonin-Rodriguez’s ideas of a queer canon as any

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<sup>123</sup> Michael A. Bucknor and Kezia Page, ‘Authorial Self-fashioning, Political Denials and Artistic Distinctiveness: The Queer Poetics of Marlon James’, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 26:2 (November 2018), Special Issue: Marlon James, i-xvi (p. v).

formation of 'queer space', which 'is created and elaborated' as 'a queer canon being composed in real time'.<sup>124</sup> My thesis reads this selection of queer Caribbean writing as a playfully rebellious 'real time' canon creation, where, following Bonin-Rodriguez further, an 'LGBTQ + knowledge, experience, and testimony' is provided as an offering to the world for those who may need it.<sup>125</sup> This offering is an exercise in globally focussed queer critique which becomes an exercise in queer worldmaking. I also view this engagement as a way to aid in Holly Lewis' imperative for 'challenging European cultural hegemony and its amnesia about its colonial projects' which includes its 'refusal to admit cultural works from colonized people into the Western canon'.<sup>126</sup> The literary critical creation of this thesis also desires to, in whatever small, complicated, and imperfect way, focus my epistemic labour on queer Caribbean writing as an act of reparation. This involves a real time canon creation against the ways that global anglophone writing continues to be wilfully excluded from canonicity, and falsely misrepresented as any version of peripheral to English literature. Queer Caribbean writing is, and always has been, central in its own autonomous as a global queer literary resistance.

### **Queer Movements: Thesis Structure**

Following this introduction, my thesis argument commences with a comparative critique of Shani Mootoo's *Moving Forward* with Dionne Brand's *Theory* and *Blue Clerk*. I explore how the literary movement of these writings twist literary

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<sup>124</sup> Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, 'We Look to Queer Spaces' in *Troubling Tradition: Canonicity, Theatre, and Performance in the US*, eds. Lindsey Mantoan, Matthew Moore, and Angela Farr Schiller (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021) 304-306 (p. 304).

<sup>125</sup> Bonin-Rodriguez, p. 305.

<sup>126</sup> Lewis, p. 248.

perspective against straight-forwardness. In practice, this means that *Moving Forward, Theory, and Blue Clerk* move away from existent categories of writing, and writerly identity, and towards unsettling fixed conceptions of Caribbean writing as X, or queer writing as Y, or queer Caribbean writing as Z. This literary twist is argued to have global importance for queer resistance, because it allows differences between queers to become a connector instead of a version of shared similarities related to identity. I explicate a writerly mode through which Brand and Mootoo twist the idea of how Caribbean literature is resistant to colonialism, by revealing that anticolonial actions must be queer. This twisting is read to disorient a racism and straightness that remains attached to essentialised identity — of nation, race, gender, and sexuality — which maintains straightness in contemporary decolonisation strategies. I interpret queer Caribbean writings as singular bodies of work which connect alongside each other, and in global communality, with a larger body of writing that remains singular and yet plural as interpreted through the English translation by Anne O’Byrne and Robert Richardson of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Être singulier pluriel* (1996) [*Being Singular Plural* (2000)]. I read Mootoo’s titular crab movement, forward and sideways, to begin interpreting José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification and reframing it as anticolonial work. Disidentification as anticolonial work includes the understanding that identity categories support the global condition of anti-queerness, and so they must be twisted away from in order for queers to move towards new and different formations of global relationality.

The importance of disidentification as anticolonial work comes into focus through my second chapter, as I interpret the anticolonial protection strategies of queer communality. I read literary representations of a traditional Caribbean

cultural form — Obeah, a West African derived pan-Caribbean spirituality — through Marlon James' *Night Women* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Sister Mine*, to explore the queer nature of protections against colonial oppression. I begin by outlining a critical boundary I have set to interpret the concept of Obeah as queer and not to interpret Obeah practices. To aid this methodology, I engage with Janelle Rodriques' *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian Literature* (2019) to inform my critical engagement with the conceptual slipperiness of Obeah as a global queer resistance. This conceptual slipperiness is explored as a protective force related to circular narrative and formal patterns in *Night Women* and *Sister Mine*. These circular patterns are shown to interconnect as Obeah-in-action, related to sacred geometry and Fibonacci numbers, which empowers the narratives of *Night Women* and *Sister Mine* with a queer protective force against the colonality of straight dominance.

In my third chapter, I read Staceyann Chin's memoir *Paradise* with Shivane Ramlochan's poetry collection *Haunting* through the queer survivorship of Audre Lorde's *Zami*. Lorde's life writing is a convergence of myth and biography which I propose in queer communality with Chin and Ramlochan as a global queer literary resistance. This relationship is explored through Lorde's Caribbean heritage which is often not a focus in queer studies outside of Caribbean scholarly circles, whilst Lorde's oeuvre is also only retroactively being appreciated as queer theory. The global importance of queer resistance related to biomythography is examined as stemming from life narratives which create a map to queer survivorship. A map to queer survivorship has the destination of knowledge which queers can use to practice autonomy over their lives, by rejecting their victimhood in favour of



survivorship in the face of global anti-queerness. This autonomy is exposed as including the fundamental necessity to remain critical of existent structures of identity, community, family, and nation and to instead dwell in Lorde's 'house of difference'.<sup>127</sup> My third chapter closes by highlighting the global importance for queers to not rely on outside forces for aid, but to instead write their own life narratives and become the storytellers of their own queer survivorship, which is achieved by not playing the characters prescribed by a fixed identity.

A radical refusal of power outside of the self informs my penultimate chapter, by involving it with the idea that trickster utopian imagining in traditional Caribbean storytelling evidences the queerness of anticolonial resistance. I interpret this queerness as a trickster utopian imagining against dominant narratives of straightness, through interpretation of *Black Leopard* by Marlon James and *Unravelling* by Karen Lord with the pan-Caribbean tradition of Anansi stories. I propose adopting the gender and sexual inclusive term 'folx' to pay attention to an embedded queerness within folk storytelling traditions, amid the provocation that folktales have always been queer as folx. I suggest that this queerness is reflected in the unusual and otherworldly queer gender and sexual expressions represented by James and Lord, whose writings are thus also folxtales. I interpret trickster utopia through my queer critical engagements of it with Belinda Carlise's popular music hit 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' (1987) and Jamaican music artist Shenseea's popular music hit 'Rebel' (2020). These engagements aid in my understanding of contemporary queer speculative writing as 'folxtales', which is shown to evidence

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<sup>127</sup> Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name, A Biomythography* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2018), p. 268.

the contemporary relevance of traditional storytelling and present the anticolonial force in their queer ethos of non-conformity.

My thesis then moves with each of my previous theorising alongside it, both forward and sideways, into my final chapter where the spirit of Carnival in queer Caribbean writing is explored as a form of queer confrontation. I read Kei Miller's *Bushes* with Andre Bagoo's *Dreaming* to interpret a Carnival spirit which thrives in their writing, by refusing a script of social conformity and national belonging based on identity. This spirit is characterised by a playfulness, which does not take even the most serious aspects of anti-queerness too seriously, and is interpreted through queer camp, masking, and being as playing-a-role. The queer confrontation of Carnival is proposed as defying the seriousness of colonial power; I do not propose that Carnival has become queer in this chapter, but rather that a globally focussed queer resistance is embedded within Carnival. Carnival's power is read to transcend the straightness of nationalism, and to transgress the boundaries of identity, which tend to sanction freedom for some persons and not for others. This global queer resistance is examined through Bagoo's titular allusion to Kate Bush's 'The Dreaming' (1982). With all this in mind, Carnival is suggested in this chapter to be a metonym for global queer resistance. *Bushes* and *Dreaming* are read as an epitome of Carnival spirit, because their narratives resist the idea that queer freedom is impossible in the Caribbean, much as Carnival resisted the idea of freedom from British colonialism as an impossible future. A queer homing of the Caribbean is read through *Bushes* and *Dreaming*, which reflects the affective rhythms of Carnival freedoms and reveals queer freedom as Carnival freedoms because they can exist in all global locations as they are created within each person.

Bringing my chapters together at the conclusion, I collate they ways that queer Caribbean literary resistance has been examined as having a global resonance for queer communality. I underscore my argument that queer Caribbean writing unsettles the accepted knowledge that colonialism is a past oppression, because colonial tactics of categorisation through identity and policing autonomy continue in the global condition of anti-queerness. I summate how disorientation and disidentification, patterns of protection, survivorship and self-parenting, radical autonomy and rerouting, and a queer camp spirit act as global queer literary resistance. The irreducibility of queer Caribbean writing to a homogeneity at the level of narrative, tone, style, and form is shown to expose that a commitment to singularity is not an isolated individualism but remains vital for creating a global relationality that privileges individual difference.

The queer Caribbeanness of the writing that I explore in this thesis is defined as of global, worldly, and transnational importance because its communality does not demand assimilation to any existent model of identity, as a tactic for resistance against the global condition of anti-queerness. This transgression and disruption is a critical intervention which shows how queers can empower their singularness as a form of global connection, by engaging in the anticolonial ethos of their queerness. The *raison d'être* of queerness will be shown to be anticolonial, and vice versa, because queerness rejects the false promises of a community, a family, or a nation which are based upon a fixed identity. Identity is underscored as a colonial legacy which continues to categorise and divide human beings as a tool for their oppression and control by a global straight dominance. The readings in this thesis begin with a twist and move into a slippery form of queer

protections, which are then shown to support a queer survivorship informed by an ethos of non-conformity arriving in my final chapter at the fighting tradition of a queer Carnival confrontation.

**Chapter One: Against Straight-Forwardness: Literary Twists in *Theory: A Novel* (2018), *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (2018), and *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014).**

A mode of global relationality which establishes queer communality is exposed in this opening chapter, through writing that twists away from an extant identity. I interpret how the literary twists of Dionne Brand's *Theory: A Novel* (2018), *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (2018), and Shani Mootoo's *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014) reveal queer Caribbean writing as a vital resource for conceptualising global queer resistance strategies.<sup>1</sup> I close read *Theory*, *Blue Clerk* and *Moving Forward* to explore an understanding of queerness as fundamental for anticolonial praxes, if either is to achieve macrosocial impact. I propose that this global impact is created through creative writing which adds a twist on existent formations of literary belonging, by simultaneously moving forward and sideways: towards autonomy and away from the homogenisation of an identity category. In practice, this literary twist mimics its counterpart in social relations, where queers reorient a perspective on human belonging as based upon a similar identity in favour of a queer communality which prioritizes difference.

By proposing the sharing of difference in this chapter, I do not mean to imply false equivalencies related to individual lived experiences of national, sexual, gender, or racial oppressions related to a person's identity. However, the realities of this difference inform the wider argument of my thesis which examines how

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<sup>1</sup> Dionne Brand, *Theory: A Novel* (Toronto, CA: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018) and *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Shani Mootoo, *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (Brooklyn, NY: Akashic, 2017). Hereafter, these editions are referenced in text and referred to as *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward*.

global relations can be forged through difference. In *Theory, Blue Clerk, and Moving Forward*, I explore the importance of literary representations that highlight different experiences of oppression related to identity, whilst considering how these texts also work to avoid essentialising identity (that is, providing an identity an intrinsic characteristic or value in and of itself). *Theory, Blue Clerk, and Moving Forward* are shown to entwine queerness and Caribbeanness as a global resistance against the literary straight-forwardness of categorizable identity, because this remains a legacy of colonial epistemologies. Twisting is a literary mode which disorients the straightness of accepted perspectives on resistance to colonialism, and postcolonial freedoms, by evidencing that an anticolonial praxis is only global by moving away from straight-forwardness.

### **Literary Bodies: Living and Writing Queerly**

The queer writerly voices of Shani Mootoo and Dionne Brand remain unlike each other, but they are able to connect through this difference.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in this chapter the biographies of Brand and Mootoo have importance for interpreting their literary twists as a global queer movement. This is because the queer twists of *Theory, Blue Clerk, and Moving Forward* reflect a specific transnational movement of a queer Caribbean diaspora through the British Commonwealth. A queer Caribbean diaspora refers to the preponderance of LGBT+ and queer Caribbean citizens who seek asylum in commonwealth countries; especially in Canada amidst the reality that 'in 1991, Canada became one of the first Western nations to grant

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<sup>2</sup> This connection reflects more detailed explorations of belonging through difference explored in my third chapter through the writing of Staceyann Chin and Shivane Ramlochan.

refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation’.<sup>3</sup> Edward Ou Jun Lee’s and Shari Brotman’s sociological insights on queer migration explain that, ‘while exact numbers are not available, a 2002 article in *The Globe and Mail* reported that close to 2,500 people from 75 different countries made an SOGI-based [sexual orientation or gender identity] claim between 1999 and 2002’ and that ‘1,351 SOGI-based refugee claims were adjudicated in 2004’.<sup>4</sup> As Trinidadians who expatriated to Canada by their late teens, Dionne Brand and Shani Mootoo are both a part of this unique queer Caribbean movement. A more recent anthropological study by David A. B. Murray on SOGI-based migration to Canada explains that ‘the vast majority of participants (over 90 per cent)’ in his Canadian research group ‘were from Caribbean or African nations’.<sup>5</sup> The reality of whether queer freedom is made more possible in countries outside the Caribbean is also critiqued by Murray as the trope of ‘*queer migration to liberation nation*’, which is complicated in readings throughout this thesis surrounding what queer freedom is, how it is created, and where it is located.<sup>6</sup> This complication includes my proposition of anti-queerness as a global condition, where rules of engagement in a straight status quo remain different, but the ethos of straight conformity remains the same. However, it remains true that the ideation of foreign freedom is complex in terms of the ability to live certain expressions of queerness more openly, although this of course still comes with navigating prejudice. The ability to think of queer freedom as “better”

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Ou Jun Lee and Shari Brotman, ‘Identity, Refugeeess, Belonging: Experiences of Sexual Minority Refugees in Canada’, *The Canadian Review of Sociology*, 48:3 (2011), 241-274 (p. 242).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> David A. B. Murray, *Real Queer?: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Refugees in the Canadian Refugee Apparatus* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, p. 3 emphasis in original.

in a specific global location can also create the comfort of a hopeful imaginary which can support queer lives, and which is no less important for being hoped for and imagined.

The queer Caribbean movement of Brand and Mootoo is interpreted in this chapter in relation to Sara Ahmed's concept of '*queer use*' meaning 'how things can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended'.<sup>7</sup> A queer use of colonial legacies, such as the commonwealth, sees them twisted into an opportunity for queer persons. In my readings in this chapter, this queer movement informs writing by Brand and Mootoo through their use of queerness amid Caribbean literature, which means that their bodies of work twist away from universalised understandings of anticolonial resistance that do not include queer resistance. To support this argument I interpret *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* as queer literary bodies: a written corpus informed by the ontology of Jean-Luc Nancy. *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* are thus conceived as part of Nancy's '*corpus corporum*', meaning 'a collection of pieces' which is also 'a collection of collections' because they are singular bodies that remain part of a queer body as a communality.<sup>8</sup> This means that *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* are queer literary bodies which twist alongside one another rather than connecting through a similarity. My thinking in this vein is also informed by a reorientation of Thomas Glave's observation that diasporic literature 'doesn't just provide information about

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<sup>7</sup> Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 199 emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 155.



the diaspora – it *is* the diaspora’.<sup>9</sup> The literary bodies of *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* are thus not simply information about global queer literary resistance because they, in fact, are global queer literary resistance. Ultimately, this chapter will extend Glave’s statement: *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* are global queer literary resistance because they twist conceptual understandings of Caribbeanness, global literature, anticolonial resistance, and queer writing both forward and sideways.

### **Global Queer Transgressors**

Dionne Brand resists singular categorizations of writerly identity because she is an essayist, artist, poet, theorist, and philosopher, who has been described by Rosamond S. King as ‘one of the most important living Caribbean women writers and one of an even smaller group of notable Caribbean writers who identify as lesbian’.<sup>10</sup> King has previously criticised the use of the term queer related to the Caribbean, but seemingly does not find the same issue with the term lesbian applied to Brand.<sup>11</sup> King’s description of Brand’s identification as a lesbian is of interest within the context of Caribbean gender and sexuality studies, because King also notes that ‘some people in the Caribbean explicitly identify the term lesbian with white North American and European women’.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, she states that ‘others use local nonderogatory or reclaimed terms such as *zami*, *mati*, *buenas amigas*, *entendida*, *kambrada*’ or ‘euphemisms such as “so,” “funny,” or “goes with

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Glave, *Among the Bloodpeople: Politics and Flesh* (New York, NY: Akashic Books, 2013), p. 40 emphasis in original.

<sup>10</sup> Rosamond S. King, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

women””, whilst some ‘refuse to label their sexuality at all’.<sup>13</sup> I agree with King that Brand is ‘one of the most important living Caribbean women writers’, due to her prolific cultural output in a commitment to queerness and Caribbeanness, but suggest that the unique transgressions which make her writing of worldly importance lie in the queerness of defying reductions to an identity category.<sup>14</sup>

Brand remains a high profile contemporary cultural figure connected to queerness and Caribbeanness, who has a prolific publishing record of novels, poetry and prose, essays, journal articles, and non-fiction collections. She has won multiple international literary awards and was the poet laureate of Toronto from 2009-2012. Brand is also an editor, lecturer, and anti-racist queer activist as well as the poetry editor for the publisher McClelland & Stewart and was a founding member of *Our Lives*: Canada's first newspaper devoted to Black women. Unfortunately, these accolades remain of note because of the lack of queer critical engagements with Brand’s writing outside of area studies. A global-focussed queer engagement with Brand’s writing remains a rarity, despite the potential for its intersectional disruption of national, sexual, gender, and racial identity in queer studies. Despite all of the above, Brand’s writing has not obtained the global queer critical attention it deserves in contrast to the universalisation of work by white queer writers. I suggest that this is symptomatic of a continued avoidance by some queer theorists to engage in the additional difficulties of thinking through global queerness, and an

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<sup>13</sup> King, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

engagement with writing from persons of the global majority outside of area studies.<sup>15</sup>

My use of the term ‘persons from the global majority’ reflects Rahul Rao’s imperative that epistemically ‘the meaning of the universal’ needs to be actively reframed away from whiteness and straightness.<sup>16</sup> I relate this to the queer Caribbean twists of this chapter because writing by Brand and Mootoo shifts universality away from straight-forward forms, of fixed “norms”, to instead provide evidence for Rao’s view of queerness meaning that ‘the universal resides in its always unfinished work’.<sup>17</sup> I suggest that this universality is reflected in the work of Shani Mootoo as a writer of poetry and prose, as well as an essayist, critic, and visual artist whose novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) created its own exceptional form of global queer transgression: Alison Donnell’s explanation that *Cereus* extended ‘the vocabulary and repertoire of images’ which were not previously ‘available in Caribbean writing’ supports *Cereus* as one of the progenitors for

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<sup>15</sup> These claims are supported by the lack of contemporary queer scholarship on Dionne Brand’s writing outside of important Canadian and Caribbean focussed engagements. Although there are numerous articles on Brand’s work in the Canadian journals *Topia*, *Ariel*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and *Studies in Black Canadian Literature*, there are only a small number exploring her prolific queer cultural output beyond a directly Canadian or Caribbean context. At the time of writing these are:

Johanna X. K. Garvey, ‘Spaces of Violence, Desire, and Queer (Un)belonging: Dionne Brand’s Urban Diasporas’,

*Textual Practice*, 25:4 (2011), 757-777.

Ronald Cummings, ‘Between Here and “not here”: Queer Desires and Postcolonial Longings in the Writings of Dionne Brand and José Esteban Muñoz’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55:3 (2019), 308-322.

Rhonda Cobham-Sander, ‘Amital Queer: Aunts, Negresses, and Auntie men in Dionne Brand’s “Dialectics” and Hilton Als *The Women*’, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 2022, 42:3 (2022), 246-263.

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, ‘Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage’, *GLQ*, 14:2-3 (2008), 191-215.

<sup>16</sup> Rahul, Rao, ‘Queer Questions’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16:2 (2014), 199-217 (p. 213).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Caribbean literary disruptions of global straight “norms”.<sup>18</sup> *Cereus* also remains one of a minority of texts from persons of the global majority that is taught in queer literary studies courses worldwide. However, the canonical status of *Cereus* was also not created without critical controversy, including accusations of appropriation by Mootoo as *Cereus* adopts the narrative perspective of an African Trinidadian gay man that can be read to represent his gayness as part of a potential gender dysphoria expressed by his transvestitism. The separation of gayness as distinct from gender dysphoria that is also distinct from transvestitism is blurred in *Cereus*, where these expressions are brought together in a way that can be read to too easily conflate them.

This is relevant because a similar contemporary criticism has been levelled against Mootoo’s trans male protagonist in *Moving Forward*, which has recently been unpacked by Libe García Zarranz through the opposing positions of literary scholar Lisa Outar and trans female poet Casey Plett. Outar has argued that Mootoo’s ‘presentation of female-to-male transition’ in *Moving Forward* is shifted ‘to a representation that is quite a bit more complex’ and ‘fully fleshed’ than *Cereus*.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Plett has placed *Moving Forward* within an emergent genre she dubs ‘the Gender novel’, which is a designation referring to texts which ‘fail to communicate what it’s actually like to transition’.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting Zarranz’s position

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<sup>18</sup> Alison Donnell, ‘Shani Mootoo: Writing, Difference and the Caribbean’, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 19:2 (April 2011), 1-8 (p.4).

<sup>19</sup> Lisa Outar, ‘Indigenous Sexualities: Rosamond S. King’s *Island Bodies* and the Radical Politics of Scholarship’, *Small Axe*, 21.1:52 (2017), 241–249 (p.247) in Libe García Zarranz, ‘Feeling Sideways: Shani Mootoo and Kai Cheng Thom’s Sustainable Affects’, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 89:1 (Winter 2020), pp. 88-106.

<sup>20</sup> Casey Plett, ‘Rise of the Gender Novel’, *The Walrus*, March 18 2015, updated September 13 2023, <<https://thewalrus.ca/rise-of-the-gender-novel/>> [accessed 1 July 2024].

between Outar and Plett, agree with aspects of both arguments whilst highlighting my support that *Moving Forward* 'is as advanced for its time as *Cereus Blooms at Night* was for its'.<sup>21</sup> However, the knowledge that *Moving Forward* is advanced for 'its time' remains a critique of 'its time' in the contemporary world.<sup>22</sup> I suggest that, as a result of the global condition of anti-queerness, trans narratives are often flattened into a homogenous experience. This includes the lack of literary platforms and opportunities for multiple differing accounts of trans stories in writing. So, I do see *Moving Forward* as advanced for its time but also that this remains a critique of the global condition of anti-queerness, rather than Mootoo as an exceptionally progressive writer. I also concur with Mootoo's own description of *Moving Forward* as 'a much more mature book in every way' than *Cereus*.<sup>23</sup>

It is the maturity of *Moving Forward* that I suggest in this chapter is a lens for its global queer transgressions, which are coupled with its emotional substance read through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's conceptions of *gravitas*. In *Moving Forward* 'the *gravitas*, the meaning, but also the *center of gravity*' of 'the term "queer" itself deepens and shifts'.<sup>24</sup> I read *Moving Forward* as a compatible text for comparative critique with *Theory* and *Blue Clerk* despite their lack of similarities related to identity, because through this difference they expose a global queer transgression where 'the term "queer" itself deepens and shifts'.<sup>25</sup> Brand writes from the intersections of her African Caribbean Canadian perspective and Mootoo from her

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<sup>21</sup> Mariam Pirbhai, 'On "Moving Forward" Toward the Un/familiar: An Interview with Shani Mootoo', *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 40:1 (2015), 227-241 (p. 234).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 9 emphasis in original.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Indian Caribbean Canadian position; however, I propose in this chapter that these identities are less important than the sustained disorientation of straight-forwardness created in their writing. This disorientation is a twist as a pivot for the 'center of gravity' through which 'the term "queer" itself deepens and shifts' to reveal the perspective of queer Caribbean writing as a global literary resistance.<sup>26</sup> In this chapter I explore how Brand and Mootoo use disorientation in their writing as a means of defence against the stultifying hold of a global straight dominance, which looks disturbingly similar to colonial oppression.

### **Connecting Through Difference**

To evidence queerness as important for anticolonial praxes to have a global resonance, I examine how *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* evidence that rejecting identity categories can help to resist colonial legacies. This highlights the further possibility that prior Caribbean writing may have always been moving towards queerness in its critique of colonial categories, but that critiquing colonial categories may necessitate an added twist of queer interpretation. This queer twist could subvert any supposed ignorance of queerness in Caribbean literary history by important figures including, amongst others, Derek Walcott, Earl Lovelace, Merle Hodge, Jamaica Kincaid, Kamau Brathwaite, Grace Nichols, and V.S. Naipaul. Instead of queerness being somehow anathema to Caribbean literary history until an arbitrary date, the entirety of Caribbean literary history could be understood as already moving queerly towards a global resistance strategy against straight-forwardness.

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<sup>26</sup> Sedgwick, p. 9.

The idea of a queer twist as a global movement against straight-forwardness supports the important work of Andre Bagoo in an intertextual relationship created between his short story collection *The Dreaming* (2022), which is explored in detail in my final chapter, and V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* (1959). Bagoo asserts that in relation to his queer writing 'Naipaul is like Trinidad's Ezra Pound: as problematic as he is unavoidable', and yet you 'cannot help but return to all of it again and again'.<sup>27</sup> As Bagoo returns to Naipaul 'again and again' he, in turn, reveals the global possibilities for theorising queerness as anticolonial resistance, through anglophone Caribbean writing, because its unique colonial history has meant its writers have always been twisting back against contemporary "norms" of identity, which remain 'as problematic' as they are 'unavoidable'.<sup>28</sup> In this chapter I consider how *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* twist literary form, genre, argumentation, language, and representation to disrupt straight-forward perceptions, that I posit are the contemporary continuation of a colonial mindset. This twist is proposed as a literary mode that supports the global importance of queer theorising related to Caribbean writing, amid the Caribbean's unique inception, remarkable survival, and prosperous continuation on the contemporary world stage.

This chapter suggest that queer Caribbean writing produces a twisted sense of Caribbeanness which is global in reach because it is singular and unlike, and yet manages to be communal, not only across the multiform differences throughout the Caribbean but also its refraction across a global queer consciousness. This is a

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen Narain, "What Is Old Can Sometimes Feel New": A Conversation with Andre Bagoo' *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 4 February 2022, <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-is-old-can-sometimes-feel-new-a-conversation-with-andre-bagoo/>> [accessed 18 July 2023].

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

view that there is always more that can connect people through difference than the supposed similarities of identity, and, through queer writing I suggest that supposed similarities are disorientated. Thus, queer individuality does not equate with a straight-forward idea of individualism, because it remains a communal invitation to exist in connection whilst retaining autonomy. Being unlike but alongside one another is the gravitas for creating a communality that transcends the identity connections of a community. Therefore, by remaining distinct from each other in narrative, style, and context this chapter proposes that *Theory, Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* share a movement alongside one another: forward and sideways. A foundation of this literary movement sees *Theory, Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* turn away from the contemporary continuation of a colonial mindset in the global condition of anti-queerness.

### **De-Familiarising Familiarity**

*Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014) follows the fictional narrative of a gender transition by an Indian Trinidadian Hindu woman to a man named Sydney (Syd) Mahale. Sydney's dead name was Siddhani (Sid), which I use throughout interpretation where necessary to indicate that the narrative chronology of *Moving Sideways* returns to Syd's life prior to transition but this does not mean that this is not always and already Sydney. *Moving Forward* adopts a first-person perspective from Syd in its short initial section, 'From Sydney's Notebook' (*Moving Forward* 9-25), and from Syd's stepson in sections of 'Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab: A Memoir by Jonathan Lewis-Adey' (*Moving Forward* 27-302). The majority of this larger section of narrative is, however, told through an indirect third person



perspective by Jonathan but '(as he [Sydney] told it to me)' (*Moving Forward* 67) which has been transcribed from Syd's deathbed. Syd's life is chronicled without linearity between Trinidad and Toronto, including Siddhani's early adulthood and her unrequited love for her closest friend Zain who is later murdered by her male partner. Part two opens with the representation of Sid's solo walk to the gender clinic, a movement which is retold multiply in the narrative and with more information provided on each iteration; the final representation ends with the revelation that Sid's primary motivation for transitioning gender was to escape the domination of women by men. At Syd's funeral, Jonathan receives letters between Sid and Zain from which he proceeds to write a romantic meta-narrative of their love story that is presented as the final part of *Moving Forward*.

I propose that the narrative structure of *Moving Forward* informs the movement of its literary twisting, which I suggest act to create meandering pathways allowing Mootoo's queer Caribbean writing to move against straight-forwardness. I read these pathways as traces of Jean-Luc Nancy's recent explorations with Peter Engelmann of Derridean '*destinerrance*' which interprets 'destiny' as not only '*destin*' as in predetermined purpose 'but destiny as *errance*, as aimless wandering'.<sup>29</sup> I posit that the literary twists of *Moving Forward* disorientate as a version of '*errance*, as aimless wandering', where the 'aimless' or ineffable qualities of queerness allow it to defy the concept of straightness as familiarity because this is a categorizing tool of colonialism through the global condition of anti-queerness.<sup>30</sup> De-familiarizing familiarity in *Moving Forward* can thus be

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<sup>29</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Engelmann, *Democracy and Community* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019), p. 26 original emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

understood as aimless but no less impactful for not having a set destination. By this I mean that the act of twisting in literary disorientation stems from writing in English, on queer themes, and from a Caribbean perspective. From this vantage point, queerness and Caribbeanness in their relationship to English become synonymous because they both always and already include the other. This is because literary twists remain necessary as a self-protection for queers; a literary resistance against the seemingly harmless familiarity of straight-forwardness which demands that queers conform to some version of identity. To obtain this autonomy, queer writing twists the preconceptions of normative orientation, that both inform, and are informed by, a societal status quo of straightness. In the Caribbean, this straightness is a distinct product of colonialism, but this is only ever a reflection of its global realities as a straightening device, which demand that the unnatural constructs of racism and heterosexism be viewed as the only safe “norm” because they remain familiar.

*Moving Forward* engages in its twist against the global condition of anti-queerness by highlighting a lack of criticality surrounding the familiarity of family structures. This means that a straight-forward family line is twisted to free the concept of familiarity from the straight family. Each representation of Syd’s family remains twisted in multiple, unfamiliarly errant, forms in such a way that the familiarity of family units can be viewed as conditional to normative, or familiar, definitions that also remain distinct from being a “norm”. As Sid transitions gender to Syd, so too does their family unit become disoriented as a mother becomes a father but still remains a mother; however, these categories remain familiar even

though they lose their claim to straight “norms”. Jonathan explains that although his family is changed by Syd’s transition, it remains familiar, because, while ‘the material, the physical form of the past as’ he ‘had known it, had changed utterly, the heart of it was steady and true’ (*Moving Forward* 39). Jonathan’s understanding of the ‘steady and true’ (*Moving Forward* 39) connections which exist beyond a straight-forward family unit, combats what Sara Ahmed explains as a linearity where ‘compulsory heterosexuality operates as a straightening device’ and in terms of Caribbean literature this ‘straightening device’ informs and is informed by the dominant modes of Anglo-American or Eurocentric categories of narrative form.<sup>31</sup> For example, the straightening of representation which is created in following a familiar and straight-forward presentation of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. In other words, narrative linearity results in the straightening of characters as well as their literary worlds which means that disrupting this mode will always make way for something new.

This queer newness also disrupts racialised binaries surrounding compulsory heterosexuality, meaning lesser examined aspects of compulsory heterosexuality that remain inherently racist — such as how the universal image of the nuclear family not only includes a heterosexual cisgender female mother; a heterosexual cisgender male father, plus heterosexual cisgender children, but that they are also each white. I do not mean that a nuclear family unit is shared across cultures, because multiform expressions of the family exist, but rather that the idea of a nuclear family unit is shared across cultures as familiar because its creation was

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<sup>31</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 23.

racist. In *Moving Forward*, the de-familiarizing of familiarity from straightness to queerness is achieved as a newness, which is created by allowing non-normative representations of a family to thrive against the 'straightening device' of compulsory heterosexuality by disrupting a narrative linearity.<sup>32</sup>

The universalisation of compulsory heterosexuality as a societal construction informs Ronald Cummings' interpretation of "here" 'as an oppressive space' for Black queer people because both racism and straightness support white supremacy.<sup>33</sup> As Ahmed notes, compulsory heterosexuality serves to keep people in line, globally, by proliferating and then policing the idea that life naturally moves toward a straight-forward 'family line', with its 'legitimacy and social capital of heteronormativity' which remains in-line with the social capital of whiteness.<sup>34</sup>

*Moving Forward* is, however, particularly disruptive in terms of aiding understandings of different ways to remain out of line but become familiar.<sup>35</sup> In *Moving Forward* there is a disruption of a nuclear, traditional, and straight-forward, family line through a reconfigured familial unit that adds a further twist by remaining far from the "norm" but not being defined against normality. Specific structures of the family do differ across global cultures. For example, there is much scholarship on the prevalence of matrifocality in family structures of the anglophone Caribbean, and this is engaged with directly in the fourth chapter of

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<sup>32</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Cummings, 'Between Here and 'not here': Queer Desires and Postcolonial Longings in the Writings of Dionne Brand and José Esteban Muñoz', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55:3 (2019), 308-322 (p. 320).

<sup>34</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

this thesis surrounding a global ethos of non-conformity within the idea of queer self-parenting.

Although I do not mean to homogenise different family structures and their functions, it is also true that contemporary family units include a familial 'norm' that presupposes the binary of a heterosexual cisgender male father and a heterosexual cisgender female mother, with heterosexual and cisgender children. As Olive Senior argues in her anthropological study *Working Miracles* (1991), this "norm" — as it operates in the Caribbean — is derived from Victorian England in an adherence to the 'sexual division of labour in the domestic sphere and to patriarchal family structure', as a direct link to the coloniality of straightness related to the Caribbean.<sup>36</sup> In *Moving Forward*, the representation of a queer family twists the concept of "norms" against themselves to depict all family units as unique, by reorienting gendered expectation related to a mother. This is represented as Sid 'had once been my [Jonathan's] other mother' (*Moving Forward* 123) which allows mothering to go beyond straight-forwardness, because Sid as Jonathan's 'other mother' (*Moving Forward* 123) includes the context of Sydney's sexual orientation and gender transition. Sid as a queer other mother complicates understandings of an 'other mother' derived from a history of West African tribal traditions, and African American feminist theory. Othermothers are derived from West African traditions of the communal and provide care for children not biologically their own.<sup>37</sup> However, in *Moving Forward* there is a complication of this straight-forward

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<sup>36</sup> Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Diane Watt provides context on othermothers amid her exploration of this relationship in a Jamaican context, as part of 'the way in which the community organizes to nurture itself and future

sex binary because Syd has always existed as part of Sid. Mootoo subverts the binds of straight-forward language, by creating a twisted description that redefines the term mother beyond binary gender because the boundaries of where Sid ends and where Syd begins are indeterminate. Therefore, Mootoo appropriates the term mother and othermother by twisting them both away from a fixed sex binary, in a further engagement with Ahmed's 'queer use' or 'how things can be used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended'.<sup>38</sup>

The orientations of relationships in *Moving Forward* are interpreted by Libe García Zarranz as 'sideways feelings' which 'are oriented and reoriented through different forms of ethical encounters and modes of relationality'.<sup>39</sup> For Zarranz, these 'sideways feelings' create 'an ethico-affective lens which problematizes normative scripts and orientations'.<sup>40</sup> In *Moving Forward* the normative scripts of gender and sexuality as they relate to Sid's and Syd's Caribbeanness remain necessarily problematized, which I propose as a reflection of their need for disruption on a global level to decolonize "norms" of gender and sexuality. Syd explains that because 'there is hardly ever a single answer to anything' it is that 'the stories one most needs to know are the ones that are usually the least simple or straightforward' (*Moving Forward* 49). I agree with Zarranz that *Moving Forward* holds normativity up to an ethico-affective critique, but further suggest that queerness and Caribbeanness interrelate as a problematization which informs a

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generations'. Diane Watt, 'Traditional Religious Practices amongst African-Caribbean Mothers and Community Othermothers', *Black Theology: An International Journal*, 2:2 (2004), 195-212 (p.195).

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, p. 199 emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup> Zarranz, p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

global form of queer resistance, that reorients a view that familiarity is the sovereign right of straightness twists. The singularity of Zarranz's lens amid their suggestion of normative orientation would somewhat limit the complexity I read through Mootoo's queer Caribbean twists. I suggest that Mootoo's writing is able to simultaneously move itself forward and sideways from a fixed orientation and, although Zarranz's ethico-affective lens is critically useful it may remain too static an entity related to the narrative perspectives of *Moving Forward*.

Zarranz's lens could be thought multiply, as it could also shift and change in relationship with one another as kaleidoscopic lenses which are indicative of the ability of *Moving Forward* to create a version of singularness which remains communal. This kaleidoscopic lens conceptualises the encountering of ethics and relationships in *Moving Forward*, against the straightness of understanding one orientation as familiar. This is an important distinction for my critique because it relies on Mootoo's literary queerness as the pivot that allows for a twist between different modes of 'ethical encounters' and 'relationality'. Queerness in *Moving Forward* 'problematizes normative' literary and social 'scripts and orientations', which is a rejection of the global condition of anti-queerness rather than one fixed by a Caribbean location. In the context of the diasporic movement of Brand and Mootoo their work remains queer and Caribbean as a global mode of resistance.

The counteraction of literary linearity in *Moving Forward* is created through interjections of multiple differing stories and literary forms, through letters and meta-narratives, that do not promise any narrative straight-forwardness. Syd's life story is told by himself through Jonathan, to remain against a straight-forwardness that might fix his interpretation of the story as the objective truth of a trans life

experience. This representation by Mootoo allows for her creation of a queer story that disorients objectivity to show that any objective truth remains elusive, and that this should by now be familiar. This representation also reflects the knowledge of queer lives explained by Syd to Jonathon because disorientation can be a necessary camouflage against straight oppression. Syd explains to Jonathan that 'if you think I am speaking in riddles' this is because 'I don't know how else to speak' having 'been trained' by the straight world 'to hide my unease' (*Moving Forward* 187). Sydney decides to 'tell my story as I must' and 'in the only way I know how', a queer storytelling that twists the presentation of truth, because perhaps 'speaking in riddles' (*Moving Forward* 187) comes closer to explaining the complexity of lived experience.

I posit that forward and sideways remains an appropriate conceptual movement for Syd's queer relational shift against the straight world, from Sid to Syd, as Sid is explained by Zain pre-transition to have always moved through life 'sideways, sideways, like a crab' (*Moving Forward* 102). This remains key to Sid as a same-sex desiring woman, and Syd as an opposite sex desiring man, navigating the global condition of anti-queerness within the reality that Sydney always existed within Sidhani. Interestingly, Zain, Sid's closest friend and unrequited love, always refers to Sidhani as Sid meaning that Syd's queerness is able to be expressed in the past, present, and into the prolepsis of a narrative future both forward and sideways. Mootoo's twisted use of perspective through Sidhani, Sid, Sydney, and Syd create a polyvalent characterisation where their queerness exists no matter their current embodiment in the narrative as either Sid or Syd.



However, Mootoo also does not allow for a straight-forwardness in which Zain's position as an ally or advocate for Syd remains one-dimensional. Despite her allyship of Syd, Zain also suggests that Sid straighten themselves by imploring them to 'learn to walk like me' meaning 'like a cat' with 'one foot in front of the other' (*Moving Forward* 103). Zain fails to comprehend that moving 'sideways, like a crab' (*Moving Forward* 102) cannot be straightened, or made straight-forward, without inflicting trauma on Syd. The trauma enacted on the self in attempts to straighten queer people exists as self-inflicted in impositions by others. Syd's queer relationship to the straight world is a resistance against it which remains embodied by those closest to her, because Sid's movement 'like a crab' (*Moving Forward* 102) reflects a queer engagement with the straight world as their own autonomy. This singular, plural, and multiple queer engagement with the straight world remains explicit throughout *Moving Forward* as Mootoo entwines Sidhani, Sid, Sydney, and Syd to disorient a perspective of where one "ends" and another "begins". The creation of polyvalent meta-narratives related to Sidhani, Sid, Sydney, and Syd maintain their own movement 'sideways, sideways like a crab' (*Moving Forward* 102), by twisting forward and sideways against the demand for a straight-forward representation of gender transition as a phenomenon which takes place in one moment or happens in one life event.

*Moving Forward* evidences a refusal to be fixed by literary identity, or expected literary movement, which later connects with *Theory* and *Blue Clerk* as a key characteristic of my argument for queer communality: that queer Caribbean writing refuses definition by anything except itself. In order to maintain its queer autonomy, I suggest that *Blue Clerk*, *Theory*, and *Moving Forward* each engage in

Mootoo's description of crab movement by moving simultaneously forward through the straight world whilst sideways away from it. This movement is also indicative of the ways that a human body twists itself, by moving both forward and sideways to position itself in two directions: both towards and away from an object or subject. The narrative complexity of *Moving Forward* includes this spatial, perspectival, and temporal narrative twisting by moving forward and sideways and keeping past and present entwined through Sid and Syd, whilst continuing to highlight both "real" and imagined futures through Jonathan as a proxy narrator. This narrative complexity means that no part of *Moving Forward* is easily divisible from its whole; however, its order also remains non-linear, non-chronological, and both forward and sideways. Just as Syd explains that Jonathan must 'hear *all* the stories, in a seemingly digressive way, for *any* to make sense in the end' (*Moving Forward* 122, original emphasis), similarly, '*all*' the stories of *Moving Forward* twist together to allow '*any* to make sense in the end' (*Moving Forward* 122). Each part of *Moving Forward* contains a past, present, and future which exists twisted together into a present, and which ensures a narrative flow that does not create a straightness or linearity.

The narrative flow of *Moving Forward* remains in flux as opposed to in linearity, to frame Syd's story '(as he [Syd] told it to me)' (*Moving Forward* 67), as a queer story which embraces disorientation because this is closer to a natural global tempo that does not need to be straightened or ordered in pre-codified terms. This literary disorientation complicates straight-forwardness regarding writerly autonomy, and postcolonial writing in colonial languages, as a twist forward and sideways circumvents a Spivakian double bind, or an 'aporia, which by definition

cannot be crossed'.<sup>41</sup> I further suggest that this double bind incorporates the autonomy of queer writing in the straightness of colonial languages as Mootoo's queer Caribbean literary twists empower a discursive resistance to colonialism by resisting the retainment of straightness in English. Queerness works to inform anticolonial resistance through Spivak's imperative that we must be

willing to risk loss, relishing the power of others to constrain our interpretive "will to know," saving us from narcissism and its melancholy through the very positivities that cannot be exhausted by us, the otherness that always exceeds us.<sup>42</sup>

The queerness and Caribbeanness of *Moving Forward* is informed by its queer Caribbean representation which refuses to toe a line that limits their presentation of 'the otherness that always exceeds us', to move forward through, and yet sideways against, the often-ignored colonial foundations of straight dominance in anglophone Caribbean literature. Mootoo succeeds in refusing the fixed perceptions that come with a literary identity defined by a shared similarity, even by those who may attempt to impose a queer "identity" as something that has an essential characteristic, and which always remains a contradiction in terms because queerness means disidentifying and this has a fundamental importance for defying colonial categorisation.

### **Disorientating Ordinarity**

*Theory: A Novel* (2018) by Dionne Brand is separated into four parts chronicling a female protagonist's experience of doctoral study in cultural theory, during which

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<sup>41</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 104.

<sup>42</sup> Spivak, p. 202.

time she navigates queer relationships with three other women and with herself: Selah, Yara, Odalys and Teoria. The protagonist is unnamed until the penultimate section of *Theory*, where Odalys decides the final title of the narrator's thesis: 'A Conceptual Analysis of the Racially Constructed' (*Theory* 158) and it is explained that Teoria 'is what Odalys called me' because 'Teoria' means 'Theory' in Spanish. The genre of *Theory* exists as its own queer twist on Bildungsroman, because, as *Theory* traces Teoria's personal growth from the ages of twenty-eight to forty it also depicts her unfulfilled desire to complete her doctoral thesis. However, the entirety of *Theory* is itself a queer form of thesis because it is presented double-spaced with references, which means that *Theory* creates a twist on the usual encounter of academic writing by invigorating it with the literary representation of a queer life.

Throughout *Theory*, sections of the narrator's thesis appear in italics whilst satirising an academic life where 'one has no friends in academia' because 'one has colleagues' and 'one has assassins' (*Theory* 67). The shift of the narrator's thesis title further indicates a satire of academia as it moves from 'Gender's Genealogies: The Site of the Subaltern, a Foucauldian Reading' to 'Exhibitions or Memorials: The Site of the Subaltern, a Spivakian Reading' to 'Gender and Heidegger's Dasein: Informal Imperialism and 5,000 years of Gender Regime' to 'Political Thought as Outgrowth of Gender Identities' and 'The Mask of Gender: A Fanonian Critique' (*Theory* 47). The playfulness of this satire sheds light on an academic system, whilst aiding the disorientating twist of *Theory* where Caribbeanness and queerness remain alongside the narrative without providing it with a stable or categorizable identity as queer Caribbean. I propose that the disorientation created by Brand through this indirect representation protects queerness against literary straight-

forwardness, in order to reject straightness as an essential human norm that is also natural to academia. This presentation involves *Theory* allowing queer Caribbean bodies of colour like Teoria to be as ordinary in the academy, despite the fact that they are not classed as the “norm” of academia under the privileges which continue to abound within it for white persons including amongst all others: students, researchers, and lecturers.

Teoria explains that going against straight-forwardness in her relationship with Odalys is defined by twisting-away from what has come previously — the straight dominance of order — but that this queerness is ‘a difficult thing to do’ because ‘there are no forms to follow, only errors to make’ (*Theory* 101). However, I propose that each queer error in *Theory* is twisted against a straight-forward conception that failure is solely a negative or undesirable outcome. As opposed to a negative, each queer relational ‘error’ (*Theory* 101) represented in *Theory* creates the novel as a literary body which moves towards possibilities for new forms of relationality. Although there are ‘only errors to make’ (*Theory* 101), these errors succeed because they resist the ossifying effects of straight order.

This straight order is rejected by *Theory* through Brand’s queer use of an academic style, which twists away from the straight-forward concept that academic style means that writing is more objective or more factual than fictional novel writing. By this I mean, that straight-forward and uncritically adopted conventions attributed and enforced onto styles of writing, including those used in this thesis, inform their position within a false binary of “fiction” or “non-fiction”. However, *Theory* presents the falseness of this binary because it is impossible to prove or define what is “fiction” or “non-fiction” by representing how different queer paths

are always possible. This disorientation of academic style means that queer lives and queer narratives can thrive in *Theory*, against the straight-forwardness of styles of writing and in academia. In practice, this means that Brand's writing remains indirect in its engagement with both her own queerness and Caribbeanness to keep them safe from straightening devices — literary and otherwise — which is reflected in the imperative which Odalys and Teoria have to make sure they 'weren't re-enacting the heteronormative dramas of the ruling ideology' in their own queer relations (*Theory* 101). I posit that *Theory* is able to remain both queer and Caribbean in a distinctive form which disorientates both terms because it rejects being defined by a category of identity of straight dominance. This means that the narrative of *Theory* is able to remain intelligible as that of an African Caribbean Canadian female, but, through Brand's twisted use of literary perspective and disorientation, *Theory* is also framed as a global queer literary resistance that is not categorizable as anything other than itself.

I posit that Brand's twisted literary perspective means that queerness and Caribbeanness remain synonymous as a global resistance within *Theory*, through adoption of disorientation and indirection. This disorientation and indirection are queer literary manoeuvres; a twisting which informs the sense of queerness of Brand's writing and which makes it difficult to fix within a single category. This, in turn, destabilizes the definitions for what queer writing is, what Caribbean writing is, or what Canadian writing is, which I read as reflected in the form of love that Teoria feels for Odalys' body. Teoria 'loved Odalys' body the way one loves a theory' (*Theory* 138) not because of 'Odalys body' itself 'but the *sense* of Odalys' body' (*Theory* 138; original emphasis). This '*sense* of Odalys' body' is 'like a

universal weight in the world' (*Theory* 138), and I suggest that this 'universal weight in the world' (*Theory* 138) is a useful conceptualisation of the gravitas which shifts the queer centre of Brand's writing away from being fixed, and instead into the 'sense of Odalys' body' (*Theory* 138). The 'sense of Odalys' body' (*Theory* 138) transcends the bodily form of Odalys with the same force that queerness transcends the formal parameters of *Theory*. This, in turn, connects with *Moving Forward* in the ways that the sense of Sydney's body is always present in the sense of Sidhani's body regardless of its specific form. The body and its relationship to form are explored in the first part of *Theory*, concerning Selah who 'inhabited that manifestation' of conventional female beauty because, for Teoria, 'in this world there is a shared aesthetic' (*Theory* 10). Unlike Selah, Odalys' body has a queer gravitas beyond its aesthetic dimension, and it is this queer 'sense' of the body which allows Teoria to interpret through her reading of Odalys that 'the body is intelligence' (*Theory* 138). Reflectively, I suggest that against a straight-forward literary representation, the queerness of Brand's writing exists beyond parameters of description, categorisation, and identity in similarity to the 'weight of her presence' (*Theory* 138). This weight is 'the "mental grammar"' (*Theory* 138) of queerness, that weaves into the fabric and texture of narrative in *Theory*, by twisting away from being reduced to an identity and thus opens the possibility for a macrosocial version of connecting and belonging that is necessary for queer communality. This disorients what being together as a 'sense' (*Theory* 138) means, when it is not based around supposedly shared similarities based on, for example, the constructs of nationality, gender, sexuality, and race.

The disorientating nature of queerness related to *Theory*, as it disengages with stable categorisation, is further represented in Selah's description of 'how queer' and 'how out of time' Teoria is (*Theory* 14). Brand uses indirection through this secondary character to bring the term queer into *Theory* with Selah using queerness to mean odd, non-conforming, and out of place. Teoria is 'out of time' (*Theory* 14) as a reflection of the different rhythms and tempos of queerness against those constructed and imposed as the "norm" by straight dominance, with Brand's use of the term queer signalling its disidentification to reject the straightness of what is in exchange for the queerness of what could be. Selah's explanation of 'how queer' (*Theory* 14) Teoria is thus reflects José Esteban Muñoz's description of queerness as 'a conceptual grid in which we do not claim to always already know queerness in the world' and which 'staves off the ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology'.<sup>43</sup> Brand creates the character of Teoria as an 'invitation to look to horizons of being' and 'to strain our vision to force it to see otherwise' as a queerness undefined by anything other than an autonomous expression of self beyond social constructions.<sup>44</sup> Teoria expresses this in the final section of *Theory* by explaining that she hasn't 'said much about the world in these pages' but 'only about my interior world, which is a parody and also a reflection of the real world' (*Theory* 175). Brand's representation of Teoria and queerness necessarily remains a potentiality, 'beyond the limited vista of the here and now' to make of her literary self both a 'parody and also a reflection of the real world' (*Theory* 175) which is out

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<sup>43</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Muñoz, p. 22.



of reach on the horizon because it is 'out of time' and remains a surprise: 'how queer' (*Theory* 14).<sup>45</sup>

Rinaldo Walcott describes Dionne Brand as 'a queer hero like few others can be' because she writes 'from a Black queer centre' related to her own positionality.<sup>46</sup> I suggest that this Black queer centre is akin to the global perspective I propose through queer resistance in anglophone Caribbean writing, against a global straight dominance, because it involves the necessity for queerness to be fundamentally engaged against legacy of colonialism in social constructions. Brand's Black queer centre is thus not defined by Walcott as an identity characteristic, but can be understood more openly through Muñoz's ideas for the 'sharing of a brown sense of the world', which is 'not the sole province of people who have been called or call themselves brown' but instead 'a flowing into the common'.<sup>47</sup> This, in turn, redefines the potentialities of black queer Caribbeanness against Walcott's conception that black queers 'remain beyond and against the rules of the category Black'.<sup>48</sup> In existing 'beyond and against the category Black' there is a further reflection of Muñoz's earlier defined conceptions of queerness, following the ontologies of Ernst Bloch and Giorgio Agamben, that 'queerness is not quite here' because it is 'a potentiality'.<sup>49</sup> Ronald Cummings has explored this correlation in depth by examining how Blackness and queerness both posit "'here"

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<sup>45</sup> Muñoz, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup>Rinaldo Walcott, 'A Revolution on the Page: Poet Dionne Brand's Contributions to Culture are Unparalleled' <<https://www.cbc.ca/artsprojects/superqueeroes/dionne-brand>> [accessed: 20 July 2020].

<sup>47</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, eds. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 149.

<sup>48</sup> Walcott, p. 85.

<sup>49</sup> Muñoz, p. 21.

as an oppressive space' in terms of the shared literary understanding of Brand and Muñoz which 'escape and exceed the normative logics and locations of our here'.<sup>50</sup> Expanding on Cummings, I suggest that Brand's writing remains outside singular definitions of Blackness or Caribbeanness or queerness because they are a fully realised anticolonial praxis, which does not separate these terms, and discursively represent Muñoz's 'feel' of 'queerness' pull' by 'knowing it as something else entirely and that lies within a disorientation of ordinariness'.<sup>51</sup>

The twisted movement of disorientating ordinariness is encapsulated during Teoria's first meeting with Odalys in *Theory*, where Odalys is walking down a street backwards reflecting the direction of Mootoo's crab-like, and, as I have previously suggested, queer movement. When Teoria asks why, Odalys explains that she is 'trying to change my life around' because she wants 'to see what I leave behind when I move forward' (*Theory* 144). For queers, due to the oppressions of straightness which intersect multiple forms of bigotry, the individual experience of overcoming adversity is unique, and relates to multiple factors that are influenced by a person's perceived identity. This adversity often evolves into a source of personal strength, and an empowerment derived from the path many 'leave behind when' they 'move forward' (*Theory* 144). This previously trodden path includes a singularly personal resistance to the global condition of anti-queerness, which necessitates an autonomous queer twist on engaging in the straight world. Therefore, for Odalys, contrary to any accepted knowledge informed by colonialism amid a global proliferation of Enlightenment logic, looking backwards is reoriented

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<sup>50</sup> Cummings, p. 317 and p. 320.

<sup>51</sup> Muñoz, p. 186.

as a positive life experience. Odalys chooses her own queer perspective against straight-forwardness, because straight-forwardness predetermines the past as a singular “then” which must be continuously ignored in order for the forward movement of “now” to occur. This is twisted by Odalys in her desire to see what she leaves behind by moving forward, and this movement against straight-forwardness can be understood through a conventional social imperative against mental distress that demands a person “move on” or “move past” their issue, by concentrating solely on the safety of the present. However, in a spectrum of differing levels of oppression based on the perception of a person’s gender, sexuality, race, and class the safety of the present is not simple for queers under the conditions of global anti-queerness. Returning to Cummings’ argument, this means “‘here’ as an oppressive space’ for queers, in distinct and unique ways dependent on the perception of a person’s gender, sexuality, and race.<sup>52</sup> This straight oppressive space is anti-queer in its intersections of oppression which impact each individual differently, yet which derive directly from continued global proliferations of colonial epistemologies.

Brand traces straight-forward thinking as a colonial epistemology in *Theory* via Teoria’s critique of antiquated economic theory which ‘held that social formations necessarily pass-through vectors of slavery, feudalism and capitalism’ (*Theory* 185). Brand’s narrator insists on looking at this straight-forward interpretation in new ways and twists towards a queer demand to ‘insist on an ethical relation to the present rooted in an authentic one to the past’ (*Theory* 187).

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<sup>52</sup> Cummings, p. 317.

The reality remains that a “move on”, “move past” or “don’t look back” mentality, that is represented by a demand for straight-forwardness, goes some way to explain the majority view held by contemporary Britons regarding British colonialism. This reality is exemplified by the responses to a 2019 British YouGov survey in which thirty- two percent of those asked believed colonialism was something to be proud of, thirty-seven percent were ambivalent, against only nineteen percent who believed colonialism was negative.<sup>53</sup> In the scenario of “not looking back” ambivalence can be said to work in the same vein as an colonial apologist perspective, by undermining the possibility of ‘an ethical relation to the present rooted in an authentic one to the past’ (*Theory* 187).

Brand’s writerly mode is able to twist away from what Teoria describes as ‘the disturbing slumber of the normative’ (*Theory* 105). This somnambulism includes an uncritical perception of a straight dominance that, in contemporary terms, includes the racism borne of global colonial oppressions through white supremacy. Awakening from the ‘disturbing slumber of the normative’ (*Theory* 105) involves engaging with the complex intersections of race related to queerness, in terms of straight dominance, because this exists in different terms globally but shares a similar ethos in macrosocial terms as the ‘disturbing slumber of the normative’ (*Theory* 105). For Teoria, the normative, or global straight dominance, is understood as a reorientation of her childhood background of ‘ordinariness’ (*Theory* 176) which is shared globally for queer persons. For queer persons, like Teoria, living and growing through ‘ordinariness’ is depicted as itself a trauma

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<sup>53</sup> ‘YouGov - British Empire Attitudes’ (2019)  
<<https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/z7uxxko71z/YouGov%20-%20British%20empire%20attitudes.pdf>>  
[accessed 1 September 2020].

because, globally, ordinariness is a straightness that is not a benign social occurrence (*Theory* 176). For example, although Teoria ‘wasn’t born into any bad situation – no teenaged mother, no drunken father’, meaning that there were ‘no hard times’, she was traumatised simply by existing in a straight world of ‘just conformity’ (*Theory* 176). Teoria exposes the epistemic violence enacted on queer people, globally, by a social demand for ‘[R]egular, stultifying conformity’ (*Theory* 176), which may take many different outward shapes but still demands straight-forwardness. Thus ‘ordinariness’ (*Theory* 176) keeps many in the ‘disturbing slumber’ (*Theory* 105) of “norms”, by attempting to ensure that a person is unable to express themselves with full autonomy. Brand’s writing succeeds in reorienting ordinariness as a way to represent difference as a communal human experience, revoking the neutrality of ‘ordinariness’ to show that ‘just conformity’ (*Theory* 176) can and does cause harm to each person’s autonomy.

*Theory* twists expectations of representation against its titular definition — as *A Novel* — by constantly challenging what novel writing is; what it can be, or what it could be. By disorientating what novel writing is, what it can be, or could be, I propose that *Theory* becomes the inscribed life of a narrator, a written corpus as a literary body that challenges difference as an impasse for connection. *Theory*, as a literary body of work, includes Teoria’s thesis as a personal narrative which is also a collection of other literary bodies — Selah, Yara, and Odalys — into the corpus of *Theory*. The queerness of this literary body of work made of many queer bodies, exists beyond straight-forward representation and instead can be understood as the atmosphere of a room in which ‘one never notices space or air, only the chair or the table’ (*Theory* 28). In declaring that *Theory* is a novel, Brand represents the

ordinary and normal form of Teoria's queer life with a reoriented purpose, because this challenges what novel writing is including who it is presupposed to represent as queer writing, Caribbean writing, or queer Caribbean writing. As Shamira A. Meghani and Humaira Saeed explain, representing the ordinariness of queer life engages in 'positioning the sensitive, observant queer as the text's moral centre', which overturns 'the clichés of queerness as moral decay', and further defies queerness being shaped into 'pre-codified imperialistic terms'.<sup>54</sup> In this way the queerness of *Theory* exists like the notes of Teoria's thesis; 'neither as narrative, nor as trauma, but as epistemology' (*Theory* 227). Any expectations of what queer writing is, Caribbean writing is, or queer Caribbean writing is remains continually twisted by *Theory* not 'as narrative, nor as trauma' but knowledge and sense 'as epistemology' (*Theory* 227) which refuses to be made unconventional or "other" by remaining, definitively, a novel that is inclusive of each of its perceived identities as well as much more and not the property of straight-forwardness.

Brand's representation of queerness as ordinary whilst disorientating straight ordinariness, complicates the narrative of *Theory* against a straight-forward understanding of it as a hybrid or unusual form. I propose that this showcases the complexity and abstraction of Brand's work as a form of queer disorientation that twists perception to its own ends. Similarly, *Blue Clerk* complicates the norms of a poetry collection in its representation of a prose dialogue between a poet and their clerk; as Sharlee Cranston-Reimer describes, 'Brand complicates genre because

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<sup>54</sup> Shamira A. Meghani and Humaira Saeed, 'Postcolonial/Sexuality, or, Sexuality in 'Other' Contexts: Introduction', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55:3 (2019), 293-307 (p. 295).

genre can operate as such a significant organizing feature'.<sup>55</sup> I agree with Cranston-Reimer's description of the resistant nature of Brand's genre complexity and, further, that it engages in Sara Ahmed's queer use, because Brand 'complicates genre' by using multiple genres in 'ways other than for which they were intended' by twisting them for the use of those 'other than for whom they were intended'.<sup>56</sup> As a result, *Blue Clerk* writes through a liminal space regarding genre; between the poet's descriptions of 'the imperative, in a certain sense, for prose to satisfy narratively' and 'the generative possibilities that a poem has' (*Blue Clerk* 111). *Blue Clerk* includes numbered versos separated into collections — for example, Verso 16.1.1 — whose interlocutors narrate on gender, race, and sexuality in four untitled parts which are represented without a contents page. The lack of a contents page creates a formal disorientation in *Blue Clerk* as the reader is revoked a format to easily position themselves at a single point in the collection. This has the result that attempts at reading the poems of *Blue Clerk* are informed by seeking and searching. *Blue Clerk* represents versos chronologically and each is unique in length from a few words to a few pages; however, irregularities are presented including unnumbered and repeated versos. Many versos contain numerous literary styles by involving amongst others: anecdotal monologue, dictionary, recipe, bibliographic, index and academic reference style. *Blue Clerk* has unnamed and ungendered narrators split into the figure of a poet and their clerk, who remain, somewhat surreptitiously, understood through the content of the poems as African Caribbean Canadian queer

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<sup>55</sup> Sharlee 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: Vancouver*, 228/229 (Spring/Summer 2016), 93-109 (p. 109).

<sup>56</sup> Cranston-Reimer, p. 109, and Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, p. 199.

women. This representation suggest that the poet and the clerk of *Blue Clerk* remain like Teoria of *Theory* simultaneously both Brand and not Brand, in a disorientating perspective that shifts the boundaries of biography and fictional narrative.<sup>57</sup>

Arguably, English Literature dominates how anglophone Caribbean literature has become categorised and identified. This is reflected in ‘Verso 9’ through the dichotomy between the poet and the clerk when describing the nature of poetry. For the poet, poetry is

the esoteric, not history, or politics. This is the conservative line of poetry; to stay away from politics, stay away from the everyday except soothe, sage, bring good tidings, observe beauty; give light when all is dark; assure us that we are benevolent and good at the core, lift us from the daily troubles of the world, elevate our molecular concerns, our parochial, individual lives to the level of art (*Blue Clerk* 53).

To this explanation ‘the clerk sighs’ because ‘that’s god, or mother, not poet’ but, for the clerk, ‘[P]oetry must be eternal not temporal’ (*Blue Clerk* 53). The poet represents the need to reject the colonial ties of English Literature as ‘the conservative line of poetry’, and instead to understand poetry as ‘esoteric’ and ‘elevating our molecular concerns’ and ‘our individual lives to the level of art’ (*Blue Clerk* 53). Similarly, Kofi Omoniyi Sylvanus Campbell explains that colonial trauma, regarding the dichotomy between the global North and global South, impacts Caribbean queer subjects today as a ‘Western focus marks all other queer

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<sup>57</sup> The shifting boundaries of biography and fictional narrative are explored with more depth in the third chapter of this thesis related to Audre Lorde’s conception of biomythography.



sexualities as immediately inauthentic, until they can be disciplined into the Western mould'.<sup>58</sup>

The poet resists being 'disciplined into the Western mould' because the 'conservative line of poetry' (*Blue Clerk* 53) is that which fixes poetry into a category of English literature.<sup>59</sup> The poetic voice of the clerk twists poetry away from the poet himself in the explanation that 'poetry must be eternal not temporal' (*Blue Clerk* 53), meaning that the nature of poetry is itself, similar to *Teoria*, 'out of time' (*Theory* 10). Therefore, if being 'out of time' (*Theory*, 10) accounts also for 'how queer' (*Theory* 10) a form is then the 'eternal not temporal' (*Blue Clerk* 53) nature of Brand's poetry remains queerly disidentified. This same focus resisting extant literary paradigms is reflected in the critical drive for Caribbean writing to be described in pre-codified terms, including postmodern, postcolonial, world-literature, and even the descriptor anglophone Caribbean literature. Of course, queer Caribbean writing can be read as featuring aspects of all categories. However, ascribing queer writing a definition by these categories is an erasure through which queerness becomes absorbed into pre-existing hierarchies of cultural worth, which means they becomes both straightened and whitewashed, or colonised.

Brand's writerly mode is distinctively abstract and complex, or as Cranston-Reimer describes it 'incommensurable', as a resistance tactic that disorients the colonizing nature of literary "norms".<sup>60</sup> For example, *Blue Clerk* includes a faux

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<sup>58</sup> Kofi Omoniyi Sylvanus Campbell, *The Queer Caribbean Speaks: Interviews with Writers, Artists and Activists* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Cranston-Reimer, p. 109.

climax, followed by an index which remains part of the main text of the collection and which then proceeds into a re-writing of Verso 33.1. I suggest that Brand's complex and abstract literary mode is a vital characteristic of queer disorientation, whose twisted particularity allows for the importance of its Caribbean queer connections as a global communality. Marlene NourbeSe Philips explains that there is often an attempt to fix her own writerly mode into predefined terminology, by 'white or European audiences' who she believes 'do not understand' or 'miss most of what the work is about' because 'they see it as postmodern'.<sup>61</sup> *Blue Clerk* and *Theory* evidence a primary concern of Brand's writing, to protect their autonomy against the straight-forwardness of definition, that can then connect with those who also reject judgement against pre-existing forms. This is important because it includes an imperative to not view Brand's writing as unconventional prose in verse or hybrid prose in poetry, because I propose that Brand's writing sustains its uniqueness as the connection of difference necessary for global queer communality. This includes no supposed similarity between writers or writings at the level of identity because this is a proxy of 'ordinariness' (*Theory* 176) and the demand for '[R]egular, stultifying conformity' (*Theory* 176). The queerness of Brand's writerly mode creates a global articulation of connection that can be understood to transcend existing categories of identity. I posit that that this mode bears a conceptual resemblance to the poet's description of 'the baby's voice' (*Blue Clerk* 155), because they explain that they 'love the baby's voice' for is has 'such

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<sup>61</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip, *Bla\_K: Essays and Interviews* (Toronto, CA: Book\*hug, 2018), p. 53. Notably, Philips explains a conceptualisation between the similarities of already existent literary identities and her own queer Caribbean writing; that, 'while the work may look like a duck, walk like a duck and even talk like a duck, it is not a duck' (p.55).

originality' (*Blue Clerk* 155). This means that the baby's voice is the sound of queerness in each individual prior to any attempts at social conditioning.

This perception disorients the straight-forward idea that a baby's voice is something unformed and which lacks substance, because the baby's voice in fact communicates a queer originality. Brand twists a linear idea of progression surrounding human growth, knowledge, and language, and positions the baby's voice as the epitome of autonomy. The baby's voice acts as a global connection for queers as a symbolic representation that any policing by a straight status quo can be unlearned as a form of personal growth. I suggest that this conception intersects with the nature of Caribbean writing and English literature as interpreted by Philip, because Caribbean English literature necessitates a 'decontaminating process' in order for English literature to not behave as 'an abusive parent' and leave Caribbean writing 'always in a shadow around English'.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, in a queer context, Caribbean writing in English requires an additional twist to achieve this 'decontaminating process', to successfully counteract the entwined phenomena of racism within straightness, and vice versa, that remains tied to a demand for straight-forward clarity related to what anglophone Caribbean writing is.<sup>63</sup>

I propose that a double-page reference note to a single phrase in *Theory*, 'Occam's razor' (*Theory* 1), directly connects with representations in *Blue Clerk*, as an encapsulation of the disorientation in Brand's literary twisting against straight-forwardness. 'Occam's razor' (*Theory* 1), sometimes known as *novacula Occami*, is the preference for simplicity in defending ideas which has been recently been

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<sup>62</sup> Philip, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

interpreted by Susan Brower-Toland as a ‘commitment to parsimony’ — meaning that entities or arguments are not multiplied beyond necessity — attributed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century theologian William of Ockham.<sup>64</sup> Occam’s Razor was originally theorized as a way to accept divine Providence that Towland views as developing around a ‘common-sense intuition’ which ‘truth depends on’.<sup>65</sup> Teoria explains how her own thesis writing necessitates far more of ‘Occam’s razor’ because it ‘is instructive, didactic’ (*Theory 2*) in nature, but ‘on the other hand’ she knows that also ‘one ought to take stock of one’s own bullshit’ (*Theory 2*). Although simplicity in argument may inform clarity, it is also true that ‘to take stock of one’s own bullshit’ (*Theory 2*) remains necessary and complex.

To achieve this merging of simplicity with complexity I propose that Brand performs a queer twist on Occam’s Razor, that turns conventional understandings against themselves, by forcing the reader to look at their own investment in the global condition of anti-queerness, ‘to take stock of one’s own bullshit’ (*Theory 2*). For example, in Verso 32.1 from *Blue Clerk* the poet adopts Occam’s Razor to explain clearly and directly that ‘Plato was a slaveholder’ (*Blue Clerk* 167) and that this is a fact that the poet ‘cannot get past’ (*Blue Clerk* 167). Brand proceeds to twist an apologist perspective surrounding the enslavement of human beings against those who ‘say that is the way it was’ (*Blue Clerk* 167), with her own razor-sharp retort that ‘yes, that is exactly the way it was’ (*Blue Clerk* 167). The seemingly straight-forward logic of Occam’s Razor is used by Brand to define the simplest answer as the most favourable answer. The queer use of Occam’s Razor against the

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<sup>64</sup> Susan Brower-Toland, ‘Deflecting Ockham’s Razor: A Medieval Debate about Ontological Commitment’, *Mind*, 132: 527 (July 2023), 659–679 (p. 659).

<sup>65</sup> Brower-Toland, p. 677.

philosophical canon it stems from, ensures that legacies of enslavement are not brushed aside through vague platitudes related to historical context. This is important because dismissing the horror of 'the way it was' (*Blue Clerk* 167) also serves as a contemporary smokescreen around the way it remains, which means avoiding the enslavement of human beings as a contemporary phenomenon. Brand's reminder that Plato was a slaveholder serves to question the received wisdoms of canonical figures, as they may have been internalized by the reader, by reflecting them back on themselves to ensure that they 'take stock of one's own bullshit' (*Theory*, 2).

Brand's queer use of Occam's Razor is also represented by Teoria in *Theory* when she explains that she is 'certainly not a humanist', because 'humanism is the graveyard for people like me' (*Theory* 108). The straight-forward perception that humanism is a positive ideal, which espouses the fundamental moral goodness of humanity, is complicated by the fact that the history of humanism has served eugenic ends that uphold global white supremacy. There is satirical pathos imbued in the narrator's quoting of Althusser against ideology and the fact that 'it's important to note that Althusser killed his wife' (*Theory* 127). Here, a twist on Occam's Razor represents how simple and clear truths also create a complexity which should not be ignored. Brand's literary twist undoes any attempts at glossing over uncomfortable realities of humanity, because human atrocities remain part of humanism. The implication that it is the 'way it was' (*Blue Clerk* 167) is not accepted as a distancing away from the way it is. In *Verso* 19.2 the poet further proposes a twisted engagement with canonical cultural figures by foregrounding their bigotry. Explaining the less palatable thinking of Picasso through Gertrude Stein and Hegel,

the poet declares 'who on earth is left who did not say an awful thing' and 'who did not disguise it as sophistication as knowledge, as wit' (*Blue Clerk* 116). Brand presents an epistolary section in Verso 19.2 derived from letters written by Gertrude Stein's partner Alice B. Toklas, where Toklas presents her interpretation of Stein's view on culture of the African continent, explaining how

Gertrude Stein concluded that negroes were not suffering from persecution, they were suffering from nothingness. She [Stein] always contends that the African is not primitive, he has a very ancient culture and there it remains. Consequently, nothing does or can happen (*Blue Clerk* 117).

A similar mode of bigotry is explained in Verso 30., because the poet 'still can't forgive T.S Eliot for those "dead negroes" in the river' with 'the collective noun, cargo, just before' in reference to Eliot's 'The Dry Salvages' (1941) the third of his *Four Quartets* (1943). The poet laments being forced 'to come upon something like that so early' in her studentship as a creative writer, because in another decisive queer use of Occam's Razor: 'why should I?' (*Blue Clerk* 164). In proposing the clear question 'why should I?' (*Blue Clerk* 164), the poet proposes the literary canon as a tool of contemporary trauma for some students of English literature amid its background of 'ordinariness' (*Theory* 176), and which may similarly seek to contextualise racism as the 'way it was' (*Blue Clerk* 167). The lack of sensitivity around these complicated and difficult subjects is underscored as Brand reminds the reader that 'yes, that is exactly the way it was' (*Blue Clerk* 167). Brand's queer and Caribbean perspective twists the 'way it was' into 'exactly the way it was' (*Blue Clerk* 167), implying that canonicity must be challenged to aid in reducing trauma on students in order to keep 'the way it was' from not remaining the way it is. A

way to counter this ordinariness is to refract it onto queer narratives, returning to Meghani and Saeed in their explanation that representing the ordinariness of queer life engages overthrows 'the clichés of queerness as moral decay', and defies 'pre-codified imperialistic terms'. A queer use in these terms includes an appropriation of ordinariness away from straightness, as well as the interconnections I interpret between straightness and global white supremacy.

The sharpness of Brand's twisted use of Occam's Razor is explained in an anecdote in *Blue Clerk* as the poet describes how their group of friends, who are also poets, are unable to accept the poet's communism. When asking why the poet is a communist, they stoned me with Stalin' but in return the poet 'pelted them with Sartre' (*Blue Clerk* 49). Following this confrontation, Brand's twisted use of Occam's Razor acts as a tool for adding complexity against straight-forwardness, by presenting the succinct and simple declaration that 'I'm a communist because I'm not a capitalist' (*Blue Clerk* 49). This explanation is refused by the group as 'simplistic' and, reorienting the platitude of this refusal, the poet declares, 'yes, but it's clear' (*Blue Clerk* 49). Here, communism and queerness conflate through Brand's own queerness and Caribbeanness as herself a communist, meaning that her writing and her person converge in order to turn straight-forwardness against itself and towards the difficulty of accepting simple truths. This intersection of queerness, anti-capitalism, and the embodied and material disruptions of queerness, shown by Teoria against the status quo of her friends, echoes the queer anti-capitalist imperative of Peter Drucker 'to link political economy with an

analysis of the imperial world order and with a radical politics of sex'.<sup>66</sup> This further connects with Holly Lewis' writing that 'racism, misogyny, and oppositional sexism' are 'conditions and contingencies of the organization of production and reproduction under capitalism', where Brand as a black queer communist speaks against each of the protestations of a straight status quo represented by her other poet friends.<sup>67</sup> This merging of Brand and her writing reflects how 'queerness becomes catchy' for Sara Ahmed because 'queer uses might leave traces of ourselves behind'.<sup>68</sup> Brand leaves traces of her queer communist self within her writing, as she turns readerly attention back to the simple facts of anti-capitalism and of queerness. This is because the simplest explanations of anti-capitalism and queerness remain true: if you are against straightness then you are queer, and if you are anti-capitalist then you are aligned with communism. A queer use of Occam's Razor means that Brand's literary twists return to simple facts that queerness is against straightness and communism is against capitalism. Brand's queer Caribbean perspective in her writing employs its own queer use of the English language, canonicity, and universally accepted understandings against themselves to defy their colonialism and show their global dominance. Subsequently, this means that *Blue Clerk* and *Theory* use literary representation to twist straight conventions against themselves as a challenge for them to take stock of their 'own bullshit' (*Theory* 2).

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Drucker, 'Political Economy of Sex and Empire: Homonationalism & Queer Resistance' *Against the Current*, 31:2 (2016), 23-26 (p. 24).

<sup>67</sup> Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2016), p. 262.

<sup>68</sup> Ahmed, *What's the Use?*, p. 200.



Brand remains entwined with her writing by refusing the straightening of her literary body into an identity, which I see reflected in a similar imperative from Édouard Glissant's conception of 'errantry' as a 'temptation (the desire to go against the root)'.<sup>69</sup> Brand's errantry lies in desiring to go against the root of English literature, and its continuation through any straightness of Caribbean literature, by expressing an autonomy that is a global form of queer resistance. This is necessary because the poet of *Blue Clerk* explains that 'I leave my house and immediately my body is ripped from me to enact some colonial idyll', this 'colonial idyll' is created around

A dialect. Each word that seems perfectly legitimate right now, perfectly, as the vocabulary of what is called resistance, you will notice later only reinforces the zoo.

Essentially, as a poet. As anyone, the clerk says. As anyone, the author is trying her best to agree with the clerk this way life would be easier, so yes as anyone, you cannot be comfortable with any new arrangement. My job is to be completely uncomfortable, as painful and horrible and sometimes as personally devastating as all that might be. You always have to distrust the comfort of solutions. It is incumbent on me to keep being unsettled (*Blue Clerk* 83).

Here, Brand warns against the false comfort of teleology and implies that this remains existent within 'the vocabulary of what is called resistance' (*Blue Clerk* 82). Brand uses disorientation in her literary twists as a queer Caribbean writer, whose 'job is to be completely uncomfortable' (*Blue Clerk* 82), because this is unavoidable when the desire is 'to go against the root' and live against fixed ideas of straight-

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<sup>69</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* trans. Betty Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), p. 15.

forwardness.<sup>70</sup> These literary twists are able to use disorientation as an aid for Muñoz's imperative to 'hold queerness in a sort of ontologically humble state'.<sup>71</sup> The queerness of Brand's writing refuses the comfort of existent definitions, because 'you cannot be comfortable with any new arrangement' (*Blue Clerk* 83) and only with the disruption of existing forms. As Teoria states in a section from her thesis: 'we can only see differently if we frame it differently' (*Theory* 182). Thus, critical engagements with queerness and Caribbeanness remain open for the global potential of a resistance which means to 'frame it differently' (*Theory* 182), to frame belonging differently. To 'see differently' (*Theory* 182) derives from the persistent decision to 'keep being unsettled' (*Blue Clerk* 83) and in turn to keep unsettling what anticolonial action is if it is not centred around queer resistance.

Brand's writing contains a characteristic resistance to standard definition or literary identity — against straight-forwardness — by desiring to not 'live in that world anymore' as a global reality that 'the world' is 'where certain bodies signify certain immovable qualities' (*Blue Clerk* 93). This refusal is a resistance against both a literary "norm" and an identity "norm", through which queer bodies are consistently circumnavigating straightness: a singularity and linearity which is 'deployed like lampposts along a route' (*Blue* 93). Going against this 'route' includes the errantry of Glissant and brings the creative force of writing as one which defies order coming closer to Verso 19 of *Blue Clerk* in its etymology of poetry as '*Poema, Poein, related to, the Sanskrit, cinoti, cayati, to assemble, to heap up, to construct*' (*Blue Clerk* 110). *Theory* and *Blue Clerk* each engage in twisting and

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<sup>70</sup> Glissant, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> Muñoz, p. 22.

turning as a way 'to assemble, to heap up, to construct' (*Blue Clerk* 110) their own singularity, which expands beyond the limit of connection which exists when separation is based on identity. The works of Brand and Mootoo assemble themselves alongside each other, by disrupting colonially derived, straight, orderliness: literary or otherwise. Crucially, this disruption includes the specific rejection of any referent to straightness, whiteness, and the limits of identity as stopping point in fostering global solidarity. Thus, going beyond straight-forwardness is a key component of understanding how and why queer Caribbean literary twists offer important value to conceptualising global resistance strategies, which foreground the queer resistance necessary for a global anti-colonial praxis and the anti-colonial praxis necessary for global queer resistance.

### **Twisting Détournement**

I conclude this chapter in a queer engagement with an established Caribbean critique — Édouard Glissant's *détournement* — alongside Dionne Brand's representation of Charles Mingus's jazz masterpiece *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956). This engagement represents the importance of conceptualising a twist that is able to go against straight-forwardness, because this remains part of the queerness necessary for an anticolonial praxis. This means that queer Caribbean writing adds an additional twist on Édouard Glissant's interpretation of 'rerouting [*détournement*]'.<sup>72</sup> Glissant interpreted this originally through the Francophone writing of Saint-John Perse, and if Perse's rerouting works in a Francophone Caribbean context to enact a postcolonial resistance; then, reflecting Ahmed's

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<sup>72</sup> Glissant, p. 40.

conceptions, I propose that Brand and Mootoo add further twists on *détournement* for their own queer use. This is achieved as queer Caribbean twists in writing reject categorisation to move against the straight-forwardness of identity, by instead moving forward through it, and sideways against it. For example, despite the differences of identity that could be used to separate Brand and Mootoo, as queer writers who are respectively Black Caribbean Canadian and Indian Caribbean Canadian, their writing is able to commune in their demand to have ‘nothing to do with any reference’ of the colonialism of straightness in English literature, as well as demanding ‘nothing to do with any reference’ that retains the same straightness in Caribbean literature.<sup>73</sup> Despite its presupposed straightness, this does not mean that Caribbean literature is simply rejected by Brand and Mootoo, but rather that their writing is able to connect alongside Caribbean literary history because they include the global connectivity that is possible when straight-forwardness is disoriented as an anti-colonial praxis.

This colonial resistance lies in a queer Caribbean writing that not only subverts the racism of British colonialism but also resists its inseparability from contemporary straightness.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, similar to my earlier manipulation of Zarranz’s ethico affective lens, Brand and Mootoo multiply Glissant’s *détournement* by twisting it against the limits of straight-forwardness, because this is necessary for queerness to reach its global potential. This means that Brand and Mootoo reroute any reference to the colonialism of standard English, and its implicit straightness, whilst diverting from any colonialism and straightness in Caribbean

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<sup>73</sup> Glissant, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

English discourse. This involves multiple re-routings, both forwards and sideways, against the centrality of whiteness and straightness on a global and local level which both inform and support the global condition of anti-queerness. Therefore, Brand and Mootoo retain a literary mode which is unique to a queer way of understanding cultural creation as global phenomena, and that reflects the poet's description from Verso. 31 of 'Charles Mingus's *Pithecanthropus Erectus*' (*Blue Clerk* 165) in *Blue Clerk*. For the poet, Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus* 'is not music' but rather 'a text of philosophical charge' (*Blue Clerk* 165). Similarly, the anticolonial foregrounding of queer resistance in *Theory*, *Blue Clerk* and *Moving Forward* — and thus the queer foregrounding of anticolonial resistance — is able to, like Mingus, suggest that 'another territory' (*Blue Clerk* 165) is possible. This 'another territory' (*Blue Clerk* 165) is a location from which queer Caribbean writing commits to disorientation. This connection, between *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* follows in the footsteps of *Pithecanthropus Erectus* whilst echoing Philip's argument on the damaging reduction that negative interpretations of her writing gain as impenetrably 'complex and abstract'.<sup>75</sup>

My critical framework for the queer literary twists created by Brand and Mootoo adhere with Philip in the explanation that her 'work is "complex and abstract"'; however, 'so is jazz and that doesn't prevent anyone from listening to it'.<sup>76</sup> Writing by Brand and Mootoo uses complexity and abstraction as a connector for the communality conceptualised in this thesis, which is a belonging that requires nothing but difference. This is a belonging which moves similarly to Mingus' jazz

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<sup>75</sup> Philip, p. 51.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

and is reflected in writing which moves against the straight-forwardness that is a 'direction of known conventional languages that we use to "communicate" with' because if you remain tied to these 'then you are lost' (*Blue Clerk* 165) in the world of straight conformity. This engagement currently has an ineffability in terms of categorization and meaning that, as Brand explains, that 'ineffability requires another larynx' (*Blue Clerk* 166); a singularness that is not reduced to individualism, because its dimensions remain enigmatic in order to create the connections which I suggest remains as important for global queer resistance as jazz is for global culture.

Throughout this chapter a key facet of queer Caribbean communality that creates a global queer resistance has been interpreted, through the twisted literary movements of writing by Dionne Brand and Shani Mootoo against straight-forwardness. The queer Caribbean literary bodies of *Theory*, *Blue Clerk*, and *Moving Forward* move against straightening as a macrosocial version of queer resistance, because they always necessarily directly engage with racism as inseparable from straightness, or the global condition of anti-queerness. These queer twists are able to conceptually travel beyond the Caribbean, because in their queer Caribbeaness they are anticolonial, which allows them to become global in scope. This chapter has begun my thesis argument to frame queer Caribbean writing as an apex of resistance to colonial oppressions; those that continue through global white supremacy. I will continue into my following chapter to highlight the possibility that Caribbean writing has always been moving towards queerness if it has sought to defy colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial paradigms of contemporary power. Understanding the additional queer twists necessary for an anticolonial praxis,

informs my following chapter's position that queer Caribbeanness can be understood as representational of the ways that global queer resistance strategies are already involved in anticolonial praxes. Thus, queer Caribbean writing can start to be understood as an existent evolution of what anti-colonial resistance is, and what it could be, globally moving forward and, of course, sideways.

## Chapter Two: The Queer Concept of Obeah: Global Protection Circles in *The Book of Night Women* (2009) and *Sister Mine* (2013)

There is a generalized understanding of pan-Caribbean theology, globally, which remains tainted by misconceptions that reduce it outside of the Caribbean and its diaspora. These misconceptions are epitomised by a blanket minimizing of Caribbean religions and spiritualities into Christianity, Rastafari, or a homogenous West African-derived spiritual otherness. These reductions ignore the vast array of unique Caribbean religions and spiritualities; for example, many remain ignorant of the focus of this chapter, Obeah, which is a set of spiritual religious practices unique to the anglophone Caribbean. Obeah was borne as a syncretism of West African religions, in a form of resistance enacted by enslaved persons against the atrocities of British colonial oppression. Obeah was subsequently vilified by colonial powers and it remains illegal.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will examine a link between anticolonial resistance and queer resistance related to literary representations of Obeah, to propose Obeah as a queer concept in *The Book of Night Women* (2009) by Marlon James and *Sister Mine* (2013) by Nalo Hopkinson. The queerness of Obeah as a concept will be shown to lie in the macrosocial resistance it creates against colonial power because it rejects the ordering devices of straight dominance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the dichotomy of religion and spirituality in the anglophone Caribbean please refer to Diana Paton's scholarly body of work; notably, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (2015). I have made the decision to capitalise Obeah following its use by Paton and the critics and historians within her edited collection *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, eds. Diana Paton and Maarit Forde (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women* (London, UK: One World, 2014); Nalo Hopkinson, *Sister Mine* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2013). Hereafter, references will appear in text from these published editions as *Night Women* and *Sister Mine*.



In this chapter I read global reductions of Caribbean theology as representative of a wider, and often wilful, obfuscation of colonial historical realities, which sustain the global condition of anti-queerness. I propose that this obfuscation is combatted by *Night Women* and *Sister Mine* as they become Obeah-in-action, through literary circles which inscribe their narratives with a global form of queer protection against the straightening devices of categorised identity. The queer concept of Obeah will be shown to defy categorisation by identity, as a tactic for evading policing by a contemporary straight status quo precisely because this is a legacy of colonial oppression.

### **Obeah within Caribbean Theology**

My engagement with the concept of Obeah in this chapter is indebted to recent critical work by Janelle Rodriques from *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian Literature* (2019). Obeah is a unique form and practice within each island country that comprises the anglophone Caribbean. It is important to remind the reader here that the anglophone Caribbean only ever exists within a global imagination, which groups countries by their colonially imposed languages. This means that I do not suggest a homogenisation or hegemony throughout the anglophone Caribbean, but, supporting the wider argument of my thesis, that a queer communality is empowered by these unique and multiform differences. This means that Obeah is a set of religious and spiritual practices which connect in their distinct individuality, amid the reality that many specifics of Obeah practices remain necessarily guarded against non-adherents.

There are three predominant theories on the inception of Obeah; each relating to different West-African tribal traditions: Igbo cosmology (*Odinala*), Ashanti, or Efik practices and terminologies.<sup>3</sup> However, each hypothesis agrees on Obeah being an amalgam created by enslaved West African persons in the British colonial Caribbean. I posit that the concept of Obeah has a queer exceptionality in the context of Caribbean religions and spiritualities, because others have a fixed origin with the exception of Myal which connected in a binary with Obeah as “bad” and Myal as its “good” counterpart. For example, Trinidadian Shango descends directly from Yoruba traditions, and unique Christian sects also have known origins including Jamaican Bedwardism and Revivalism; Trinidadian Spiritual Baptism, and St Vincentian Shakers.<sup>4</sup> Christianity is the dominant religion across the anglophone Caribbean, with census records reporting most nations being around 60-70% Christian. Hinduism and Islam also exist with popularity across the anglophone Caribbean and are most common in Trinidad and Guyana.

Rastafari has a distinctive imprint upon global imaginings of religion, spirituality, and culture from the anglophone Caribbean. However, even in its spiritual homeland of Jamaica, Rastafari numbers remain 1% of the population.<sup>5</sup> It is

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<sup>3</sup> *Odinala* includes the traditional religious practices of the Igbo tribe of southern Nigeria encompassing many differing spirits as well as a form of monotheistic God (Chineke). Efik tribal practices and the Ashanti people have similar words to Obeah for doctor figures. For further insight please see John A. Umeh's *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Healing, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria* (2000); Richard N. Henderson, 'Generalized Cultures and Evolutionary Adaptability: A Comparison of Urban Efik and Ibo in Nigeria *Ethnology*', 5:4 (1996), pp. 365-391, and Gracia Clark, 'Market queens: Innovation within Akan Tradition', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 10:1 (1997), pp. 173-201.

<sup>4</sup> For context on Shango and Obeah please see these specific sections from *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, ed. Diana Paton and Maarit Forde (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012): Maarit Forde, 'The Moral Economy of Spiritual Work: Money and Rituals in Trinidad and Tobago' pp. 198-219, and John Savage, 'Slave Poison/ Slave Medicine: The Persistence of Obeah in Ealy Nineteenth Century Martinique' pp. 149-171.

<sup>5</sup> 'International Religious Freedom Report' (2008)  
<<https://20012009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108531.htm>> [accessed 18 October 2020].

also important to note that Rastafari is not a singular entity because it exists as Mansions of Rastafari — an umbrella term encompassing numerous groups — with the largest groups being Bobo Ashanti, Niyabinghi, and The Twelve Tribes of Israel.<sup>6</sup> There is another erroneous global misconception of Caribbean religion and spirituality related to Haitian Voudou, amid the idea of Voudou as a pan-Caribbean practice.<sup>7</sup> Separating Voudou from Obeah aids in unpacking the shadow of colonialism traced within their contemporary conflation: ascribing non-Abrahamic religions as a threat to the status quo. The only similarities between Obeah and Voudou lie in their vilification by colonial powers, because both have been framed as malevolent forces. The idea of Voudou as a malevolent force has been particularly successful through popular culture — for example, zombies, voodoo dolls, and witch doctors — amid a colonially informed global denigration of Haiti, due in no small part to Haitians having undertaken the only successful enslaved rebellion against colonial oppressors.<sup>8</sup>

The specific practices of Obeah are shrouded in secrecy from non-practitioners. For context, however, Kelly Wisecup explains that

Obeah practitioners employ various ceremonies to access supernatural powers, and they acknowledged the possibility of interchanges between natural and super-natural realms. Constituted by both material and supernatural elements,

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed insight on Rastafari please see Barry Chevannes *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (1994).

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of Caribbean theology see *The Encyclopaedia of Caribbean Religions* (2013) ed. Frederick I. Case and Patrick Taylor.

<sup>8</sup> The Haitian Revolution occurred between 1791-1804 and included a series of conflicts between enslaved persons against French colonial oppression. The Haitian independence movement was led by ex-enslaved general Toussaint Louverture, and the revolution was successful in establishing the world's first black republic whilst evidencing the power of enslaved populations in rebellion against their colonial oppressors. The Haitian revolution was famously historicised by C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins* (1938).

Obeah is a set of interconnected religious and medicinal knowledge and practices, a combination of botanical knowledge, ideas about the supernatural origins of illness, and practices designed to affect the non-human forces that caused disease.<sup>9</sup>

I draw some details of Obeah paraphernalia used by characters in *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* from Lindsay Haines' 1972 New York Times article 'Obeah Is a Fact of Life, and Afterlife, in the Caribbean' — calabash gourds, animal bones, medicinal vegetation — to evidence that these are specifically literary representations of Obeah and not another religion or spirituality.<sup>10</sup> The lack of sensitivity, nuance, and care Haines took in regard to Obeah practices in her writing remain shocking; her article includes an offensive caricature of Jestina Bailey, the daughter of renowned St Vincentian Obeahman Ezra Bailey. Haines' article is offensive, outdated, and unethical, but I also suggest that it remains critically useful in evidencing the worst practices of writing about Obeah from the position of an outsider. This is something that should not be forgotten, or avoided, and my critical engagement with the ills of Haines' writing has informed my own interpretation of Obeah in creative writing as white British queer critic. I have carefully considered whether specific details of Obeah should be provided in this chapter and have made the decision to leave its practices unrepresented. This is because any knowledge of what Obeah practices contain remains a sacred knowledge which has not been ethically disclosed to outsiders. This chapter instead highlights the global importance of Obeah as a

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly Wisecup, 'On Knowing and Not knowing About Obeah', *Atlantic Studies* 12: 2 (2015), 129-143 (p. 139).

<sup>10</sup> Lindsay Haines, 'Obeah is a Fact of Life, and Afterlife, in the Caribbean', *The New York Times*, 10 September, 1972 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1972/09/10/archives/obeah-is-a-fact-of-life-and-afterlife-in-the-caribbean-obeah-a-fact.html>> [accessed 1 April 2021].

queer concept, because it has thrived by evading identity amid an understanding that categorization by identity is a colonial form of control.

Obeah's practices remain guarded by practitioners against outsiders with an appropriate level of secrecy, meaning that I will get as close to Obeah in this chapter as any white British literary critic can or, arguably, ever should. However, as a queer researcher I have lived insight on the textures, tensions, and tenets of a queerness that continually seek to disidentify, or in bell hooks' imagining

queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond any iteration of identity categories, I read the importance of Obeah as a queer concept because it has had 'to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive' as an anti-colonial protection that is a queer resistance of a global scale.<sup>12</sup> No matter how ineffable queerness is, it is all I know, and I know it well because it not only lives within me, it also is me. I propose that this aids in my engagement with Obeah as a queer concept through *Night Women* and *Sister Mine*, because I am not seeking to ascribe it an existent identity. The queer concept of Obeah is instead a communal mode for relating across difference, which moves away from a view that people share fundamental similarities based on identity. Obeah works with the slipperiness, evasion, and non-conformity necessary to defy a straight status quo which proliferates as the global condition of anti-queerness.

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<sup>11</sup> To engage with bell hooks interpretation of queerness related to this quote, please see her 2014 in-conversation: bell hooks, 'Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJk0hNROvzs>> [published 7 April 2014; accessed 1 September 2023] presented during hooks' time as scholar-in-residence at Eugene Lang College.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

## **The Strengths of Being Misunderstood**

In my readings of *Sister Mine* and *Night Women*, Obeah functions as queerness and queerness has a distinct affinity with Obeah. This connection is supported by my reframing of conventional perspectives on contemporary legal frameworks, across the anglophone Caribbean, which separately outlaw queer expressions and Obeah. Obeah has been criminalised since 1760, including laws which remain enacted across the anglophone Caribbean in Grenada (1825), Jamaica (1898), and the Leeward Islands (1904). To date, four countries have removed Obeah from their legal sanctions: Anguilla in 1980, Barbados in 1998; Trinidad and Tobago in 2000, and St Lucia in 2004.

As with my perspective on so-called “Buggery Laws” in the Caribbean, explained in my introduction, I do not mean to create a familiar critique that laws against queer expression make some global locations “worse” or “regressive”, and others “better” or “progressive”. Instead, I propose that continued outlawing of queer expressions actually aids in conceptualising the resistant mode of Obeah and queerness. The fact that laws against queer expressions, in which I include Obeah, continue to exist is arguably a transparent reflection of contemporary worldwide “norms”; this is perhaps a more honest representation of the global reality that those who defy social “norms” are policed. Thus, I suggest that the contemporary existence of laws which ban queer expressions in the anglophone Caribbean can aid in creating the criticism necessary to resist the global condition of anti-queerness. This visibility allows for critiques which can maintain that the shape of anti-queerness remains different in different locations, but its force is shared across the globe.

For example, it is difficult to argue against anti-queerness existing in countries that also propose to support queer freedom. Therefore, I suggest that it actually becomes more difficult to resist anti-queerness when national powers propose that they sanction queer freedoms, but they do not in reality exist. Unless you are willing to defend potentially eugenic and racist ideas of “progression” and “regression” related to different global locations, then anti-queer laws do not exist in a vacuum on the world stage because anti-queerness is a macrosocial reality. This perspective undermines the narrative that some nations have queer freedoms, and that others have not yet attained queer freedoms, because de-sanctioning laws against queer freedoms may only ever shift the goalposts and can also be temporary. Beyond this shift, it remains imperative for us to hold in mind a global imperative for queer freedom, amid the clarity and strength of civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hammer’s infamous declaration that ‘Nobody’s free until everybody’s free’.<sup>13</sup>

Queerness and Obeah remain known to those who embody queerness and Obeah and yet they cannot be empirically defined. In the practice of outlawing Obeah this means that laws ban ‘instruments of Obeah’, which broadly mean ‘anything used, or intended to be used by a person, and pretended by such person to be possessed of any occult or supernatural power’.<sup>14</sup> So, there is no specific list of banned items or practices of Obeah, which I see reflected in the so-called

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<sup>13</sup> Fannie Lou Hammer, ‘“Nobody’s Free Until Everybody’s Free,”: Speech Delivered at the Founding of the National Women’s Political Caucus, Washington, D.C., July 10, 1971’, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, ed. Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis W. Houck (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Scholarship Online, 2010), 134-139 (p. 134).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Obeah Histories: Researching Prosecution for Religious Practice in the Caribbean’ <<https://obeahhistories.org/1898-jamaica-law/>> [accessed 11 January 2021].

“Buggery Laws” that are often understood as homophobic, but that I interpret as anti-queer in relation to Janeille Zorina Matthews’ and Tracy Robinson’s explanation that these laws are defined by ‘breadth and vagueness’.<sup>15</sup> So-called “Buggery Laws” are thus anti-queer rather than anti-gay, because their ‘breadth and vagueness’ serves to reject any practice deemed unacceptable to the status quo.<sup>16</sup> These laws do not prohibit same-sex desire, because policing affect remains impossible, but rather, in one example, they prohibit ‘anal intercourse by a man with a man or woman, or vaginal intercourse by either a man or a woman with an animal’.<sup>17</sup> The taboo of queer expressions in the Caribbean could be argued to be sanctioned by these vague laws; yet, paradoxically, these laws make no mention of, for example, male same sex desire or transgender and non-binary being. Therefore, anti-queerness in the Caribbean remains fuelled by laws that have little actual relationship to queer expression – except perhaps within a popular global misconception: the belief that all queer persons engage in anal intercourse and that, for whatever reason, that should matter.

Joseph Gaskins Jr also notes the contemporary misuse of so-called “Buggery Laws”, which include ‘the most recent cases in which buggery and “serious indecency” laws were used to involve paedophilia, rape, and other serious charges’.<sup>18</sup> However, as Matthews and Robinson note the ‘breadth and vagueness’

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<sup>15</sup> Janeille Zorina Matthews and Tracy Robinson, ‘Modern Vagrancy in the Anglophone Caribbean’, *Caribbean Journal of Criminology*, Special Edition: Crime, Gender and Sexuality in the Anglophone Caribbean, eds. Lucy Evans and Dylan Kerrigan, 1:4 (April 2019), 123-154 (p. 125).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *The Gleaner*, ‘What Is Buggery?’ <<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20111127/out/out9.html>> [published online 27 November 2011; accessed 11 January 2021].

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Gaskins Jr., ‘Buggery’ and the Commonwealth Caribbean: a comparative examination of the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago’, *Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, eds. Corinne Lennox and Matthew Waites (London, UK: University of London Press, 2013), 429-454 (p. 435).



of laws surrounding queerness also indicate their powerful ‘elastic quality’.<sup>19</sup> For Matthews and Robinson, this ‘elastic quality’ is the ‘paradoxical timelessness’ of laws against queer expressions which they interpret as ‘the quintessence of the paratactic style’.<sup>20</sup> A paratactic style — meaning add-on or side-by-side — is of particular use for understanding how queerness thrives globally despite its societal illegitimacy and stigma. I propose that this is because the paratactic nature of queerness remains counterintuitive to an Enlightenment logic that demands a form be empirically defined, so that it can be categorised into the social order of a status quo. Thus, by remaining difficult to define, and allowing for add-ons, queerness is also difficult to understand, categorize, and then oppress. Obeah and queerness include a breadth of practices, which remain only vaguely known by outsiders, and can include a vast array of difference that disorients those who demand to know what Obeah is or what queer means. The queerness of Obeah as a concept is informed in this chapter by Rodriques’ description that ‘[R]eading Obeah is an exercise in ellipsis and innuendo’ which is understood with clarity and detail by their cognoscenti — those in the know — whilst managing to repel straightness by remaining misunderstood and therefore less capable of being controlled.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Queer Concept of Obeah**

Understanding Obeah as a queer concept is supported by Diana Paton’s description of Obeah’s ambiguous identity; Paton describes Obeah as ‘a set of practices which

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<sup>19</sup> Matthews and Robinson, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Janelle Rodriques, *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian Literature: Moving through the Margins* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2019), p. 11.

observers and participants all, more or less, know to be Obeah' leaving it 'difficult to define'.<sup>22</sup> This means that Obeah is a queer concept because it cannot be categorised, homogenised, or empirically defined. Thus, I propose that Obeah reflects Elizabeth Freeman's description of queerness as 'endlessly detoured meanings outside itself'.<sup>23</sup> Freeman's concept of queerness as detoured meanings supports the rerouting of literary twists read in my previous chapter, whilst connecting with Paton's explanation

that, precisely because of its indeterminacy and multiple meanings Obeah has been a telling category over a long period, one that has frequently marked out critical debates about the status of the Caribbean and its people; about power, race, nation and Citizenship.<sup>24</sup>

I agree with Paton regarding Obeah that the description 'more or less matters, because a lot remains unknown', whilst extending this into the importance of understanding Obeah as a queer concept.<sup>25</sup> This means that I diverge from Paton's view that the unknowns of Obeah are a generalized socio-historical political challenge, because I perceive a critical opportunity within Obeah being 'more or less' queer.<sup>26</sup> I read the more or less queer foundation of Obeah as a resistance to straightness because this forms the structuring device of colonial oppression. This is an important distinction because anticolonial or decolonial theories and practices often remain separated from queer resistance. So, there is much anti-colonial resistance which remains straight, because it continues to support the global

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<sup>22</sup> Paton, p. 8 and p.6.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Paton, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Paton, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Paton, p. 8.

condition of anti-queerness, and, arguably, this limits its global aims and scope. Thus, I posit that Obeah has a queer Caribbean centre which can be understood as a global resistance against straightness. Obeah remains in the liminal space of identity, where more or less matters, because it means that Obeah is one of Gayatri Gopinath's 'symbolic spaces of collectivity in inhospitable and hostile landscapes', where queerness is engaged with not only gender, and sexuality but also race and colonialism.<sup>27</sup> The continued survival of Obeah is furthered by its ability to thrive, that reflects queerness, and which make Obeah a symbol of 'collectivity in inhospitable and hostile' status quo: a successful resistance to the coloniality of straightness.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Obeah can be understood as a symbolic concept for queer resistance – a collectivity whose unique form remains more or less unencumbered by existent versions of categorized identity.

Obeah as more or less a queer concept can be understood as a remedy to Hiram Pérez's demand for a fresh queer approach that centres race and colonialism, by creating 'new, alternative narratives for identity'.<sup>29</sup> This chapter reads alternative narratives for identity within literary representations of Obeah, because Obeah is a synecdoche for a queer Caribbeanness that creates a global queer resistance. This queer conception of Obeah thrives as a colonial dissident which is not fixed by a meaning in a reflection of Judith Butler's explanation to Sara Ahmed that perhaps the expression "I am queer" is supposed to be the public

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<sup>27</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diaspora and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 192.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Hiram Pérez, *A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2015), p. 149.

display of the paradox for others to think'.<sup>30</sup> What queerness is, and what Obeah is, therefore remains something 'for others to think' and these 'others' can be understood as a straight status quo which is unable to accept a 'public display of the paradox' of identity.<sup>31</sup> This paradox further connects the terms Obeah and queer in their grammatical disruptiveness when used in standard English. As terms, both Obeah and queer more or less fit standard English but they remain unfixed; they are each polysemous and so contain the ability to be used as a subject or an object — to be queer as well as to be a queer object; to be Obeah as well as to be an Obeah object. This reality supports my proposition of Obeah as a queer concept because it makes a 'public display of the paradox' of identity which includes defying the straightness of English discourse as a method for defying legacies of colonialism.<sup>32</sup>

### **Interlocking Circles: Obeah-In-Action**

The queer conceptual slipperiness of Obeah has been framed so far as rendering colonial attempts to understand it, totalise it, or fix it, futile. Historical context supports this framing as Wisecup describes how, for colonial-era archivists and writers, Obeah 'knowledge ultimately eluded observations and required' them 'to acknowledge, albeit in incomplete or partial ways, its [Obeah's] supernatural causes and its invisible power over bodies and minds'.<sup>33</sup> Wisecup suggests that colonial writings which attempted to represent Obeah were also impacted by Obeah as it

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<sup>30</sup> Sara Ahmed, 'Interview with Judith Butler', *Sexualities*, 19:4 (2016), 482-492 (p. 489).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Wisecup, p. 142.

protected itself from definition. I propose this protection as a form of Obeah-in-action when it is represented in writing. Wisecup cites William Earl Jnr's novella *Obi or, The History of Three-Fingered Jack* (1800) as a notable example of Obeah-in-action, with *Obi* being a colonial misnomer for Obeah and with *Three-Fingered Jack* being the nickname of the Jamaican Maroon leader Jack Mansong.

The figure of Three Fingered-Jack had been the subject of colonial satire, including racist melodrama and bigoted pantomime by William Murray and John Fawcett. Earl Jnr's own white colonial fictional writing can also be critiqued as appropriation and an abuse of power, although *Obi* has also been interpreted as a revenge tragedy of abolitionist writing. However, despite this, as Wisecup explains, 'the charm-like qualities of words in the novel [*Obi*] escape empirical observation and natural causes'.<sup>34</sup> This means that Obeah evaded Earl Jnr.'s white colonial writing, with the result that Obeah became more difficult to discredit as unreal. Wisecup makes note of Earl Jnr.'s

representations of Obeah as producing unnatural forms of knowledge and being. These textual slippages attest to the presence of competing epistemologies and the connections between natural and supernatural realms.<sup>35</sup>

These 'textual slippages' are an Obeah-in-action which prevents colonists from being able to depict Obeah as a powerless fantasy. This means that Obeah cannot be successfully captured by those who may do it harm, and I propose that this is similar to a queer Caribbean reality of legal sanctions. Whilst legal sanctions against queerness exist in the anglophone Caribbean, and whilst they are supported,

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<sup>34</sup> Wisecup, p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> Wisecup, p. 141.

policed, and restricted by the global condition of anti-queerness, then queerness cannot be understood as anything but a powerful threat to straight dominance.

This chapter interprets the evidence for this powerful threat against straight order as the literary queerness of interlocking circles created by *Sister Mine* and *Night Women*. These queer literary circles interlock, by remaining concentric and yet connected in a spiral pattern. This chapter will suggest that *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* create these queer patterns as Obeah-in-action. This Obeah-in-action makes the writing of *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* into apotropaic markings which are otherwise known as protective inscriptive magics or protection spells. These protection spells are empowered by queer patterns, where literary spirals create a queer resistance interlocking *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* as Obeah-in-action.

### **Defying Order: Conjoined Twincest**

Nalo Hopkinson's speculative fiction retains an African Caribbean focus throughout her oeuvre, as, to date, each of her six novels, three short story collections, and three edited anthologies include African Caribbean religions and folklore. *Sister Mine* is set in and around Toronto, Canada, and its narrative centres around a family of African Caribbean demi-gods called Celestials whose supernatural powers, or mojo, govern humans, known as claypicken, whilst they are overseen by an omniscient being named Big Boss.<sup>36</sup> The three-hundred-and-five pages of *Sister Mine* are broken into only seven chapters. The protagonist and narrator Makeda lives with her twin sister Abby, and Makeda's third person narration is often

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<sup>36</sup> The term claypicken is used by the celestials in reference to the human race having been created out of clay by Big Boss.

disrupted by analepses from her life with Abby. The twins were born conjoined as the result of a forbidden union between their Celestial father, Boysie, and their claypicken mother, Cora. Makeda attempts to free Boysie's essence — his soul or spirit — which has become trapped within a magical giant plant called Quashee who is named after a real-life Maroon rebellion leader. *Sister Mine* climaxes with Makeda creating a mojo-infused flying carpet which helps her to reach Boysie and exorcise his essence from Quashee.

The mojo of *Sister Mine* is, characteristically, more or less Obeah because although the term is not used in the text, Obeah exists throughout *Sister Mine*. For example, Obeah paraphernalia is known to include calabash gourds and animal bones and we see Makeda picking the 'bleached bone from a black cat out from among the calabash pieces' (*Sister Mine* 41). The Celestials' powers reflect those of Obeah spirits who each directly influence forces of nature. In *Sister Mine*, the Celestials have power over 'a range of tensions between a particular set of dualities' (*Sister Mine*, 204). These dualities include life and death as overseen by Uncle John; wilderness and civilisation as overseen by Boysie, and thunder and lightning as overseen by Aunt Cath and Uncle Flash. Big Boss also created the multipotent Celestial family from aspects of himself, in a cosmology similar to West African Igbo traditions that inform Obeah, where

there is only one God- Chukwu Okike or Chineke, who is high and is expected to be reached through intermediaries. These intermediaries are called divinities and share aspects of the divine status.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, 'Igbo African Gods and Goddesses', *Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy*, 2:2 (2018), 120-146 (p. 120).

The conceptual slipperiness with which Obeah is represented in *Sister Mine* resists its capture and definition, which I suggest characterises its queerness in a rejection of colonial demands for empiricism and categorisation.

In its rejection of colonial demands for empiricism and categorisation, Obeah arguably reflects Jack Halberstam's conception of queerness as wildness, which is an 'absence of order' including 'the entropic force of a chaos that constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desire'.<sup>38</sup> Understanding the queer wildness of Obeah rejects a colonial history which has negated wildness as inhuman or as savagery. I propose that this involvement between queerness, wildness, and Obeah can be interpreted through the representation of conjoined twincest in *Sister Mine*, with twincest being a neologism for biological twins who engage in sexual relations. I propose that this conjoined twincest brings together two halves of the same circle, where an incestuous conjoining reconnects separate bodies that used to exist as one being. This conjoined twincest is read as representational of the complex relationship between queerness, wildness, and Obeah which 'constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desire', as a tactic of global queer resistance which remains distinct and individual but also queerly communal in the form of conjoined twincest.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout *Sister Mine*, detailed description is provided of supernatural beings engaging in queer sex with each other in, for example, Abby and Makeda who, we're told,

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<sup>38</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



were each other's eager study partners in things sexual. Abby liked to roughhouse, and the nip of teeth on the sensitive bits of her, except her toes. I liked to have things inside of me. Anything that looked likely was fair game (*Sister Mine* 127).

I suggest that the mojo of Abby and Makeda makes them queer embodiments of Obeah spirits, whilst each Celestial simultaneously expresses Obeah alongside queer gender and sexuality. The celestials are mojo-filled beings who are pansexual, gender fluid, incestuous, and exhibit differences from an able-bodied and neurotypical straight status quo. I posit that these representations are evidence for the intersections of queerness, Obeah, and Halberstam's wildness which means that that they exist 'not as the beginning of a new phase of human endeavour, but as the beginning of the end of a colonial version of the human'.<sup>40</sup> For example, in *Sister Mine* the supernatural birth separation of Makeda and Abby is performed by their Uncle John, who is also known as Death, which I propose creates an allegory for conceptualising the 'beginning of the end of a colonial version of the human'.<sup>41</sup> The queer being, queer sex, and queer separation of Makeda and Abby represents the queer concept of Obeah as not 'the beginning of a new phase of understanding', but rather 'the beginning of the end of' the limitations which have defined a 'colonial version of the human'.<sup>42</sup>

Separating Makeda and Abby severed Makeda's mojo organ, which is a muscular organ 'like a heart' both 'adamantine' as well as 'solid and lacy' (*Sister Mine* 171). Makeda's mojo thus escaped and became a haint which is representative of an Obeah duppy, because Makeda's haint is also a shape-shifting

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<sup>40</sup> Halberstam, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

spirit who appears in many guises including ‘wearing the form of a child just old enough to walk’ and a ‘melanistic garter snake’ (*Sister Mine* 57; 63). As Rodriques explains ‘Obeah practitioners are also skilled in the “catching” of duppies, or unrested souls, which may be used for nefarious purposes’.<sup>43</sup> Makeda’s haint returns throughout the narrative of *Sister Mine* and seems to be attempting to murder her. However, the haint is actually attempting to re-merge with Makeda, and I read this as the queer concept of Obeah seeking to fulfil her potential to exist beyond any conceived ‘colonial version of the human’.<sup>44</sup> Makeda’s loss of mojo is representative of how a ‘colonial version of the human’ occludes the necessary ‘absence of order’ that is involved with being human.<sup>45</sup> By this I mean that Makeda does not conform to the categories defined for her of being human, or of being Celestial, as she defies “norms”. Makeda’s inability to conform to “norms” mean that she is unique in her personhood and remains autonomous against any conception of a “normal” or ‘colonial version of the human’, because these are only ever the prescription of a set of unnatural social constructs.<sup>46</sup>

Halberstam’s wildness includes the ‘the disorder of things’ which can be ‘read through the marks of their violent submission to order’.<sup>47</sup> The queerness of Obeah related to Makeda and Abby reflects this ‘violent submission to order’ through their unusual, or queer, birth. The reality of unusual or queer births include Makeda and Abby as conjoined twins which reflect many other forms of queer being, including intersex persons, or those with supposed anomalies including facial

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<sup>43</sup> Rodriques, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Halberstam, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Halberstam, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Halberstam, p. 24.

clefts, acrosyndactyly, or maxillofacial dysplasia. These supposed anomalies are, more often than not, provided with an immediate medical intervention which acts as a 'violent submission to order' to a 'colonial version of the human'.<sup>48</sup> There are often little to no health benefits from medical interventions in queer being, which leave 'marks' to make certain bodies conform to a fixed conception of straight somatic "norms".<sup>49</sup> I posit that this medical ordering is a physical reflection of the psychological demands of straight dominance, against queer persons, to submit to a conformity where 'marks' are the mental trauma left upon the psyche. The societal need for this 'violent submission to order' arguably exposes the natural disorderliness of human beings, because the necessity for medical intervention to create a body as a social "norm" is a fallacy that supports the false idea of a singular normal body, mind, or desire. The fact that scars are left from this ordering reveals the unnaturalness of straight order. Abby and Makeda were separated, but their loss also 'marks' them as queer, and the physical separation which sought to order their natural queer form also does not prevent them from remaining conjoined.

The separation of Makeda and Abby can be read through Heather Love's interpretation of queer connectivity, which includes 'identifying through loss' and 'allowing ourselves to be haunted'.<sup>50</sup> Makeda and Abby embody this queer relationality in remaining haunted by the loss of each other: the wholeness of their queer being which was sacrificed by their separation to straight order. Thus, Makeda and Abby exist as an embodiment of a distinctly queer perspective on

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<sup>48</sup> Halberstam, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Halberstam, p. 24 and p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 43.

history, because, according to Love ‘queer history is, in a sense, nothing but wounded attachments’.<sup>51</sup> Love’s argument plays with the term ‘wounded attachments’ to denote the pathos of queer history as being hidden amid the human cost of persecution.<sup>52</sup> Much like colonial histories, conventional, or received historical knowledge leaves an open wound, a black hole, of queers. These wounds can create ‘an education in absence’ through ‘the experience of refusal and the denigration of homosexual love’.<sup>53</sup> Thus, in being forced to become separate persons, Makeda and Abby choose to hold on to their wounded attachments as they become queerly conjoined through their sexual unions.

The themes of sexuality and connection in *Sister Mine* echo Kate Houlden’s interpretation of Hopkinson’s novel *Salt Roads* (2003), which she reads through Audre Lorde’s conception of Black female same-sex desire as a kinship of sexuality. Makeda and Abby enact a queer form of Houlden’s explanation that ‘Hopkinson shows the love and support black women offer each other being a source of sustenance, as well as conduit to sexual pleasure’.<sup>54</sup> This means that the queer sex of Makeda and Abby enacts Lorde’s expressions from her essay ‘Eye to Eye’ (1983) that she and other Black women ‘healed each other’s wounds, fought each other’s battles, and eased each other’s passages into life and into death’.<sup>55</sup> The distinctly singular and powerful critical voice of Audre Lorde has also formed a global queer communality, which becomes of direct interest in my next chapter in the context of

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<sup>51</sup> Love, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Love, p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Kate Houlden, ‘Writing the impossible: Racial, Sexual and Stylistic Expansivity in Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads* (2003)’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51:4 (2015), 462-475 (p. 467).

<sup>55</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, eds. Audre Lorde and Cheryl Clarke (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), p. 153.

Lorde's Grenadian heritage related to her conception of biomythography. Makeda and Abby conjoin through queer sex and in doing so, queerness and Obeah entwine beyond a 'colonial version of the human' through a conjoined twincest which can help them to heal 'each other's wounds'.<sup>56</sup>

This conjoined twincest is also a queer sexual union that complicates the separation of human beings, because when Makeda and Abby have sex it can be read as onanism. This is because Makeda and Abby initially existed as a single being, and Makeda explains through analepsis that when '*[M]y fingertips brushed against her naked thigh*' she sees that '*[T]he texture of her skin was as comfortingly familiar as my own*' and Abby exclaims that "*We are like us*" she said delightedly, like it was a new discovery (*Sister Mine* 125). This conjoined twincest reconnects Makeda and Abby, and I suggest that their entwined and entwined coital bodies represent the transgressive potential in the queer concept of Obeah, as a symbol for the global re-connection of queers that is necessary to defy straight dominance. This global resistance lies in the knowledge that there is a need to complicate and deconstruct any and all normative scripts of gender, sex, race, humanness, and personhood, because all normative scripts of identity remain part of a straightening device supporting the global condition of anti-queerness. Makeda and Abby complicate any idea of global gender and sexual "norms" by engaging in conjoined twincest whilst also having sexual relationships with their twin cousins, Beji and Beji. Beji and Beji share a name despite the fact 'one was a he-Beji and one was a she-Beji' (*Sister Mine* 170), however, their genders are also mutable because

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<sup>56</sup> Halberstam, p. 7, and Lorde, p. 153.

when they [Beji and Beji] and Abs and I [Makeda] had a regular booty-call thing going for a few months that time, they'd showed us that they switched that up whenever they got bored with it (*Sister Mine* 170).

I propose that the gender and sexual complexity represented in *Sister Mine* is a global form of queer resistance because it defies any macrosocial "norms" of gender and sexuality, and that this is part of the Obeah power of Makeda and Abby which I suggest interrelates with the cyclical reoccurrence in *Sister Mine* of sections from Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' (1862). These sections encircle the narrative body of *Sister Mine*, by occurring both peripherally as epigraphs and centrally as embedded text. I propose that this literary circling entwines with Makeda and Abby as a transgressive and boundless queerness that interlinks the form and content of *Sister Mine*.

The poem 'Goblin Market' remains queerly violent and sexualised in tone despite its styling as a children's fairy-tale. I posit that 'Goblin Market' is a children's fairy-tale that is perhaps not meant for children, or at least for the children of a straight status quo.<sup>57</sup> Reflecting akeda and Abby, 'Goblin Market' blurs a boundary between sapphic and incestuous desire whilst telling the story of twin sisters — Laura and Lizzie — who are tempted by Goblin merchants with fruit. Laura reluctantly provides her blonde hair in exchange for the goblin's fruit, but soon becomes ill with desire for more. So, Lizzie goes on a mission to seek the goblins, but when Lizzie refuses to provide her own hair to the Goblins she exchanges their

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<sup>57</sup> Reading 'Goblin Market' as a poem which subverts the children's fairy tale already has a lengthy critical history. Examples of these readings include Marylu Hill, "Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': Eucharist and the Erotic Body in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", *Victorian Poetry*, 43:4 (2005), pp. 455-472, and Victor Roman Mendoza, "Come Buy': The Crossing of Sexual and Consumer Desire in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", *ELH*, 2006 73:4 (2006), pp. 913-947.

fruit for an interaction with her that is intimated to be violent and sexual.

Subsequently, Lizzie returns to Laura's forest bed with the fruit and

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,  
"Did you miss me?  
Come and kiss me.  
Never mind the bruises,  
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,  
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.  
Eat me, drink me, love me;  
Laura, make much of me:  
For your sake I have braved the glen  
And had to do with goblin merchant  
men.<sup>58</sup>

I suggest that the queerness of this familial interaction between Laura and Lizzie is reflected in Makeda's prize possession, which is a box full of pictures of

Radica and Doodica, India, nineteenth century. Rosa and Josepha Blažek, Bohemia, twentieth century. No wait; they were the nineteenth century. Daisy and Violet Hilton, UK, early twentieth century. Giacomo and Giovanni Batista Tocci, Italy, nineteenth century. Ritta and Christina Parodi, nineteenth century, Sardinia. Eliza and Mary Chalkhurst, the Biddenden Maids, England, twelfth century. Blanch Dumas, nineteenth century, Martinique (*Sister Mine* 149).

This connects with Makeda's earlier pondering on the potential incest between the conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker who were 'born in Siam, which became Thailand' and are 'where the term "Siamese twin" came from to denote people like

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<sup>58</sup> Christina Rossetti, 'Goblin Market' (1862), <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44996/goblin-market>> [accessed 11 January 2021].

me and Abby' (*Sister Mine* 121). Makeda questions 'Eng's and Chang's involuntary threesomes – and maybe foursomes sometimes?' where she queerly imagines that 'before they'd been married, hell, even afterwards, had they ever touched each other?' (*Sister Mine* 125). I posit that the conjoined twincest of *Sister Mine* exists as a motif for the queer concept of Obeah as a transgression of the coloniality of straightness, which includes the inseparability of racism and heterosexism. This is achieved as Hopkinson creates a fresh narrative surrounding sexual autonomy and queer Being in *Sister Mine*, where the incorporation of 'Goblin Market' amongst representations of conjoined twins throughout history is way to understand Obeah as entwined and entwinned with queerness. This is because Makeda and Abby both embody Obeah whilst engaging in a conjoined twincest where they more or less exist as one another. Conjoined twins, either remaining as one or being separated embody a quandary for categorisations of humans related to gender, sex, and personhood. How, or where, does a one queer form, or one queer person, end and another begin? Especially, if these queer bodies come together through sexual and literary intercourse to become more or less each other. Extending beyond the limits of existent categories of identity and humanness, Makeda more or less is Abby, Abby is more or less Makeda, their Obeah is more or less queerness meaning that queerness is more or less Obeah.

### **Apotropaic Protection**

Queerness and Obeah are represented with striking regularity in each chapter from Marlon James' second novel, *The Book of Night Women*, which I suggest make it an ideal literary space for conceiving the queer concept of Obeah. *Night Women* is set



in eighteenth century Jamaica, at the fictional sugar plantation Montpelier, amongst the brutal realities of the chattel enslavement of African people by British colonisation. The matrifocal enslaved house maids Homer, Callisto, Pallas, Iphegenia, Gorgon, Hippolyta, and Lilith resist this British colonial regime by using Obeah as a circle of supernatural Night Women. Homer is both the matriarch of the Night Women and the head of Montpelier's enslaved household. Lilith, the newest member of the Night Women, is the novel's protagonist, who was born as the result of the rape of her thirteen-year-old enslaved mother by Montpelier's Irish ex-overseer, Jack Wilkins. Jack Wilkins is the biological father of each Night Woman apart from Homer; Callisto, Pallas, Iphegenia, Gorgon, Hippolyta, and Lilith each share a resemblance with either red hair or green eyes, and Lilith has 'skin dark as midnight' and the 'greenest eyes anyone done see' (*Night Women* 1). *Night Women* is written in the third person from the perspective of a seemingly anonymous and omniscient narrator, who is revealed at the novel's denouement to be Lovey Quinn: Lilith's daughter with Montpelier's current Irish overseer, Robert Quinn. The Night Women can be read as queer beings who embody Obeah through their supernatural powers. These powers are used to lead a revenge-filled enslaved uprising at Montpellier at the climax of *Night Women*, which results in the death of each Night Woman except for Homer, who disappears, and Lilith, who becomes enslaved to Robert Quinn.

I propose that Obeah-in-action acts in *Night Women* as a form of apotropaic protection which is reflected in *Sister Mine*. The word apotropaic stems from the Ancient Greek word apotropaios [αποτρέπειν] which means to avert evil and is rooted in apotrepein [αποτρέπειν] meaning to turn away. This links directly to Sara

Ahmed's description of the 'etymology of the word "queer", which comes from the Indo-European word "twist" that suggests a veering away'.<sup>59</sup> I propose that the apotropaic protection of Obeah in *Night Women* means that it turns away from those powers who would seek to capture it, to use it, or to destroy it. In the case of *Night Women* and *Sister Mine*, it is my contention that the queer concept of Obeah protects itself from the straightness of colonial interpretation with its threat of categorisation, assimilation, and destruction.

An understanding of *Night Women* as an apotropaic protection is particularly interesting through Kathleen Marks' description that

apotropaic, then, are those gestures aimed at warding off, or resisting, a danger, a threat, or an imperative. More exactly, apotropaic gestures anticipate, mirror, and put into effect that which they seek to avoid: one does what one finds horrible so as to mitigate its horror.<sup>60</sup>

Marks interprets apotropaic writing through Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), which is an icon of the neo-slave narrative genre and a monument to the strength of enslaved persons in the Antebellum South. I do not suggest that *Night Women* is a Caribbean literary variation of *Beloved*. However, I do propose that both *Beloved* and *Night Women* correlate distinctly with Christina Sharpe's reading of emancipation as part performance and part avoidance, and of continued oppressions which are not directly faced by those who are freed. Sharpe explores narratives of enslavement as only ever shifting black persons from one form of

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<sup>59</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Marks, *Toni Morrison's Beloved and the Apotropaic Imagination* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002) p. 2.

subjugation to another, and that we should see the emancipation of people from enslavement as only a performative action. This performative action is a perpetual cycle, which Sharpe explains as a 'performance of freedom' that

is meant to position contemporary readers and actors to feel anew the ways multiple intimacies (domestic, political, academic, social, familial, etc.) and the desire to be free require one to be witness to, participate in, and be silent about scenes of subjection that we write as freedom.<sup>61</sup>

James forces the reader 'to be witness to' and 'participate in' the experiences of enslaved African people in British colonial Jamaica, and the connections it has to contemporary global power structures that continue on the back of colonial atrocities.

Witnessing the realities of colonial atrocities in creative writing reveals that the contemporary freedom which we perceive to live within is arguably only a self-soothing fantasy, because this is in fact only the new 'scenes of subjection that we write as freedom'.<sup>62</sup> This understanding can also help to reframe the explicit violence against women represented in *Night Women* as subversive critique, because James confronts a contemporary readership with their own history related to enslavement, because enslavement in the Caribbean has had an impact on each global citizen as regards the onset of capitalism, global modernity, and globalization. Agreeing with Jhordan Layne's description that 'the narrator of *Night Women* embodies resistance to spiritual subjugation on the plantation', I suggest that 'among other forms of resistant slave discourses' lies Obeah as a queer

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<sup>61</sup> Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

resistance against British colonialism.<sup>63</sup> Instead of a resistance which has gained freedom, Obeah and queerness connect as a cycle of continuous resistance to the present that rejects a false sense of contemporary freedom and security. Instead of a narrative of emancipation which includes depictions of Obeah, *Night Women* reflects *Beloved* by remaining one of only a scarce number of neo-slave narratives which do not depict the redemption of enslaved persons into emancipation. *Beloved* and *Night Women* protect the legacy of enslaved persons by refusing the performance of a climactic redemption, and they each deny representing the contemporary world as anything other than Sharpe's 'subjection that we write as freedom'.<sup>64</sup> This similarity imbues *Night Women* and *Beloved* with an intertextual resonance, with the potential for each of their writings to be viewed as protective apotropaic against the fantasy of contemporary freedom, because this view ignores global straight dominance as a continuation of colonial dominance.

I suggest that *Night Women* queers the force of the novel form by making it into an apotropaic protection, which is informed by Giorgio Agamben's concept of magic as secret names and special Being from

Ancient tradition scrupulously followed by kabbalists and necromancers, according to which magic is essentially a science of secret names. Each thing, each being, has in addition to its manifest name another, hidden name to which it cannot fail to respond. To be a magus means to know and evoke these archi-names. Hence the interminable discussions

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<sup>63</sup> Jhordan Layne, 'Re-evaluating Religion and Superstition: Obeah and Christianity in Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* and William Earle Jr.'s *Obi, or The History of Three-Fingered Jack*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 26:2 (November 2018) Special Issue: On Marlon James, eds. Michael A. Bucknor and Kezia Page, 50-65 (p. 56).

<sup>64</sup> Sharpe, p. 23.

of names (diabolical or angelic) through which the necromancer ensures his mastery over spiritual powers.<sup>65</sup>

I suggest that through *Night Women* James becomes a literary necromancer of the imagined dead persons from a fictional colonial plantation, to critique the present and foretell the future. This is informed by James' use of narrative circles coupled with his Obeah circle of *Night Women*, which create a global form of literary resistance that transcends the page by existing as Obeah-in-action. Rather than suggesting a climactic freedom, in *Night Women* James signals that a resistant future can exist, but that this must be continuously fought for. This means that, in Homer's understanding, 'we not getting free, we taking free' (*Night Women* 70). By declaring that 'we not getting free, we taking free' (*Night Women* 70), Homer embodies the queer concept of Obeah which echo Malcolm X's infamous declaration that resistance for freedom must be created 'by any means necessary'.<sup>66</sup> This was itself an allusion to Frantz Fanon's declaration '*par tous les moyens nécessaires*' during his address to the Accra Positive Action Conference in 1960.<sup>67</sup> This sentiment also channels Angela Davis' belief, detailed in her 1971 prison interview, that true revolution against a violently racist status quo involves a 'revolutionary thrust' which 'lies in the principles and the goals that you're striving

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<sup>65</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2015), p. 22.

<sup>66</sup> I refer to Malcolm X's speech from the founding rally of the organization of Afro-American Unity (1964), for a full transcription please see <<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity/>> [accessed 18 February 2021]. Frantz Fanon's quote comes from the wider description that: 'Violence in everyday behaviour, violence against the past that is emptied of all substance, violence against the future, for the colonial regime presents itself as necessarily eternal. We see, therefore, that the colonised people, caught in a web of a three-dimensional violence, a meeting point of multiple, diverse, repeated, cumulative violences, are soon logically confronted by the problem of ending the colonial regime by any means necessary', Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 654.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

for, not in the way you reach them'.<sup>68</sup> Each statement reverberates through Homer as an Obeah woman who declares that colonial disenfranchisement must be fought for queerly — by any means necessary. Homer's 'we not getting free, we taking free' (*Night Women* 70) acts as 'a science of secret names' because it interlinks her own resistance through a global history of resistance via Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, and Angela Davis. This foundation frames combatting the violence of British colonialism as acts of continual queer defiance within the subtext of *Night Women*.<sup>69</sup>

The ability for Obeah to be a queer defiance, through *Night Women* as an apotropaic protection, is also informed by my perspective on the analepsis by Lovey Quinn which occurs at the denouement of *Night Women*. Lovey describes how Lilith 'teach me how to write' which is 'the most forbidden thing and it still be so' (*Night Women* 416), and Lovey Quinn learning this 'most forbidden thing' (*Night Women* 416) gives her the ability to be the narrator of Lilith's life in *Night Women*. The ability to write Lilith's story is Obeah-in-action as it resists the subversion of enslaved realities by British colonists, by using its own inscriptive tool of the English language against itself. The circle of queer women which Lovey represents as the narrator of *Night Women* makes her writing an Obeah protection against colonial oppressions, which remains why writing is 'the most forbidden thing and it still be so' (*Night Women* 416). The resistance to silencing enacted by Lovey is reflected in the ways that *Night Women* refuses to relegate the narrative of the enslavement of

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<sup>68</sup> This quote is from a 1971 prison interview with Angela Davis by Bo Holmström, of which no publicly accessible video link is available. This quote is transcribed and critiqued by Lisa Beard in 'From Dynamite Hill to The Black Power Mixtape: Angela Davis on the Violence/Nonviolence Binary and the Mediation of Black Political Thought', *Political Theory*, 51:4 (August 2023), 645-673 (p.647).

<sup>69</sup> Agamben, p. 22.

African people in the Caribbean to the past, and to have it dictated by colonial history. Thus, *Night Women* refuses to accept contemporary freedom as anything but a new form of oppression, by writing a fictional narrative inspired by true events which highlights that historical “fact” is only ever a fictional narrative inspired by true events. Writing *Night Women* from the perspective of Lovey Quinn is the ‘most forbidden thing’ (*Night Women* 416), because it relates the atrocities of enslavement in visceral detail, and gives voice to the voiceless of enslaved persons that acts as a protection against the wilful ignorance of colonial oppression and the avoidance of its continued power.

There is a continuous sexual tension related between the *Night Women* meaning that, in a reflection of Makeda and Abby, I propose that they embody queer sexual and gender expression entwined with their Obeah power. Same-sex desire remains a constant threat for Lilith who repeatedly exclaims variations on the sentiment that Homer, and the rest of the *Night Women*, can ‘keep you woman secret and you woman loving to yourself’ (*Night Women* 74). Here, Obeah is twinned with their ‘woman secret’ and connects this ‘woman loving’ (*Night Women* 74) directly to Obeah, by marking it as a queer concept. Lilith also queers the perception of her own gender which sees her express her own queer autonomy, for, when Homer questions if Lilith ‘think you is woman?’, Lilith replies simply that ‘Me think me is Lilith’ (*Night Women* 341). The clarity and simplicity of this statement highlights the complexity of gender related to autonomy and personhood, whilst also decisively cutting through it in a reflecting of the exploration in my previous chapter surrounding Dionne Brand’s use of the

rhetorical device Occam's Razor, and the sense of Sydney represented in his differing embodiments in *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab*.

Regarding queerness, gender, personhood, and autonomy, Judith Butler expresses that 'autonomy remains a paradox' because 'present and entrenched social conditions in which gender norms are still articulated' predetermine any 'departures from the norm as suspect'.<sup>70</sup> For Butler, this means that 'individual choice will prove to be dependent from the start on conditions that none of us author at will', which means that 'no individual will be able to choose outside the context of a radically altered social world'.<sup>71</sup> Although this reading may seem fatalistic — that no-one can or will have autonomy, over gender or otherwise, under the current world order — it does not mean that exercising the extent of your autonomous will is not still possible and is not still important. Butler views autonomy as a paradox, and in absolute or teleological terms it may be. However, I sustain in this thesis that autonomy is part of a utopian vision whose horizon is fuelled by this paradox. In my readings, autonomy over gender, and all aspects of queer personhood, is something which exists within the striving for; not something that becomes a final achievement, and, like the horizon, something that always recedes out of reach. Here 'Me think me is Lilith' (*Night Women* 341) is not a destination but a continual process of becoming as being. This means autonomy, as expressed often throughout Jose Esteban Muñoz's ontology, is the ultimate queer horizon: the ultimate seeking, the ultimate striving towards, and the ultimate exploring which is no less important and powerful for not being attained.

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<sup>70</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), p. 100.

<sup>71</sup> Butler, p. 101.



Queerness amid gender and autonomy therefore also thrives following Butlerian terms, where autonomy remains a paradox ultimately unreachable, because, in my view, queer living exists in striving towards the unreachable.

By rejecting a definition or categorisation of identity outside of herself, as a woman, because 'Me think me is Lilith' (*Night Women* 341), I posit that Lilith represents Paul B. Preciado's concept of countersexuality through which 'bodies recognise themselves as not men or women but as living bodies'.<sup>72</sup> Lilith expresses a counterintuitive identity that is not based on her sex or gender because she is not a woman, she 'is Lilith' (*Night Women* 341), which expresses Preciado's ideas for a 'theory of the body situated outside the polarities man/woman, masculine/feminine, heterosexuality/homosexuality, trans/cis'.<sup>73</sup> Transcending these polarities is, I suggest, key to providing queerness with a global scope, because queerness is fundamentally resistant to any grouping based on identity. However, the symptoms of oppression remain different for different persons which means that queers must continuously circle around them, in order to live counterintuitively to the logics of a straight status quo which I interpret as a continued colonial power structure.

The need to transcend polarities relates directly to Obeah in *Night Women*, as Homer continues to profess that her own power is Myal as opposed to Obeah.

Rodriques explains that

Closely related to Obeah is Myal, which is a specifically Jamaican term for supposedly 'good' or 'counter' Obeah.

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<sup>72</sup> Paul B. Preciado, *Counter-Sexual Manifesto*, trans. Kevin Gerry Dunn (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Preciado, p. 21.

Scholars continue to argue over the validity of this distinction, but I maintain that Obeah and Myal are not antagonistic religious traditions; instead, not only do they significantly overlap, they share roots.<sup>74</sup>

Rodrigues' interpretation maps onto *Night Women* as James represents how Obeah and Myal always exist in continuum by encircling each other. There is a binary opposition which exists in cultural understandings of Obeah as a singularly "bad" or "black" magic and Myal as its "good" or "white" counterpart. When challenged on this fact by Lilith, Homer explains directly, 'me don't work no Obeah' (*Night Women* 319). But there is much evidence to the contrary, for example, when 'one day a young one not much older than Paris grab Homer by the hair, she point two finger at him eye and by nightfall he got the consumption' (*Night Women* 43). Homer has also been slowly poisoning Montpelier's plantation mistress in revenge for the sale of Homer's children to another plantation. Homer also reveals that she used her powers to murder Circe, Lilith's foster mother, and an unruly enslaved house worker, Andromeda, in her plan to catalyse the climatic Montpelier rebellion of *Night Women*, which was conceived 'since 1796, five years after Saint-Domingue free itself' (*Night Women* 293). The reference to 'after Saint-Domingue free itself' (*Night Women* 293) also invokes the queer power necessary for 'taking free' (*Night Women* 70) as an allusion to the successful Haitian Revolution previously known as Saint-Domingue.

I read James' complex, and often morally ambiguous, representation of Obeah in *Night Women* as purposefully placing its violence against the inhumanity

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<sup>74</sup> Rodrigues, p. 8.

of British colonialism in Jamaica. Obeah's representation against British colonial brutality subsequently rejects any conceptual binary between Obeah and Myal as "bad" and "good". Homer's refusal to define her power as anything but Myal means that the Obeah of *Night Women* is more or less its own slippery identity; by keeping Obeah ambiguous, the reader is given the opportunity to understand Myal and Obeah as conjoined forces. *Night Women* complicates the separations and connotations between whiteness and blackness – Myal and Obeah – via an earlier narratorial explanation by Lilith's daughter, Lovey Quinn, that Obeah is the 'blackest magic', and that 'if Obeah be the black, Myal be the white' but 'the two still black' (*Night Women* 50). The description 'if Obeah be the black' does not directly define Obeah as black and Myal as white, which serves to undo an oppositional binary between Myal and Obeah. The 'if' of 'if Obeah be the black' (*Night Women* 50) remains important because the conjunctive 'if' of this statement frames the ineffability of these powers — as all more or less Obeah.

The fact that the vengeful, and often murderous, spiritual forces of *Night Women* are represented as more or less Obeah creates an interesting moral quandary within the context of James' literary representation of British colonial Jamaica. Specifically, whilst it is true that Obeah includes revenge and murder and Myal cannot or does not the question remains, in the context of British colonial Jamaica, and the enslavement of African human beings, does *Night Women* reframe Obeah into a "good" or protective magic? The retribution created by Obeah in *Night Women* protects the enslaved women from the traumas of torture, murder, and rape by British colonists and indentured Irish servants. Amongst queerness and Obeah, the narrative of *Night Women* conveys the relentless cruelty

of the British colonial regime in Jamaica, with visceral detail, described by Michael Bucknor and Kezia Page as James' allegorical *mis-en-scène* of 'an imaginative home in his [James'] fiction' where 'we as readers find it as brutal and searing as was James' experience with homophobia'.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, understanding James' writing as apotropaic — inscriptive magic — brings a new perspective on the understanding of the violence depicted by *Night Women*. As Homer explains that white colonists can grab a black person 'and kill her just so', '[J]ust like that', she explains that '[O]nly white man can live with how terrible that be' (*Night Women* 319). If revenge and murder are the only possible forms of protection for enslaved African people then, arguably, Obeah's murderous revenge is justifiably "good". This also means that Myal in *Night Women* cannot be wholly "good", because Myal has no protective use against the brutalities of enslavement.

I suggest that, throughout *Night Women*, Obeah and Myal becomes similar to Makeda and Abby of *Sister Mine*, whose queer twinning brings together their "good" and their "bad" or their "whiteness" and their "blackness". This inseparability is important because it disrupts a racial connotation tied to "white" and "black" spiritual powers. The spiritual powers instead move cyclically, a movement embodied within the enslaved Africans of *Night Women*, because: in actuality, 'the two still black' (*Night Women*, 50). The description 'the two still black' (*Night Women*, 50) conjoins Obeah with *Night Women*, meaning that they remain always more or less Obeah, and not only African Caribbean but queer Caribbean. Obeah is a queer Caribbean force in the context of *Night Women* as a

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<sup>75</sup> Bucknor and Page, p. iv.

protection from harm that is necessary due to its illicit nature in the face of British colonisation, which enacts a queer resistance that is anticolonial. This means that it can be defined as a global resistance, because the queer concept of Obeah continues to defy legacies of the largest global empire the world has yet known.

### **The Power of Circles and Cycles**

I propose that, when read comparatively, the Obeah circles of the Celestials from *Sister Mine* and the circle of Night Women become conceptually interlocked. This connection exists through the Obeah-in-action of *Sister Mine* and *Night Women*, which I suggest is connected to their representations of queer gender, sex, and being. Thus, the writing of Obeah and queerness in *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* create concentric circles which move in tandem to create a spiral form. With this in mind, I interpret the interlocking circles of *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* as a formation of the Fraser spiral illusion conceived by psychologist James Fraser in 1908. The Fraser spiral illusion explains that

concentric circles, comprise alternating oblique dark and light parts, which trigger the impression of a twisted cord in spiral shape [...] concentric circles do not appear as circles but as having a spiral character or tendency'.<sup>76</sup>

I read concentric circles related to literary representations of Obeah and queerness in *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* as spirals of 'oblique dark and light parts', that exist in many natural forms in the world but also defy a straight-forward

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<sup>76</sup> Xuyan Yun, Simon J. Hazenberg, Richard H.A.H. Jacobs, Jiang Qiu, and Richard van Lier, 'The Neural Signature of the Fraser Illusion: An Explorative EEG study on Fraser-like displays', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 9:1 (July 2015), 1-7 (p. 1).

explanation.<sup>77</sup> These Fraser spirals have been interpreted mathematically and geometrically through their relationship to both the Fibonacci sequence and Golden Ratio ( $\phi$ ). The Fibonacci sequence is a mathematical recurrence of numbers that are the sum of their preceding numbers (for example, 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55...), which is understood algebraically as if  $F_0 = 0$ ,  $F_1 = 1$  then  $F_n = F_{n-1} + F_{n-2}$ . The ratio of any two Fibonacci numbers is also equal to the Golden Ratio ( $\phi$ ), of approximately 1.618034 ( $\phi$  is  $1 + \sqrt{5}/2$ ), that is said to reoccur in nature as a divine, or spiritual, presence. The proliferation of spiral patterns in nature which correlate with the Fibonacci sequence, and the Golden Ratio, also remain queerly inexplicable as they seem to show that there is a natural order to wildness. For example, these spirals patterns are found in the branching of trees; the petals on flowers; the spirals of snail shells, and the phyllotaxis of plants.<sup>78</sup>

I propose that narrative and formal circles in *Night Women* allow James' narrative to resist straight order and that this creates wild natural patterns. James writes Obeah from his own queer Caribbean perspective, amid the worldliness of his diasporic life, which I propose makes *Night Women* a microcosm of Obeah's ability to inform queer resistance on macrosocial level. I propose that the narrative of *Night Women* forms a circle through its cyclical narrative whereby a line from its first page is repeated in its final narrative words. *Night Women* opens with Lilith's birth, amid the narrator's explanation that '[I] gon' call her Lilith' but '[Y]ou can call

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<sup>77</sup> Yun; Hazenberg; Jacobs; Qiu; van Lier, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> For more information specific to Fibonacci numbers and natural patterns, refer to theoretical writing by the mathematician A.C. Newell. In an article of note, 'How universal are Fibonacci patterns?', Newell explores Fibonacci numbers as 'patterns of an almost-periodic nature' which 'turn up all over the place' because '[T]hey appear as sandripples, as cloud formations, as granular cells on the sun's surface, and as the epidermal ridges on fingerprints', *The European Physical Journal D*, 62:1 (2011), 5-17 (p. 5).

her what they call her' (*Night Women* 3), whilst in the aftermath of the Montpelier uprising the final lines read '[Y]ou can call her what they call her' because '[I] gon' call her Lilith' (*Night Women* 417). I posit that this reoccurrence makes the narrative of *Night Women* into a protective circle informed by Lilith's daughter, Lovey Quinn, as the narrative voice. The agency of Lovey Quinn to open and close the narrative of *Night Women* is a result of her achievement of literacy, which has defied her enslavement and allowed her to present the narrative of *Night Women*. Thus, Lovey Quinn holds the circle of Night Women within her own narrative circle as a literary ouroboros: a narrative eating its own tail with a beginning and ending whose ending is its beginning.

The cyclical narrative of *Night Women* begins to be understood as concentric through the circle of Night Women within its circular narrative. I suggest that this understanding is expanded by the five-part form and five-fold repetition in *Night Women*, because five chapters open with the line '[E]very negro walk in a circle' (*Night Women* 33; 118; 218; 304; 411) throughout the sections Niggerkin (*Night Women* 1-172), Joseph Andrews (*Night Women* 173-242), Nightwomen (*Night Women* 243-324), Oriki (*Night Women* 325-370), and Gehenna (*Night Women* 371-417). I suggest that these narrative and formal circles further connect to the lack of emancipatory redemption at the climax of *Night Women*, which represents the perpetual cycle, or circle, of oppression. The violent deaths of Callisto, Pallas, Iphigenia, Gorgon, and Hippolyta, coupled with Homer's disappearance and Lilith's continued enslavement, refuse the narrative linearity of a movement from enslavement to emancipation. Just as circles have no linearity, beginning, or ending, so too does the circle of Obeah Night Women represent

colonial oppression as perpetual. In my reading, this represents the presence of straight dominance against queer people which continues as a colonial dominance not reduced to a past entity.

A relationship to literary circles has already been examined in relation to my earlier proposition that Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' narratively circles *Sister Mine*. The sections from 'Goblin Market' occur as both epigraph and embedded text in *Sister Mine*, whilst their content is entwined with the conjoined twincest of Makeda and Abby. These circles then connect with specific features of the Celestials' realm directly related to Fibonacci numbers, which I interpret through the Fraser spiral illusion. Makeda explains that when she arrives in the Celestial realm

A torn edge of nail on my pinkie scraped the back of my other hand. Broke skin. The scratch welled blood, which whispered the words to "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore," except that the first, second, third, fifth, eighth, thirteenth words, et cetera were each baby aspirins, in a synaesthetic Fibonacci sequence of pain relief inadequate to my current requirements (*Sister Mine* 91).

Makeda experiences her somatic feelings in the Celestial world through a Fibonacci sequence which connects with the circles of 'Goblin Market' and Makeda and Abby, linking the narrative form of *Sister Mine* and the spiral patterns of concentric circles with *Night Women*. As the celestial realm becomes 'baby aspirin, in a synaesthetic Fibonacci sequence' (*Sister Mine* 91) it remains entwined within circles of 'Goblin Market', and Makeda with Abby, amongst the form of *Sister Mine* in its notably small number of chapters. I suggest that the seven-chapter form of *Sister Mine* has a distinct relationship to the interlocking circles I read in the queerness of narrative



patterns between *Sister Mine* and *Night Women*. The number seven has long been acknowledged as spiritual or divine, from the Ancient Egyptians into contemporary Christianity, with it being common knowledge that the number 666 denotes the antichrist because the number six falls behind seven as the perfect number of God.

I suggest that the seven chapters of *Sister Mine* involve this spiritual number as a connection with *Night Women* read through the Seven Circles Theorem (1974) of synthetic geometry. The seven circles theorem is a geometrical arrangement related to the creation of seven circles within the Euclidean plane.<sup>79</sup> The Seven Circles Theorem means

that no matter what sizes we pick for the seven circles (subject only to certain order and tangency constraints), it will turn out that the lines AD, BE, and CF will meet in a point.<sup>80</sup>

I suggest that the Obeah of *Sister Mine* is empowered by its narrative and formal circles in connection with the concentric circles of James' Obeah *Night Women*, and a distinct relationship to the number seven. The Obeah circle of *Night Women* is not completed until Lilith becomes their seventh member, joining Homer, Callisto, Pallas, Iphegenia, Gorgon, Hippolyta at which time their supernatural power is activated. The completion of this circle allows for the supernatural powers of the *Night Women* to enact their bloody revenge in the enslaved uprising at Montpelier. Lilith, as the seventh member the *Night Women*, completes their Obeah circle in a

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<sup>79</sup> The Euclidean plane is the fundamental space of geometry which first appeared in Euclid's *Elements*. The Euclidean plane is used to build and prove all geometry by starting from a few very basic properties (axioms), which are often referred to as synthetic geometry. For in depth information on the Euclidean plane please refer to D. Gardiner and C.J. Bradley, *Plane Euclidean Geometry: Theory and Problems, Revised ed.* (2012).

<sup>80</sup> Stanley Rabinowitz, 'The Seven Circles Theorem', *Pi Mu Epsilon Journal*, 8 (1987), 441–449 (p. 441).

reflection of the seven chapters of *Sister Mine* when understood through the Seven Circles Theorem. I suggest that the tangent of the seven chapters of *Sister Mine* create their own Obeah circle of power which interlocks with the circle of seven Night Women. *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* are empowered by their representation of Obeah with queer gender, sex, and being to create a force that has global reach because *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* are read across the world.

*Sister Mine* and *Night Women* follow Wisecup's conception that when Obeah is represented in writing it has 'charm like qualities'.<sup>81</sup> I propose that the representation of Fibonacci numbers and concentric circles remain part of these 'charm like qualities', whose interlocking circles form a conceptual spiral pattern. The inexplicableness, or queerness, of spiral patterns in nature evidences an connecting force for forms which cannot be captured or controlled by straight order. Much as straight order cannot control the way wild plants grow, neither can it straighten Obeah because it is a queer concept of global scale and scope. This reflects how queerness expresses itself in writing as Halberstam's wildness which 'constantly spins away'.<sup>82</sup> This conception of wildness connects with Antonio Benítez-Rojo's work of Caribbean studies where he explains the 'graphic picture of what the Caribbean is' as 'the spiral chaos of the Milky Way'.<sup>83</sup> These conceptions further connect with Leighan Renaud's recent scholarly examination of Fibonacci numbers in the fractal poetics of Erna Brodber's *Nothing's Mat* (2014), where these patterns were read to create a Caribbean narrative of 'self-generating and infinite

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<sup>81</sup> Wisecup, p. 141.

<sup>82</sup> Halberstam, p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 5.

quality'.<sup>84</sup> Renaud also draws on Benítez-Rojo's chaos theory, which interprets the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago, and views the fractal potential of the Fibonacci sequence in writing as its own form of encircling; as 'a repeating pattern that reiterates and facilitates the possibility of a family that continues to grow infinitely'.<sup>85</sup> This is an unusual, or arguably queer, conception which I see reflected in the family of Celestials in *Sister Mine* and the Night Women as all half-sisters: where representation of a queer family is Obeah-in-action, and where the queerness of Obeah creates natural patterns despite its rejection of straight order. Renaud uses catastrophe studies from the *Encyclopaedia of Crisis Management* (2013) to explain this phenomenon, which reflects the queer patterns I have interpreted in *Sister Mine* and *Night Women*, because catastrophe studies 'recognizes there is a natural tension between order and disorder' which means that where 'one finds order, one finds chaos, and where one expects to find chaos, one finds order'.<sup>86</sup> Straight order is rejected by *Sister Mine* and *Night Women*, because this is a continuation of colonial epistemology, where disorder is claimed to be against a natural "norm" and which in turn fuels the global condition of anti-queerness.<sup>87</sup>

A visualisation for my reading of queerness, Obeah, circles, and cycles can be conceptualised by the term Obeah itself. Obeah's own circle, its "O", can be thought of as a life raft travelling across the Caribbean archipelago, and around the

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<sup>84</sup> Leighan Renaud, "'The end linked with the beginning and was even the beginning": Fractal Poetics in Erna Brodber's *Nothing's Mat*', *Journal of West Indian Literature; Kingston*, 28:2 (Nov 2020), 60-72 (p. 62).

<sup>85</sup> Renaud, p. 70.

<sup>86</sup> Renaud, p. 61.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

globe, as uncategorizable, ineffable, and queer. Curdella Forbes describes that ‘the concentric circles of metaphor Benítez-Rojo uses to describe the Caribbean’ in his work is its own ‘additional circle of metaphor’.<sup>88</sup> This chapter has proposed the Obeah circles of *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* as one of Benítez-Rojo’s meta-tropes, but also that, as he explains, they are ‘really that and much more’ because in my reading they are an aspect of global queer literary resistance.<sup>89</sup> Obeah encircles *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* joining the concentric global metaphors of the Caribbean as ‘the last of the great meta-archipelagos’, which interlock in this chapter as a connection between queerness and Obeah.<sup>90</sup>

The protective apotropaic writing of *Night Women* is also at work in a defiance of straight order by *Sister Mine*, which means that *Sister Mine* and *Night Women* not only represent Obeah they are Obeah-in-action. This is related to the enigmatic ability of Obeah and queerness to thrive despite being outlawed, stigmatized, and policed across the globe. Therefore, this chapter has explored how the queerness of Obeah is a natural Caribbean resource which supports its rejection of colonial power with a global reach, and not an anti-colonial resistance which remains globally untenable because it remains straight. This means that I see the critical potential of Obeah for global queer resistance in its alignment of queer and anti-colonial resistance related to spirituality. The queer gender and sexuality of James and Hopkinson which is reflected through their person into their writing, therefore remains part of Obeah-in-action as the spiritual presence and connection

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<sup>88</sup> Curdella Forbes, ‘Review: *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Second Edition by Antonio Benitez-Rojo and James Maraniss’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 46:1 (March 2000), 73-80 (p. 76).

<sup>89</sup> Benítez-Rojo, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

of queer resistance amid queer communality. This means that *Night Women* and *Sister Mine* are anathema to colonialism because they refuse straightness, which is a defiance as limitless in scope as it is dangerous for global power, because they highlight an unchecked continuation of colonial epistemology that exists as the global condition of anti-queerness.

### Chapter Three: Maps to Queer Survivorship: *The Other Side of Paradise* (2009) and *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* (2017) as Biomythography

The concept of biomythography is explored in this chapter as never mutually exclusive from queer life-writing. I read this connection as an aspect of queer communality that has global importance, because biomythography is characterised as life writing by queer people that engages with the role of racism in straight dominance, and vice versa, and thus depicts the global condition of anti-queerness. The term biomythography was coined by black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet, Audre Lorde, to describe a combination of her creative and biographical writing in *Zami, a New Spelling of my Name: A Biomythography* (1982).<sup>1</sup> I critically engage *Zami* with close readings from Staceyann Chin's memoir *The Other Side of Paradise* (2009) and Shivanee Ramlochan's poetry collection *Everyone Knows I Am a Haunting* (2017), to evidence that biomythography has a macrosocial scale of resistance against straight dominance because it is queer and Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> I propose that a distinctive relationship between Lorde, queerness, and Caribbeanness founds the thematic imperative of her oeuvre: the need for innovative forms of resistance which combat oppressive global power, whilst not recreating existing structures of oppressive global power in a new image. I read this as a rejection of existent modes of belonging related to identity, which I suggest is key to the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name, A Biomythography* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2018). Hereafter referred to in-text from this edition as *Zami*.

<sup>2</sup> Staceyann Chin, *The Other Side of Paradise: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2009), and Shivanee Ramlochan, *Everyone Knows I am a Haunting* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2017). Hereafter, references are provided in-text from these editions as *Paradise* and *Haunting*.

understanding biomythography through *Paradise* and *Haunting* as queer and Caribbean and therefore a global literary resistance.

My analysis in this chapter argues that biomythography involves a literary manifestation of self-parenting, where a mythic self-possession is represented in *Paradise* and *Haunting* as a map for readers to find their own queer survivorship. Queer survivorship is understood as the stage of self-empowerment following the victimhood and survival mode of surviving trauma. However, this growth from victim to survivor and into survivorship requires personal work. Therefore, as maps to queer survivorship, *Paradise* and *Haunting* proposes different paths to the same destination: the self-confidence to exercise full personal autonomy, because this act defies straight dominance. This defiance of straight dominance remains global in scope because, reflecting *Zami*, the narratives of *Paradise* and *Haunting* depict the racism of contemporary global power structures as inseparable from the straightness of contemporary global power structures. The ability for queer Caribbean people to thrive despite this reality highlights the global importance for amplifying and advocating their resistance strategies. This chapter will evidence how the narratives of *Paradise* and *Haunting* empower the personal autonomy of all who suffer the trauma of anti-queerness in numerous, different, unique, and individual ways.

### **On (Not) Defining Biomythography**

Although the original source material appears to be lost, Subrata Sahoo suggests that biomythography was a term first defined by NYU Theatre Professor Ted Warburton, as referring to

the weaving together of myth, history and biography in epic narrative form, a style of composition that represents all the ways in which we perceive the world.<sup>3</sup>

However, *Zami* does not fit primary features of an epic narrative form; for example, *Zami* lacks an epic length in its three-hundred-and-four pages of prose.

Warburton's description also suggests that biomythography can be created by anyone without any defining traits related to representations of race, gender, and sexuality amid queerness in its mode. However, I propose that as biomythography is conceived by Lorde in *Zami*, its methodology includes a representation where queerness intersects race with gender and sexuality. This is arguably sacrosanct because biomythography was neologized by Lorde for the subtitle of *Zami*; Lorde's own queerness is aptly summated by Lyndon K. Gill's explanation that contemporary scholars 'cannot avoid recognizing Lorde — although the recognition comes belatedly — as a queer theorist'.<sup>4</sup> This means that, arguably, biomythography does not exist as an iteration of autofiction or creative-critical writing because it is marked by queerness amongst representations related to race, gender, and sexuality in its creation by Lorde. Thus, I sustain the argument in this chapter that there are core tenets of biomythography, because *Zami* not only merges myth with biography but engages this directly with personal insights on queerness at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.

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<sup>3</sup> Subrata Sahoo, 'Kamala Da's *My Story*: A Biomythography', *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, 5:2 (April-June 2018), 193-196 (p. 193). Warburton was speaking at a performing arts conference at NYU, the proceedings of which have since been deleted.

<sup>4</sup> Lyndon K Gill, 'In the Realm of our Lorde: Eros and the Poet Philosopher', *Feminist Studies*, 40:1 (2014), 169-189 (p. 176).



I do not, however, wish to reduce biomythography to the identity characteristics of a writer, and instead propose that all queer writers could create biomythography. This is because the creation of biomythography by Lorde as a queer woman of colour does not simply exclude white queers, as this would defy her own values and recreate a familiar power structure based on rejections related to identity. This interpretation of biomythography includes the important caveat that biomythography must include direct engagement with racial oppression, which cannot be ignored and must be addressed no matter the race of the writer. Bluntly: creating a biomythography as a white queer writer could happen, and may have happened, but not without a detailed self-reflective representation and examination of white privilege and internalized racism.

For clarity in this chapter, biomythography can be broadly understood as a queer life writing which engages in outlining combined personal experiences of straight dominance and racist dominance. This literary mode has a porous form, genre, and style, which expedites a combination of fiction with non-fiction and biography with history and myth. However, these attributes are not *de facto* biomythography because this mode remains a paradox that is both axiomatic and ineffable — both self-evident and undefined — and is thus queer. My decision to not provide a more specific definition of biomythography pays homage to Audre Lorde's literary legacy, because biomythography remained undefined by Lorde in her lifetime. However, I do agree with Monica B. Pearl's description that biomythography includes 'suggesting a mythological, or even fabricated' life, which

is a 'fabulous approach to biography'.<sup>5</sup> My reading agrees with the idea of biomythography as 'fabulous' because in my reading this literary mode remains fantastically, and remarkably, queer.<sup>6</sup>

### **Audre Lorde and Queer Life Writing**

In this chapter I justify how *Zami*, *Paradise*, and *Haunting* connect through a queer Caribbeanness, which I view as a global understanding of resistance to straight dominance. This means that I read the particularities of biomythography as they relate to *Zami*, *Paradise*, and *Haunting* as validation that this is not an iteration of autofiction, creative non-fiction, or life writing. A literary history of Caribbean autofiction, creative non-fiction, and life writing is swiftly summarized by Jocelyn Fenton Smitt as that which

range[s] from depictions of sexual abuse in Jean Rhys' *Smile Please*, to the traumas of poverty and colonial education in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, to Jamaica Kincaid's portrayal of familial alienation and strained parent-child relationships in *My Brother*, as well as these authors' eventual exile because of legacies of colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

Queerness has, of course, been a referent in previous Caribbean autobiography and biography, thinking specifically of the emotional and personal AIDS narrative of Kincaid's *My Brother* (1997). Queerness has also been read by Octavio R. Gonzáles in the narratives of Jean Rhys and by Nadia Ellis related to writing by George

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<sup>5</sup> Monica B. Pearl, "'Sweet Home": Audre Lorde's *Zami* and the Legacies of American Writing Author(s)', *Journal of American Studies*, 43:2 (August 2009), 297- 317 (p. 297).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Jocelyn Fenton Stitt, 'Disciplining the Unruly (National) Body in Staceyann Chin's *The Other Side of Paradise*', *Small Axe*, 18:3 (November 2014), 1-17 (p. 2).

Lamming.<sup>8</sup> I would also further suggest that queerness is inherent to canonical Caribbean writings that often mythologise Caribbean selfhood, thinking of Kamau Brathwaite's collection *X/Self* (1987) and Derek Walcott's poem 'Another Life' (1973). However, as with any global location I propose that when queer Caribbean lives are written by queer Caribbean writers their representation remains exceptional, because these representations are informed by a lived perspective of queerness within the region. This exceptionality lies in writing from a queer perspective instead of writing about or to a queer perspective. Yet, by differentiating queer Caribbean life writing from an existent canon, I do not suggest earlier generations of Caribbean literature do not include the queerness necessary for anti-colonial resistance. Far from being rejected in queer criticism, or its contemporary mode as "cancelled", the writings of Rhys, Lamming, Kincaid, Brathwaite, and Walcott, amongst many others, have fuelled the resistant flames of queer Caribbean writing even if a conflagration of queer resistance was never their own explicit desire.

*Zami* contains Lorde's own queer Caribbeanness: *Zami* often returns to the importance of Lorde's Caribbean heritage and particularly her Grenadian mother. The emigration of Lorde's mother from the Grenadian island of Carriacou emerges as significant, because the term *zami* is a Carriacouan colloquialism for women who work together as friends, and often become lovers, due to their husbands leaving the small island to procure work. Lorde describes '*zami*' as the many ways that '*Carriacou women love each other*', which, alongside their '*strength and their*

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<sup>8</sup> Octavio R. González, *Misfit modernism: Queer Forms of Double Exile in the Twentieth-Century Novel* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), and Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

*beauty is legend in Grenada*' (*Zami* 12, emphasis original). It is this female strength and beauty that is '*legend in Grenada*' (*Zami* 12), which, I will suggest in this chapter, is a queer myth reflected in *Paradise and Haunting*. This relates to my reading of the qualities of myth within queer Caribbean life writing, as being fundamental to their communal connections, and not that these writings remain similar because of categorizations relating to LGBT+ identity.

The queer Caribbeanness of Lorde has been read previously, and this chapter follows in the critical footsteps of important scholarship by Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley and Janelle Rodriques. Tinsley interprets *Zami* with specific reference to sexual revolution in Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral* (1990); specifically, intertextual depictions of the 1979 Grenadian Marxist revolution alongside Lorde's own phantasmic literary Grenada.<sup>9</sup> Touching briefly on biomythography, Rodriques's critical writing focuses on Lorde's celebrated essay 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' (1978). My particular interest lies in Rodriques' framing of *zami* as a 'practice of loving that engenders and fosters communal — and individual — female selfhood'.<sup>10</sup> Through engagement with the above critical work, my own argument sustains that it was not only Lorde's gender, sexuality, and race, but also her queerness and Caribbeanness which nourished the power of Lorde as a Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet. Thus, when the prologue to *Zami* asks '*to whom do I owe the power behind my voice*' (*Zami* i), I suggest that it is to a chorus of queer Caribbean women whose rebelliousness I read as a

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<sup>9</sup> Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), and Janelle Rodriques, 'Women Loving Women in the Erotic-Pornographic Binary: Sex and Intimacy via Audre Lorde in Nicole Dennis-Benn's *Here Come the Sun*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 29:2 (Apr 2021) pp. 62-73.

<sup>10</sup> Rodriques, p. 64.

womanism of uniquely queer ancestry. My interpretations of biomythography and queer Caribbean femaleness could be read as already existent aspects of womanism. Initially described by African American author and activist Alice Walker — in her short story 'Coming Apart' (1979) — womanism is a racially inclusive reconceptualization of feminism which focuses on the everyday experiences of Black women. However, I maintain that biomythography retains a singularity because writing by Lorde, Chin and Ramlochan is informed by a queer — Caribbean — global perspective.

### **Self-Possession and Survivorship**

This chapter reads biomythography as a literary conduit through which queer Caribbean writers represent their own life story on their own terms, as a stratagem of resistance against the racism within straightness and the straightness within racism. To achieve this mode, the writerly voices of Chin and Ramlochan commune with Lorde through their empowered self-possession, which remains unique and dissimilar but connects through a self-parenting that soothes the intolerableness of the traumas experienced by their written selves. I argue that it is the porous form, genre and style of biomythography which makes it particularly transgressive — merging both history personal and social with biography, myth and narrative — and that challenges the ideals of communities, families, and nations which are based solely upon identity.

I propose that the details of this transgression involve Chin and Ramlochan creating literary versions of themselves which they can then parent. I suggest that the creative freedom of biomythography allows Lorde, Chin and Ramlochan to

create themselves in writing as a queering of Alexis Pauline Gumbs' 'work of Black mothering'.<sup>11</sup> This work is achieved by 'the teaching of a set of social values that challenge a social logic' of racism.<sup>12</sup> Although self-parenting has most often been interpreted with Blackness and queer writing, I propose an expansion of its usage into queer Caribbeanness as undefined by a fixed idea of race, because of the globally shared assumption that straightness is essential for social belonging. For example, when Rinaldo Walcott explains there is particular tension created in the 'rearing of black queer kids' which creates the question, 'does black motherhood fail when queer kids appear?', Walcott could already be referring to a global straightness that is entwined with racism related to the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup> Walcott explains that 'normative notions of black motherhood' are not enough to 'account for black mothers' rearing of black queer kids', because queerness necessitates an exceptional nurturing by the self, as there are most often no other queer care givers.<sup>14</sup> This chapter reads biomythography as one iteration of queer Caribbean self-parenting which unsettles an understanding of biological kin through the narratives of survivorship created by Chin and Ramlochan.

The queer survivorship of Chin and Ramlochan is embodied in the writing of *Paradise and Haunting* not to relive the experience of queer trauma, but to soothe its spectral presence. Traumatic experiences appear with regularity throughout

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<sup>11</sup> Alexis Pauline Gumbs dissertation *We Can Learn to Mother Ourselves: The Queer Survival of Black Feminism 1986-1996* (2010) quoted in Lyndon K Gill, 'In the Realm of our Lorde: Eros and the Poet Philosopher', *Feminist Studies*, 40:1 (2014), 169-189 (p. 172).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, 'Against the Rules of Blackness: Hilton Als' *The Women* and Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother* (Or How to Raise Black Queer Kids)', *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*, ed. Faith Smith (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 75-86 (p. 77).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

*Paradise and Haunting*, including child sexual assault and revictimisation as adult rape alongside violent experiences of racism and homophobia. These traumatic experiences reflect those in *Zami*, where Lorde’s protagonist survives similar experiences: this literary triad of queer survivorship documents and venerates the communal and unique experiences, and additional oppressions, for different survivors related to childhood and adult abuse.

The queer survivorship of child abuse, sexual assault, and rape connects *Paradise, Haunting* and *Zami* amid Lorde’s writing on racism that exists through a wider queer Caribbean intertextuality. This means that Lorde remains a celebrated figure by queer Caribbean writers, exemplified by a section of fictional writing in to ‘The Four of Them’ by Thomas Glave. ‘The Four of Them’ are the writers Nadine Gordimer, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin and Toni Morrison and specific to Lorde there is

gratitude Audre for all your strength your  
*power* and  
 (Caribbean girl *Eastern* Caribbean  
 girl)  
 for all the years Audre of your saying and  
 articulating and  
 enunciating  
 the  
 unsayable *the* unsayable the  
 unspeakable  
 about

us

about you about

*because this is who we are* the crucial words let

them be known and

let us all and each be seen Audre heard and

the sum of all the parts making the

whole making the

person making the

me<sup>15</sup>

Agreeing with Glave that there is a vital need to give ‘gratitude’ to ‘Audre’, this chapter will evidence how *Paradise* and *Haunting* do just that as they commune with Lorde, via the queer survivorship of biomythography.<sup>16</sup> The queer survivorship of *Paradise* and *Haunting* remains ‘the/ unsayable *the* unsayable’, which is a queer survivorship that includes the disruption of fixed identity and community — literary or otherwise — which is indebted to the queerness and Caribbeanness of Audre Lorde’s biomythography.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Difficult Truth of Self-Parenting**

*The Other Side of Paradise* (2009) is a first-person narrative memoir of Staceyann Chin’s life in Jamaica prior to her US expatriation, from the 1970s to the early nineties. For clarity in this chapter, I refer to Chin when speaking of her as a writer and Staceyann when speaking on the narrative of *Paradise*. This aids my argument that Chin has made herself a biographical myth as Staceyann, in the same vein that Lorde has with Audre, as a necessity to defend against the global condition of anti-

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Glave, ‘The Four of Them’, *Among the Bloodpeople: Politics and Flesh* (New York, NY: Akashic Books, 2013), 117-129 (p. 121).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



queerness. Staceyann bears the emotional and physical scars of abuse from a seemingly narcissistic African Jamaican mother, and an absentee Chinese Jamaican father. This abuse and neglect results in Staceyann and her brother being cared for by their maternal grandmother until the age of ten, following which she is separated from her brother in a profit-based foster home, where she is molested by sexual predators. Staceyann secures a place at the prestigious Alvernia Prep School whilst moving between five foster homes, and presenting an unshakeable self-confidence which sees her explain 'that it is up to me to make a way for myself' with 'every confidence that I will' (*Paradise* 218). Staceyann begins studying English Literature at the University of West Indies where she survives another sexual assault. She becomes friendly with a group of lesbians at university who grant her access to Jamaica's underground gay scene. However, Staceyann remains unimpressed with what she views as the Jamaican gay community's commitment to conformity and secrecy. The narrative of *Paradise* climaxes with Staceyann's expatriation to New York City, directly following her graduation, where Chin remained a resident until returning to live in Jamaica in the early 2020s.

Staceyann Chin's oeuvre is described by Jeannine Murray-Róman as 'a supranational space' which 'prompts the exploration of the intersections between queer, Caribbean, and radical'.<sup>18</sup> I propose that Murray-Róman's 'intersections between queer, Caribbean, and radical' are evidenced through a literary self-possession that includes a queer self-parenting in *Paradise*. I argue that queer self-parenting is Murray-Róman's 'supranational space' because it rejects the

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<sup>18</sup> Jeannine Murray-Róman, *Performance and Personhood in Caribbean Literature: From Alexis to the Digital Age* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 145.

conformity demanded by any literary, national, or familial belonging.<sup>19</sup> Thus, self-parenting is shown as essential for queer survival against the global condition of anti-queerness, because any iteration of the family unit demands queer autonomy be exchanged for group conformity. In practice, this means that queers often do not have the biological family that they need, but also that they cannot create a chosen family, so they must become their own mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, cousin and so on. I propose that both *Zami* and *Paradise* depict a map to becoming your own queer family not as an ideal but as a mandatory practice for queer survival under a global straight status quo. I suggest that self-parenting is mandatory for queers because it equates to an uncompromising autonomy, meaning that queer freedom is not encumbered by the permission or validation of any biological or chosen outsider.

To create this self-parenting in *Paradise* Chin's writing is for herself and queer others through the narrative of Staceyann, which reflects the biomythography of *Zami* in Lorde's manipulation of her own life narrative as 'Audre'. This literary self-possession by Staceyann and Audre remains informed by a communality of queer survivorship, between Lorde and Chin, whose narratives create a map to queer survivorship. This narrative mapping begins and ends with the difficult truth that the road to queer survivorship cannot avoid painful ruptures from a straight status quo. This difficult truth is tied to the vicissitudes of Staceyann's life of abuse represented in *Paradise*, which demand that she parents herself as a reflection of Gumbs' conception of 'queer work' as a mandatory

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<sup>19</sup> Murray-Roman, p. 145.

praxis.<sup>20</sup> This queer work will always remain mandatory so long as the entwined nature of straight and racist dominance remains the global norm. According to Gumbs, queer work includes acts which confront racism and straightness, including how Black motherhood undermines a 'social logic' that 'the children of Black mothers' are 'the queer, the deviant', those who 'should not exist'.<sup>21</sup> The particulars of Staceyann's life highlight the lack of agency queers have to not engage in Gumbs' queer work, which includes Staceyann's absentee biological father, Junior, and her abandonment by her abusive biological mother, Hazel. I propose that Staceyann's experiences of parental abuse and neglect represent the necessity for all queers to parent themselves, indeed, she arguably reveals that queers must engage in self-parenting for their own survival.

*Paradise* sees Staceyann become her own nurturer, or one of Lorde's allied 'women flaming like torches' who 'stand like dykes between me and the chaos' (Zami 1). Crucially, it is the creatively manipulated representation of Staceyann by Chin, that allows her literary self to become 'the images of women, kind and cruel, that lead me home' (Zami 1) in a reflection of the literary Audre presented by Lorde in *Zami*. During the Prologue to *Paradise*, Staceyann explains that 'in the absence of most of the basic facts' she has 'had to create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4). This remains true for queer people globally because 'most of the basic facts' (*Paradise* 4) of surviving the global condition of anti-queerness are not provided. This lack of inherited queer knowledge is a trend supported by Monique Wittig's critique of psychoanalytic frameworks which sustain

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<sup>20</sup> Gumbs, p. 172.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

that the healthy mind is understood as a ubiquitously straight mind. For Wittig, it 'is no wonder that there is only one Unconscious, and that it is heterosexual', because this 'Unconscious looks too consciously after the interests of the masters'.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is Staceyann who embodies a queer narrative that goes against 'the interests of the masters' by explaining that she must 'create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4).<sup>23</sup> The need to 'set my own course' (*Paradise* 4) for queers goes further than familial structures, because, as Leo Bersani provocatively describes, 'the "general public" is at once an ideological construct and a moral prescription' of exclusion.<sup>24</sup> Further, for Bersani, 'the definition of the family *as an identity* is, inherently, an exclusionary process', meaning that queers have no choice but to behave like Staceyann and 'create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4).<sup>25</sup> This self-creation is a form of self-parenting that relies on a self-possession of mythical proportions of invulnerability, represented by Staceyann in *Paradise*, which I suggest reflects the myth and biography that invites others into Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 268).

I read the biomythography of *Paradise* and *Haunting* through *Zami* as a map to the queer survivorship that lies within Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 268). The ability of *Zami*, *Paradise*, and later *Haunting*, to guide their readers towards 'the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference' (*Zami* 268) and which I suggest exists as the home of queer communality. Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 268) exists as a habitat for queer

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<sup>22</sup> Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum the Grave? And other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Bersani, p. 9 emphasis in original.

communion because it proposes a perpetual journey to self-acceptance, for those who remain 'different from the larger society as well as from any sub-society' (*Zami* 212). Once the 'house of difference' is accepted 'rather than the security of any one particular difference' then its doors can open. These doors are undoubtedly difficult to prise apart, but once ajar they mean the queer freedom to not 'try so hard' either 'to be accepted' or 'to look femme' or 'to be straight' or 'to look straight' (*Zami* 212). Although this may seem an impossible process, it remains the difficult truth of queer freedom: an uncompromising autonomy where no queer person is demanded by another 'to be proper' or 'to look "nice"' or 'to be liked' or 'to be loved' or 'to be approved' (*Zami* 212). This chapter interprets the biomythography of *Paradise* and *Haunting* as a co-ordinated chart to the destination where queers no longer have to 'try so hard' 'to be accepted' or 'to be liked', as the foundations for the 'house of difference' of queer survivorship (*Zami* 212). This house of difference includes biomythography because it remains exceptional to life writing that is queer in its engagement with intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, whilst remaining queerly uncoded as a literary mode of written non-conformity.

The need to 'create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4) reflects Audre's musings on her own self-possession during *Zami*. Audre explains the queer reality of navigating a straight, white, able-bodied world as a 'fat, Black, nearly blind' (*Zami* 24) lesbian, because there are 'no mothers, no sisters, no heroes' (*Zami* 207) to guide her. Staceyann reflects Audre's reality that being queer, and perhaps especially being a queer person of colour, means 'doing it alone, like our sisters the Amazons' (*Zami* 207) or as Staceyann explains to 'create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4). However, there

remains strength in going it alone and to 'survive within a world we correctly perceived to be hostile towards us' (*Zami* 210). The strength of fending off adversity from a straight and white dominance that queers 'correctly perceived to be hostile' (*Zami* 210) means that like for Audre: 'when we survived, we grew up strong' (*Zami* 267). There is a strength and gravitas to the queer aloneness of *Paradise* because, of course, all persons must eventually create their own story, and set their own course. The false comfort of fixed norms and order created by straight dominance cannot be viewed uncritically because life remains entropic: change always happens and nothing stays the same. This means life as Jack Halberstam's queer wilderness, 'the entropic force of a chaos that constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desire'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, never having the choice not to 'create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4) in fact evidences Staceyann's queer advantages. Without ever undermining the reality that Staceyann's queer advantages are borne from the difficult truth of systematic and systemic abuses, having to 'create my own story and in many ways set my own course' (*Paradise* 4) is a skill which better suits the realities of life as the 'entropic force of a chaos'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Staceyann's queerness is prepared for the difficult truth that is living, whilst her queerness 'constantly spins away from biopolitical attempts to manage life and bodies and desire'.<sup>28</sup>

I propose that Chin writes Staceyann with a mythic self-possession because, in the face of any and all traumas, her self-possession remains supreme, perpetual,

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<sup>26</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

unkillable — mythical — in order to provide queers an example of how they can defy anti-queerness by empowering their own radical autonomy. I suggest that by using a creatively manipulated life narrative to recount her experiences, *Paradise* provides a map for other queers to follow, into their own survival through the merging of a biographical and mythic mode. A commitment to radical autonomy is characterised by Staceyann's rejection of the 'half-way friendships' (*Paradise* 252) from those who wish to be friends with her but still reject her queerness. Staceyann explains in no uncertain terms that she 'don't need any of their half-way friendships' and that 'none of them can tell me how to act' (*Paradise* 252). Chin creates a guide for readers as to how they can commit to their own radical autonomy. This is because it always remains true for Staceyann that 'none of them can tell me how to act' (*Paradise* 252), that no one can force another person's actions. Therefore, Chin reminds readers that they also should not wait for someone to tell them 'how to act' (*Paradise* 252) because they should take action based solely on their independent autonomy. This is a queer freedom which many may find incomprehensible if the conformity of following a crowd — or submitting to the status quo — has been a conscious or unconscious drive.

Although Staceyann's commitment to her autonomy could be read by some as a representation of banal or everyday experiences, it remains exceptional in the context of Staceyann's queer survivorship. As a mixed-race queer Caribbean woman, who continues to survive neglect, child abuse, abandonment, and sexual assault, the invulnerability of Staceyann's self-possession remains mythic. The recognition of the seemingly quotidian as mythic, is a form of revolutionary antidote to Audre's description of this 'world's cruelty that destroys its own young

in passing' (*Zami* 299). Staceyann could have understandably become a victim of this world that 'destroys its own young in passing' because this occurs 'not even as a rebel gesture or sacrifice or hope for another living spirit, but out of not noticing or caring about the destruction' (*Zami* 299). Not 'noticing or caring' (*Zami* 299) about Staceyann's actions is representative of the wilful myopia of a straight world, which at once abuses and rejects queers from birth, whilst simultaneously expecting them to have the same self-assuredness as their straight counterparts. Similarly, throughout *Zami* it is Audre's invulnerable commitment to herself which sustains the mythic nature of her narrative. As opposed to representing self-doubt and insecurity in living a queer life, Lorde provides her readers with an unshakeable self-belief that they may not be able to access in their lived reality. This means that no matter how quotidian an action might appear, because it remains true that 'non-conventional people can be dangerous, even in the gay community' (*Zami* 266), any self-possession by a queer person is a radical act. This is because understanding self-possession as an ordinary or natural part of life is arguably only the privilege of a proximity to whiteness and straightness.

Further knowledge proffered by Staceyann's queer survival exist in an interaction with her study partner, Lisa. Lisa begins avoiding Staceyann because

[Lisa] "I don't have anything against your business, but somebody wrote the word *lesbian* on my door last night"

[Staceyann] "Are you a lesbian?" I ask out loud.

[Lisa] "What?"

[Staceyann] "Are you a Lesbian? I repeat.

[Lisa] "No! What kind of question is that?"



[Staceyann] “Lisa, if you are not a lesbian, then it doesn’t matter what a stupid backward-thinking bigot writes on your door, now, does it?”

[Lisa] “Is not as easy as that, Stacey.”

[Staceyann] “It never is, Lisa. Some people will stand up for friendship and some people won’t”  
(*Paradise* 255).

In the section above, I read Staceyann as teaching Lisa a lesson in difficult queer truths. The simplicity of Staceyann’s queer truth reflects Dionne Brand’s manipulation of the rhetorical device Occam’s Razor explored in my first chapter, because the explanation that ‘it doesn’t matter what a stupid backward-thinking bigot’ thinks is both simple, true, and continues to add complexity against straight norms. The difficulty of this queer truth stems from the straight mindset of Lisa’s rebuttal, that it is ‘not as easy as that, Stacey’ (*Paradise* 255). A straight mindset is explained by Valerie Palmer-Mehta as any ‘ideological conditioning’ achieved ‘when citizens perceive a concept or idea as natural and normal’.<sup>29</sup> Thus, any time cisgender and heterosexual being is understood as the only norm it can be said that straight dominance occurs. This reality means that although Lisa professes that she ‘don’t have anything against’ Staceyann (*Paradise* 255), Lisa still supports the thinking of ‘stupid backward-thinking bigots’ (*Paradise* 255). The conciseness of Staceyann’s queer truth remains difficult for Lisa, because Lisa’s behaviour remains straight in her terror at being socially identified as anything other than what

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<sup>29</sup> Valerie Palmer-Mehta, ‘Subversive Maternities: Staceyann Chin’s Contemplative Voice’, *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 3:1 (Spring 2016), 34-60 (p. 39).

'citizens perceive' as 'a concept or ideas as natural and normal' of straight dominance.<sup>30</sup>

Staceyann's relationship with gay classmates in *Paradise* remains of interest to Chin's engagement with biomythography as a map for queer survivorship, as opposed to a relationship with gayness and identity. For example, I read the fraught nature of Staceyann's relationship with her gay classmates as a representation of the rejection and shaming of queers, which can be imposed by an LGBT+ community if their similarities lie solely on an identity. As Staceyann explains, when confronted by gays at university about her outward queer difference she refused to be silenced, which in turn makes her queerness unacceptable to the other gay students. Instead of finding the open arms of an LGBT+ community, many, like Staceyann, discover the reality that 'them don't mind if I am lesbian, but them vex with me for saying it?' (*Paradise* 252). For Staceyann, rebelliousness, non-conformity, or its other name — queerness — remains her defining trait. This queerness means that when gay people in her cohort demand Staceyann conform to their silence, Staceyann rebels by queerly introducing herself to a new classmate with the pithy 'I'm Staceyann, but I don't think it's been confirmed for you that I eat pussy and not dick' (*Paradise* 252). Here, Staceyann exhibits directness as a rejection of the false sense of security offered by an LGBT+ community based solely on gender or sexual identity. This represents that an LGBT+ sense of community can demand conformity if it is reduced to set ideas that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, has an essential meaning. In *Paradise* the rejection of Staceyann

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<sup>30</sup> Palmer-Mehta, p. 39.

surrounding her own self-expression exists regardless of what others demand from her to represent Staceyann as Chin's own personal queer heroine. This heroism stems from an ability to perpetually remain self-possessed as a manifestation of biomythography which makes Staceyann a heroic version of Chin. Although Audre Lorde and Staceyann Chin are capable of perfect timing and fathomless wisdom, the absolute impregnability of their self-possession as Staceyann and Audre remains apocryphal. Chin has made herself a biographical myth as Staceyann, in the same vein that Lorde has with Audre, as a necessity to defend against the global condition of anti-queerness. For Staceyann, the difficult truth is found in the discovery that an LGBT+ community will not necessarily be welcoming for queers. Staceyann invokes Lorde by creating her own story and setting her own course though *Paradise*.

Arguably, the chapter 'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' (*Paradise* 257-265) remains the most harrowing section from *Paradise* during which Staceyann survives an attempted gang rape. A few pages prior to 'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' Staceyann gets her head shaved because she wants to look 'like a dyke' (*Paradise* 254), as an expression of her own personal queer freedom. This visible difference is challenged by five male students who remain distinguishable only by their shirt colours. Red-shirt questions why Staceyann 'cut off all you long, long hair' (*Paradise* 257) and threatens her with penetrative rape as a 'rod of correction' (*Paradise* 257). Another student, Orville, enters the bathroom and disrupts the scene; Staceyann knows Orville to be gay so believes that he will 'not let those boys rape me' (*Paradise* 261). However, Orville proves Staceyann wrong and she explains that she 'can't believe the little faggot is going to leave' (*Paradise* 262), and that if

he does she will 'say things, to make sure you will never be safe in this country!' (*Paradise* 262). As Orville faces the would-be rapists they question his sexuality by asking 'why you don't want to join in?' and '[Y]ou is batty bwoy or what?' (*Paradise* 263). Orville crudely explains he prefers his women 'ready fi fuck' (*Paradise* 263) and then shocks the would-be rapists by declaring that, as a lesbian, Staceyann might 'have some fuck-up disease' (*Paradise* 264). This shock causes Staceyann to recognize that 'no one is holding me now' and she escapes by taking 'one carefully planned lunge to the door' (*Paradise* 264).

'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' evidences the constant threat of violence from straight dominance against queers, which serves to police non-conformity. 'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' also exposes the limitations of a community based solely upon gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, the chapter also depicts how Staceyann's queer truths are resistant to straight power as well as its reflections within an LGBT+ community. The imminent threat of sexual violence in 'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' represents the real and present danger of violence against queers. I read red-shirt's explanation that the gang are going to 'fuck her [Staceyann] to bring her back to the right way of thinking' (*Paradise* 264), as the global voice of straight domination, as Chin represents red shirt as a vocalised straightness which can arguably only exist when a room is filled with other straight men and their victims. Meanwhile, Orville's actions during 'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' are representative of the queer limitations of LGBT+ community. The dynamic between Staceyann and Orville evidences Sara Ahmed's proposition that the 'sexual-racial hierarchy of global homonormativity' is

'a respite within heteropatriarchy which only exists for some'.<sup>31</sup> Orville exposes hierarchies of gender and sexuality within LGBT+ communities, where some gay men will always have access to the privilege of passing as straight, being white, or a proximity to either straightness or whiteness.

This relationship to straightness is sometimes referred to as homonormativity and can be understood as not only a person's proximity to straightness, but the desire to conform to a straight ideal. Orville performs this straight ideal by trying to save himself without Staceyann. Thus, I propose that Orville tries to obtain Ahmed's 'respite within heteropatriarchy', which is only existent 'for some', and underscores the necessity for Staceyann's queer tactics for survival.<sup>32</sup> If Chin, Lorde and Ramlochan can be understood as propagators of a global queer literary resistance, which transcends their ethnic and cultural background, then I suggest that Orville evidences himself as their homonormative antithesis correlating with Hiram Pérez's critique that queerness should always be differentiated from gayness, without any false reduction that queer is simply "not gay".<sup>33</sup> Specifically, I propose that biomythography remains 'attentive to the constitutive power of identity politics' and creates an 'engagement that makes new, alternative narratives for identity intelligible'.<sup>34</sup> It is these 'new, alternative narratives for identity' which I suggest remain intelligible through the biomythography of Staceyann's queer survivorship, and whose purpose is to

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<sup>31</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 112.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Hiram Pérez, *A Taste for Brown Bodies: Gay Modernity and Cosmopolitan Desire* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2015), p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

provide a map for queer survivorship which includes the difficult reality that, for queers, there will be no external straight or LGBT+ saviour.

Orville exposes that any protections promised by a community may never come to fruition for queers, because as red shirt laughs on Orville's arrival he 'is not even worried about Orville's presence in the room' (*Paradise* 262). In rebellion, of both the gang and Orville, Staceyann becomes her own queer family and hero by ensuring her survivorship in the threat to ensure that Orville 'will never be safe in this country!' (*Paradise* 262). Chin's representation is a stark reminder that hierarchies of gender, sex, and race can be engaged in by queer persons as well as weaponised by them if necessary. For example, here, Staceyann twists the threat of straight male violence against a gay man to force him into aiding her survival. Reflecting ideas of queer use read in my first chapter, Staceyann uses straight male homophobia against a gay man as a tool to protect herself against the potential of her being raped. This is part of the difficult truth for queers that, as Audre explains, 'non-conventional people can be dangerous, even in the gay community' (*Zami* 266). The queer survivorship of 'Ye Without Sin Cast the First Stone' underscores the mandatory nature for engaging in the queer work of becoming radically self-possessed, as the potential for safety by an LGBT+ community remains unfulfilled by Orville. The exceptionalness of Staceyann's self-possession lies in it belonging to Chin and to a global understanding of queer survivorship. This queer survivorship is singular to Chin whilst remaining global, for all 'non-conventional people' who are 'dangerous, even in the gay community' (*Zami* 266). Far removed from a positivist LGBT+ community, the difficult truth lies in Staceyann's use of Orville; Staceyann forces Orville to allow them to use each other to survive their common enemy: the

'rainbow of schoolboy shirts' (*Paradise* 263). A communality based upon a common enemy is represented as more useful than a community based solely around a categorised identity. Therefore, Staceyann's use of Orville's gayness allows her to save herself from being gang raped. I propose that this manipulation of Orville by Staceyann reflects the complex representation of queer communality, through biomythography, related to *Paradise* and *Zami*. This complexity lies within the affective depth and range with which queer responses are represented, where difficult truths are never reframed as falsely positive. This means that Staceyann cannot become the victim of Orville's fear and when she 'can't believe the little faggot is going to leave' (*Paradise* 262) the reader understands this perspective. Staceyann shows how to put her queer survivorship into action and despite his earlier recalcitrance, Orville helps her by saving himself. Staceyann escapes the imminent rape scene with minimal physical trauma as a result of the biomythography of her own queer survivorship.

### **Communal Queer Survivorship**

*Everyone Knows I am a Haunting* (2017) is a poetry collection broken into three untitled parts which includes thirty-two poems with capitalised titles, and which sees Ramlochan mine her own personal depths by representing queer transgressions in Trinidad and Tobago. I critically engage with specific sections from *Haunting* to support my argument, with synopses provided during my close readings from the narrative sequence 'THE RED THREAD CYCLE' (*Haunting* 35-45); the poetic 'DUENNE' triptych (*Haunting* 18-22), and the stand-alone poem 'GOOD NAMES FOR THREE CHILDREN' (*Haunting* 57-58).

Ramlochan's poetics are informed by the culturally hybrid heritage of her queer Indian Trinidadian background, as she frequently places Hinduism in poetic conversation with queer themes. I suggest that these queer themes are put to the specific use of biomythography in *Haunting* in the duenne trilogy: 'DUENNE LILITH' (*Haunting* 18-19), 'DUENNE LARA' (*Haunting* 20-21), and 'DUENNE LORCA' (*Haunting* 22). Duenne are supernatural creatures that are created as a result of the death of an unbaptised child, and derive from Catholic dogma but remain unique to Trinidad and Tobago. I propose that Duenne are mythical queer beings because they are 'sexless', faceless, and their 'feet are turned backwards' as they 'steal living children' in a similar manner to changelings of Early Modern British folklore.<sup>35</sup> The proposal for a queer reading of folkloric figures is explored in detail in my next chapter surrounding the queer reconceptualization of folk storytelling. Within the poetic duenne triptych I propose a distinctive merging of queerness, myth, and biography through Ramlochan's use of nomenclature for each poem. The duenne triptych represents a poetic personae's interactions with multiple versions of duenne alongside an exceptional, and I suggest queer, rebelliousness through the subtext of the names Lilith, Lara, and Lorca which each relate to transgressive womanhood. The name Lilith connects with the nomenclature of Marlon James' protagonist in *The Book of Night Women* (2009) explored in my previous chapter; Lilith is the demonic female presence of Judaic mysticism who was intertextually adopted from the oldest known work of literature: the ancient Sumerian *Epic of*

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<sup>35</sup> 'Unbaptised Babies, Duenne and Other Characters', 17 September 2012, <<http://caribbeancatholic.blogspot.com/2012/09/unbaptised-babies-duenne-and-other.html>> [accessed 26 November 2021].



*Gilgamesh* (1300-1000 BCE).<sup>36</sup> Lara is a naiad, or water nymph, from Roman mythology whose tongue was removed and was banished to the underworld by Jupiter after revealing his affair with another nymph to his wife, Juno.<sup>37</sup> Lorca is an allusion to the early twentieth century Spanish poet, playwright, and artist Federico García Lorca, who, although male, was known for creating representations in multiple disciplines that resisted the socially prescribed role for women, particularly as it pertained to sexuality.<sup>38</sup>

*Haunting* adopts aspects of mythology and a mythic style in the poetic duenne triptych, which I propose is representational of the ways that queer Caribbean writing create a global impact against straight dominance. The terms myth and mythic have distinctive features, because mythology implies using supernatural beings to convey a story about social or natural phenomena, whilst mythic refers specifically to the adoption of exaggeration or idealization. Although both myth and mythic often intersect, they remain distinguishable and can therefore be used to explain the differing functions of mythology and a mythic mode within biomythography. Duennes embody a monstrosity that results from their supposed failure to adhere to a strictly fixed, defined, and therefore straight,

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<sup>36</sup> "Lilith" and her defining characteristics are thought to be derived from the class of Mesopotamian demons called *lilû* (feminine: *lilītu*), and the name is usually translated as 'night monster' (Petruzzello, 2017), Susan Schept, 'Lilith: A Rabbinic Projection of the Demonic Female' *Psychological Perspectives*, 64:2 (2021), 189-200 (p. 189).

<sup>37</sup> 'For betraying his trust, Jupiter cut out Lara's tongue and ordered Mercury to conduct her to Hades. Mercury, however, fell in love with Lara and coupled with her along the way' <<https://www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/Mythology/en/Lara.html>> [accessed 6 June 2022].

<sup>38</sup> 'While Lorca was not a declared feminist, his major plays reveal an acute awareness of women's status within Spanish society, especially regarding class, education, work, and marriage, that contrasts sharply with antifeminist attitudes on these issues manifested by key male writers of immediately preceding and contemporaneous generations'. Roberta Johnson, 'Federico García Lorca's Theatre and Spanish Feminism', *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea*, 33: 2 (2008), 251-281 (p. 252).

status quo of Catholic dogma. This supposed failure has no bearing on the actions of the individual, because it relates to an unbaptised child, so I propose that this is indicative of injustices that stem from prescribing and policing a straight “norm”. Therefore, I posit that *Haunting* uses the representation of duenne to depict how queerness in Trinidad and Tobago merges biography and myth as a reflection of the poetic persona’s title drop in ‘DUENNE LARA’ that ‘[E]veryone knows I am a haunting’ (*Haunting* 20) because they defy straight “norms”. As ‘a haunting’ (*Haunting* 20), the duenne depict queerness as a spectre which besieges the straightness of Trinidad and Tobago, but also by extension the world because straight dominance is inarguably a founding and structuring device for each global nation state.

The haunting of *Haunting* allows the queerness of the collection to remain an inspirited presence for its readership, long after the closing of its pages, and thereby transfigures the fixed idea that haunting is a negative effect or negative affect. This reframing of haunting is mirrored in the porosity of biography and myth as itself a literary rejection of straight-forwardness, because it goes against an uncritical understanding that biographically informed poetry is factual rather than fictional. It is the porous form through which biography and myth become converged in *Haunting* which blurs boundaries between the poet and the poems. Instead, amongst the many difficult truths presented in *Haunting* remains a communal pivot for engaging in a global queer literary resistance. This communal pivot is beginning from the basis that objective fact — literary or otherwise — is only ever a fiction, and that dominant narratives — social or otherwise — are only ever one version of events. To aid this representation, Ramlochan does not adopt

easily assumed facts of the family unit as a place of safety. As the poetic voice of 'DUENNE LARA' explains,

No one told you how it would hurt, to have your feet forced  
against  
family hearth.  
The 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[.]  
(*Haunting* 21).

This 'family hearth' (*Haunting* 21) evokes the straight conformity of a biological family that burns its queer member, and this motif informs my proposition that a communality of difference can be founded that connects these outsiders through their branding or burning. Through this burning, the queer poetic persona becomes 'a blister body of devotion' (*Haunting* 21) which subsequently means that they create their own 'casket of cunning charms' (*Haunting* 21). I read this 'casket of cunning charms' as a space of communal queer survivorship lying at the conceptual crux of biomythography in Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 226)

I propose that it is the merging of biography and myth in *Haunting* which, like *Paradise*, allows it access to Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 226). An aspect of this lies in necessarily visceral representation of traumatic subject matter in *Haunting*, which is reflected in writing by Chin and Lorde, meaning that Ramlochan is also a queer writer because she refuses to ignore or to not write these difficult truths. To soothe the burning of Lara by the 'family hearth' (*Haunting* 21), Ramlochan's poetic voice explains that they will 'never make you walk again, if you be mine' (*Haunting* 21) as a promise to stop the mistreatment of this 'blister body

of devotion' (*Haunting* 21). This blistered body connects with Audre's experiences in *Zami* of growing up as a Black lesbian in a racist and straight dominated, anti-queer, world. Growing up in this way provides Audre the gift of a 'feeling I had the truth and the light and the key', but at the difficult price that 'a lot of it was purely hell' and included being 'always alone against a greater aloneness' (*Zami* 207). I posit that the poetic voice of 'DUENNE LARA' speaks for those 'alone, against a greater aloneness', who eventually find one another by embracing their difference, and, like Audre, by not avoiding the fact of doing this 'alone, against a greater aloneness' (*Zami* 207). The poetic voice of 'DUENNE LILITH' embraces the necessity of pain in this queer self-growth by asking the duenne to 'fold my bones, fit me thimble, docile' so that they can then 'breathe into the welts' and 'endure it' (*Haunting* 18). As read earlier in *Paradise*, it is Audre's understanding of queer people always having 'to do it alone, like our sister the Amazons' as 'purely hell' (*Zami* 207) which means that they must become their own figuration of a family and a heroine. Thus, the poetic voice of the duenne triptych connects with the mythical Amazons amid the fact that having 'to do it alone' also 'resulted in some pretty imaginative tough women when we survived' (*Zami* 207).

I posit that these 'imaginative tough women' are Lara, Lilith, and Lorca as proxies for the queer survivorship of Chin, Ramlochan, and Lorde which has the global reach necessary to defy straight paradigms, without recreating their same structures. 'DUENNE LARA' depicts the necessity of understanding pain as a route to this queer survivorship, because beyond the false securities of nation, community, or family, the duenne 'has something for' the narrator 'but it looks like torture' (*Haunting* 21). The duenne takes this 'something' and 'scrapes it from the

ruins of the moonlight museum' and '[S]he smiles as its eats our national anthem from your tongue' (*Haunting* 21). This 'something' is a painful but necessary separation from current models of belonging and community, as the 'national anthem', and being severed from this known way of connecting is 'like torture' (*Haunting* 21), or 'purely hell' (*Zami* 207). This severance cuts away the stability of straight dominated ideals of the nation as a safe community. The duenne revokes the ability for the outside forces of a nation, or a fixed and categorised identity, to be collected around in order for a channel to global communality to be made possible, by instead using the biomythography of duenne to represent the difficult truth that queers must 'do it alone' (*Zami* 207). This means to 'do it alone' (*Zami* 207) and attain a queer survivorship, without supporting or recreating the same structures of identity that support a straight dominated world.

This queer survivorship is created by Ramlochan's use of poetic personae to expose queer truths, in stories which merge biography with myth, and reflect Audre's description that 'the very idea of telling stories and not getting whipped for feeling untrue was the most marvellous thing I could think of' (*Zami* 50). In *Haunting*, poetic personae are 'telling stories' of their queerness away from the policing of a straight dominated world, which means 'not getting whipped for feeling untrue' (*Zami* 50). I read the duenne stories as a reorientation of monstrosity in relation to queer survivorship, that, in connection to the twists read in my initial chapter, twist a straight dominated narrative and present 'the most marvellous thing' (*Zami* 50): that queers are not the monsters the world has led them to believe. The duenne of *Haunting* embody Audre's expression that difference from the status quo of "norms", means 'it may be much harder to try

merely to stay alive, or rather, to stay human' but that this also results in a 'stronger person in the trying' (*Zami* 212).

I posit that becoming a 'stronger person in the trying' (*Zami* 212), or to remain human in a straight dominated world that demands conformity, means a rebelliousness that connects the duenne. In 'DUENNE LORCA' the ability to 'stay human' (*Zami* 50) is disoriented in a representation which depicts the necessity to view difference from the "norm" differently. This entails a clarification over what humanity and monstrosity are as well as how humanity and monstrosity appear. As the poetic voice of 'DUENNE LORCA' speaks to their '[D]arkling son, neither female or filial' (*Haunting* 22), they explain that

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.

Nothing the forest raises is a monster.  
Your sisters, red howler and river otter,  
renounced school for the kiss of brushbroom-altar,  
water sweetening their pelts.  
Your father hid their navel strings in El Cerro del Aripo;  
lock by lock they build the hairbeds for their own children's  
haunts (*Haunting* 22).

The representation of rebellious transgression through this duenne myth sees a mother figure keep her 'own tail hidden' (*Haunting* 22), as a way to hide her supposed monstrosity and to not to incite further violence upon her son. The child's 'unchristian' nature is a reminder of the unbaptised creation of duenne, and as 'neither female nor filial' (*Haunting* 22) this duenne child has a gender queerness which sees them violently policed by an allusion to the straight status quo

symbolised by 'the schoolmistress' (*Haunting* 22). I suggest that this queer familial connection reflects Audre's mythically queered understanding of a female same sex female from *Zami*, via her description of the Grenadian knowledge where 'it is said that the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother's blood' (*Zami* 304). If female same-sex desire is derived 'from the mother's blood' (*Zami* 304) then I propose it is a queer form of inheritance where both the self and the mother become syncretic. Thus, Lorde represents queerness as matrilineal and sanguine — from the mother and in the blood — which reflects the same mythic yet biographical mode of representation in *Haunting*. In much the same way that the queerness of the child in 'DUENNE LORCA' is an inheritance from the mother, the seeming deviance or monstrosity of this inheritance also remains human against contradistinctions by a straight social script of "norms". Thus, because '[N]othing the forest raises is a monster' (*Haunting* 22) then nothing that follows its own innate queer drives 'is a monster' (*Haunting* 22). However, arguably, this means that those who then police queer difference, represented by 'the schoolmistress' (*Haunting* 22) are in fact more monstrous than human.

A queer mother and child relationship in 'DUENNE LORCA' is further reflected through Audre's queer sexual fantasies about her own mother in *Zami*, and the queerness that Stella Bolaki has noted in Lorde's representation of the Caribbean. As Bolaki explains, the 'Carriacou the protagonist finds at the end of' *Zami* 'is one she has constructed', meaning that Audre's Carriacou becomes representational of wider misconceptions of the Caribbean by both diasporic and

global citizens, who may or may not have visited the region.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, this relates further that, in fact, any imagining of a global location is a fiction that the imaginer 'has constructed'.<sup>40</sup> For Bolaki, this is a construction which 'synthesizes elements of queerness and Caribbean/African identity', and I posit further that it is this synthesised version of Carriacou from which Lorde's queer self-possession and queer parenting stem.

This imagined Caribbean remains similar to the imagined world, to show how a global form of literary resistance stems from an inability for writing to be fixed by nation or identity because these remain constructed.<sup>41</sup> This nationless belonging is evidenced in representation of the duenne stories as a poetic triptych, which mean that each have 'to do it alone, like our sister Amazons' (*Zami* 207) but remain alongside one another despite their understanding of this aloneness. Thus, I posit that 'DUENNE LILITH', 'DUENNE LARA', and 'DUENNE LORCA' remain individual, but connect alongside one another as a triptych which implies both separation and a connected relationship, or, as my first chapter conceived, they exist both forward and sideways from one another as a formation of communality. This communality derives from the queerness and Caribbeanness which I read as informing the global reach of biomythography in relation to the writing of Lorde, Chin, and Ramlochan.

The duenne poems as biomythography mirror Lorde's engagement with the figure of Afrekete in *Zami*, who is the '*Journeywoman pieces/ of myself*', and Audre

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<sup>39</sup> Stella Bolaki, "New living the old in a new way': Home and Queer Migrations in Audre Lorde's *Zami*", *Textual Practice*, 25:4 (2011), 779-798 (p. 783).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*



is always '*Becoming./ Afrekete.*' (*Zami* 4, original emphasis). Afrekete is the '*daughter to MawuLisa*' (*Zami* 255, original emphasis) who is the creation Goddess of a West African Dahomey mythology. Therefore, Afrekete influences the biomythography of Audre as a '*mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved*' who she proposes '*we must all become*' (*Zami* 255, original emphasis). In *Zami*, Afrekete, also known as Kitty, is a short-term lover of Audre's who creates a lasting impact upon her. As explained by M. Charlene Ball, Kitty provides Audre with 'the gift of knowledge of herself' and permits her 'a way to live on the borders of her multiple identities'.<sup>42</sup> The mischievous linguisticism of Afrekete as a trickster outlines a playful creativity with which queer life narratives are written as biomythography, whilst connecting with readings in my following chapter on contemporary queer Caribbean speculative fiction as a global ethos against conformity. Afrekete is the '*best-beloved, whom we must all become*' (*Zami* 255), and this becoming is fully actualised by Audre at the climax of *Zami* where the representation of Kitty shows how biomythography is not only an allusion to a particular mythology but also by an idealised selfhood. Kitty gifts Audre with the power to understand the importance of each of the '*Journeywoman pieces/ of myself*', which are integral to her '*Becoming*', by at once being and being-with '*Afrekete*' (*Zami* 4). This being and being-with is the communality of biomythography, that also exists through the alongside triptych of the duennes who are at once being and being-with Ramlochan's poetic biography.

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<sup>42</sup> M. Charlene Ball, 'Old Magic and New Fury: The Theophany of Afrekete in Audre Lorde's 'Tar Beach'', *NWSA Journal*, 13:1 (Spring, 2001), 61-85 (p. 61).

A communality of queer survivorship arises from Ramlochan becoming queer kin to herself in *Haunting* via literary self-parenting. I propose that this literary self-parenting connects Ramlochan with Chin and Lorde, because they too depict the way to become your own family amid the reality that there are ‘no mothers, no sisters, no heroes’ (*Zami* 207) to aid queer survivorship. This communal queer survivorship can be understood conceptually as the ‘we’ of Lorde’s ‘A Litany for Survival’ (1978), for whom

when we are loved we are afraid  
love will vanish  
when we are alone we are afraid  
love will never return  
and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak  
Remembering  
we were never meant to survive.<sup>43</sup>

*Paradise* and *Haunting* create written reminders for their readers, that Chin and Ramlochan are part of this ‘we’ who ‘were never meant to survive’ the global condition of anti-queerness.<sup>44</sup> Chin and Ramlochan succeed in creating life narratives that remain sovereign to themselves, but in doing so also become the

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<sup>43</sup> Audre Lorde, ‘A Litany for Survival’, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London, UK: Silver Press, 2017), pp. 200-201. To read an open access version of Lorde’s ‘A Litany of Survival’ (1978) please see: <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147275/a-litany-for-survival>> [accessed 6 September 2021].

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

'we' of queer survivorship. This communal queer survivorship includes the knowledge that being this 'we' means an imperative to find, and use, your own queer voice, because 'it is better to speak/ remembering/ we were never meant to survive'.<sup>45</sup> Ramlochan's poetic persona explains the importance of this queer voice in 'GOOD NAMES FOR THREE CHILDREN', by describing that the poetic persona must

Remember your right to use it —  
your voice, your arms, your  
High Street San Fernando desire for the  
girl with an orange blossom tucked behind her ear.  
Do not wake, sleep-ransacked,  
bleary-eyed with a fraud's tears,  
feeling filthy for the way you love,  
the how, the who, the where.  
I cradled your strong limbs in my belly  
and they tapped out against my bones  
the morse code of your whole life.  
Remember your right to use it. (*Haunting* 57)

'GOOD NAMES FOR THREE CHILDREN' speaks from the position of a mother's love, and fear, for their queer daughter who she tells to stop 'feeling filthy for the way you love' (*Haunting* 57). This love and fear are represented alongside a combination of supportive queer kinship structures that include both the living and the dead. The poetic voice of 'GOOD NAMES FOR THREE CHILDREN' proclaims that her daughter must '[R]emember your right to use it —/ your voice' (*Haunting* 57), because, despite social policing to the contrary, queer perspectives are as worthy of

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<sup>45</sup> Please see footnote 43.

being heard as all others. Ramlochan's adoption of an unusual second-person declarative in the poem — to '[R]emember your right' (*Haunting* 57) — creates a self-parenting style of voice from this mother figure to Ramlochan, whilst also providing a route for queer readers to move away from any sense of their victimhood, and its implicit survival tactics, and towards queer survivorship. Ramlochan writes of a poetic mother 'who cradled your strong limbs in my belly' and I interpret this 'your' as an invitation to the reader to escape into this queer fantasy (*Haunting* 57). In this fantasy, the compassionate care and concern shown by the poetic mother is provided for the reader; to become this 'you' who 'tapped out against my bones/ the morse code of your whole life' (*Haunting* 57). This 'you' provides strength and clarity for the reader, because, as the poem repeats, each queer person must '[R]emember your right to use' your voice (*Haunting* 57). The need to self-empower your own queer voice, and to communicate personal truth in whatever form it may take, means listening to 'the morse code of your whole life' (*Haunting* 57) and in essence becoming your own queer mothering self.

Due to this queer mothering self, I posit that Edward Chamberlain could have been writing about *Haunting* when he explains of the 'unconventional folkways' created by Staceyann's queer interpretation of family in *Paradise*. This connection between Chin and Ramlochan exists despite personal disparities related to their identity, because, as has been suggested throughout this chapter, becoming a queer parent to the self is mandatory queer work. Although this queer work will be different for all, and more or less difficult for some than others, it remains a communal necessity. The self-parenting of Chin and Ramlochan achieves what Chamberlain calls queer '*sui generis* forms of gender and sexuality' which

continue 'playing key roles in contemporary acts of family-making and sociality'.<sup>46</sup> I propose that Chamberlain's 'unconventional folkways' of 'family-making' include the ability for queer writers to make themselves their chosen family. This includes writing queerness with a radical honesty that, no matter the race of the writer, must not ignore race as a social construct amid queer understandings of gender and sexuality as socially constructed.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Ramlochan's poetic voice becomes an internalized validation for queer readers, to remind themselves not to 'wake, sleep-ransacked/ bleary-eyed with a fraud's tears/ feeling filthy for the way you love' (*Haunting* 57). This poetic voice remains direct in its dialogue from a mother to a queer child, and yet the biomythography of Ramlochan's writing transforms its message into a communal queer survivorship that exists with a global reach for queer literary resistance.

I propose that Ramlochan creates a map to queer survivorship which communes with *Zami* through their creation of biomythography. This context means that the life narratives of *Haunting* remain about Ramlochan's queer self as well as a tool for global queer readers. This means that when writing their queer Caribbean selves, Chin and Ramlochan are also writing for, to, and through global queer others. This communality can be understood with a similarity to the experience of Kei Miller, whose writing is interpreted in detail in my final chapter, when watching 'slam poet and activist Staceyann Chin' reading 'for the first time at the Calabash festival in Jamaica (the first one)'.<sup>48</sup> I suggest that on reading *Paradise*

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Chamberlain, 'Revealing the Family's Strife: Maternal Absence and Social Struggle in the Writings of Staceyann Chin and Patricia Powell', *The CEA Critic*, 78:1 (March 2016), 59-77 (p. 63).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Kei Miller, 'A Space Between the Poems: An Attempt at Benediction', *Writing Down the Vision: Essays & Prophecies* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), 144-150 (p. 145).

and *Haunting*, as well as in hearing their call to queer survivorship, then queers become like Miller 'forever changed by that experience'.<sup>49</sup> Chin and Ramlochan use a creative representation of their own lives to critique a normative social script, of straight dominance, as only ever being a fictional narrative which thus revokes its dominance. Therefore, Chin and Ramlochan join Lorde's litany for survival by reminding all queers that they have the right to speak, and write, exactly as they wish, because their own truthful narratives remain fictional, just like everything else. Furthermore, this indicates that queer narratives are not only valid but necessary, amongst the difficult reminder that, under the global condition of anti-queerness, queer narratives 'were never meant to survive'.<sup>50</sup>

It is clear in my argument so far that despite any disparities surrounding their categorised or prescribed identity, the mythic and biographical mode of *Haunting* connects with Chin's *Paradise* and Lorde's *Zami*. I suggest that this queerness and Caribbeanness creates a communality with both global impact and further potential. I posit that Ramlochan becomes the queer kin of Lorde and Chin, and vice versa, by creating their own maps to queer survivorship to Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 226). The 'house of difference' (*Zami* 226) is an emancipatory space in which self-realisation is awakened; an understanding that your 'place was' always 'the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference' (*Zami* 226). A map for queer survivorship includes Ramlochan's description of her own 'explicit historic narrative' which she uses 'as a compass to

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<sup>49</sup> Miller, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Please see footnote 43.

write poems that sometimes scare even me'.<sup>51</sup> I argue that Ramlochan writes 'poems that sometimes scare even me' because they are informed by her commitment to writing difficult queer truths.<sup>52</sup> These difficult truths are not a cure-all or panacea against straight dominance but can provide insight into the ways that a person thrives in a resistance to the global condition of anti-queerness.

Ramlochan's map to queer survivorship also includes specific mythic representations that inform the communally global scope of her writing, beyond any false limits prescribed by nation and identity. I propose that biography and mythmaking inform the shifting written person of 'THE RED THREAD CYCLE': a seven-part poem narrativizing experiences of rape, disclosure, and revictimization, against the integration of these traumas within a survivor's psyche as well as within creative writing. The experience of trauma under straight dominance is a connector for queer persons, and more especially for queer persons of colour because these traumas are informed by the racism of white supremacy entwined with straight dominance. Arguably, all queers suffer trauma by existing as themselves against a straight status quo and, inarguably, there are multiple different factors which inform the severity of this experience related to a person's proximity to whiteness and straightness. Thus, the experience of surviving trauma creates a distinctive link between *Paradise*, *Haunting*, and *Zami* and, I suggest, their queer resistance actively functions to defy the global condition of anti-queerness through writing biomythography. The distinctive queerness of this survivorship lies in it being a response from a queer writer, because trauma survival becomes queer when its

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<sup>51</sup> Shivane Ramlochan, 'The Good Brown Girl: Questioning Obedience in Indo-Caribbean Women', *Brave New Words*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Oxford, UK: Myriad, 2019), 19-34 (p. 21).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

experience is written from a queer perspective. As Ramlochan relevantly explains during an online public conversation with myself: 'it took me a while to realise that I could write about anything and still be queer'.<sup>53</sup> So, as Ramlochan explains, she 'could write about a sunset and it would be gay', or that writing about 'a market, or a closet' would 'be a queer production'.<sup>54</sup> Thus, much the same as Chin in *Paradise* and Lorde in *Zami*, Ramlochan writes the survival of rape from a queer perspective which informs her ability to create it as a map to queer survivorship.

'THE RED THREAD CYCLE' includes a complex shift of perspective, from the predominant use of second person in parts I-V; to a mixture of first-and-second-person perspective in 'VI: *Public Holiday*', and a climactic first-person perspective in VII: *The Open Mic of Every Deya, Burning*'. I interpret the importance of this shifting perspective in 'THE RED THREAD CYCLE' related to its content as a narrative poem representing the harrowing experiences of rape survival. The use of this shifting poetic voice acts to separate the narrative voice of the poem from both the writer and the persona of the poem, to gift this otherwise singular experience to the reader. Ramlochan creates a shifting and disruptive poetic voice in 'THE RED THREAD CYCLE' against a sexual trauma which can inform and instruct the reader towards their own queer survivorship. This queer survivorship is again reflective of the relationship between Afrekete and Audre, as Afrekete explains how they are 'both going to make it because we're too tough and crazy not to' (*Zami* 298).

Ramlochan also provides a literary way 'to make it' in the face of the trauma of

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<sup>53</sup> Transcribed verbatim from 'The Power of Queer Caribbean Love: A Reading and Discussion Event with Shivane Ramlochan', which took place online 17 February 2022, presented in a collaboration by Nottingham Trent University's Postcolonial Studies Centre and Bonington Gallery <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBehfuGHsfA>> [accessed 5 March 2022]. From 20.30-21.10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



straight dominance by remaining too 'tough and crazy not too' (*Zami* 298), whilst providing the soulful understanding that toughness cannot exist without softness. *Haunting* attempts to share that which remains difficult for many to understand, or as Audre describes, 'how hard it was to explain to anyone who didn't already know' that 'soft and tough had to be one and the same for either to work at all' (*Zami* 298).

I read Ramlochan's adoption of unreal and exaggerated qualities in 'THE RED THREAD CYCLE' as the use of a myth to depict the unrepresentable horrors of rape. The biomythography of this representation follows Miguel Gualdrón Ramírez's conception that postcolonial depictions of trauma often defy both Anglo-American and Eurocentric conventions, by never reducing 'someone's unbearable pain to a sense' because this 'would be an affront to it' or an 'act of sublimation'.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, I suggest that Ramlochan writes for herself and queer others by using a mythic representation which never reduces her 'unbearable pain to a sense' and instead speaks with a poetic voice which provides a communal route to queer survivorship.<sup>56</sup> Crucially, instead of presenting the toughness of survival as hardness or coldness, this queer survivorship sustains the fact that 'soft and tough' must 'be one and the same for either to work at all' (*Zami* 298), because the poem's instructive voice is strong and assured whilst remaining nurturing and supportive for the rape survivor.

In the first part of 'THE RED THREAD CYCLE', '1. *On the Third Anniversary of the Rape*', the rape survivor is guided by a further iteration of a parentally

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<sup>55</sup> Ramírez, p. 157 emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

supportive guiding voice. Due to the perspective adopted by the poem, the poem's rape survivor becomes the poem's reader; they are thus provided with a script for disclosing rape: what to say, what to do, what not to say, and what not to do. In providing this information to the rape survivor, and by proxy the reader, '1. *On the Third Anniversary of the Rape*' represents the intolerable realities of surviving rape, whilst not reducing this 'unbearable pain to a sense'.<sup>57</sup> '1. *On the Third Anniversary of the Rape*' uses the didactic qualities of myth as a mode for teaching and warning others how to survive as the poem begins

Don't say Tunapuna Police Station.  
Say you found yourself in the cave of a minotaur, not  
knowing how you got there, with a lap of red thread.  
Don't say forced anal entry[.] (*Haunting* 35).

In this opening section Ramlochan begins her creative queer Caribbean imagining of the Greco-Roman Ariadne myth in '1. *On the Third Anniversary of the Rape*', by transposing its narrative particulars onto a rape survivor in the Trinidadian town of Tunapuna. Ariadne is the mythical daughter of King Minos who aided Theseus's escape from the minotaur, by having Theseus follow her thread out of the Cretan labyrinth.<sup>58</sup> I read the poetic personae's 'lap of red thread' as the grizzly outcome of a rape by a beast in 'the cave of the minotaur' (*Haunting* 35). Thus, the 'forced anal entry' of the poetic personae's trauma is transfigured into something more

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<sup>57</sup> Ramírez, p. 157.

<sup>58</sup> For a creative yet duly informative unpacking of the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, please refer to volume II of Stephen Fry's *Mythos; Heroes: Mortals and Monsters, Quests and Adventures* (London, UK: Penguin Random House, 2018). Specifically, the section 'Theseus' (pp. 372-402) and subsection 'Abandonment and Flight' (pp. 384-387). Differing versions of the Ariadne myth diverge surrounding her fate: either Ariadne was abandoned by Theseus in Crete and committed suicide, or she was taken to the island of Naxos by Theseus, abandoned, and then rescued by Dionysus: the god of wine and ecstasy.

bearable through the mythical 'lap of red thread' (*Haunting* 35). However, I further suggest that this 'lap of red thread' (*Haunting* 35) is an important reminder of the queer knowledge that the poetic persona provides for the rape victim and thus the reader. This knowledge exists within a literary space that enables the safety of secure self-narration for the rape survivor and the reader to, like Theseus, follow this thread to queer survivorship of rape, as well as the societal responses which result from publicly disclosing an experience of rape.

Ariadne's 'lap of red thread' (*Haunting* 35) reminds the rape survivor and the reader that their sage advice must be followed, if the survivor is not to become re-victimised. I propose that a difficult queer truth lies within the subtext of the poem's first line — '[D]on't say Tunapuna Police Station' — which reminds the rape survivor and the reader that those with the most power to help victims seek justice may not be safe allies. Not only are the police alluded to be the potential perpetrators of sexual violence, they also embody the real threat of re-victimization, as the rape survivor and reader are reminded not to upset the police by making sure to '[G]ive the minotaur time to write in the police ledger' (*Haunting* 35). The poetic voice parents the survivor to ensure that the realities of their experience are not turned against them, in a presentation of the softness necessary for toughness, and the toughness necessary for softness, to help stop the survivor being re-victimized. The poetic voice explains to the rape survivor that they should not say that they 'took out the garbage alone and he grabbed me by the waist' and to not say 'he was handsome' (*Haunting* 35). These seemingly innocuous truthful statements could be used to inform a victim blaming which supports the use of rape as a weapon that polices straight dominance. Thus, '1. *On the Third*

*Anniversary of the Rape'* provides advice to the survivor and the reader, so that that they do not make the mistake of telling the truth about their rape to the police without mythologizing their truth first, because, globally, the police are arguably policers of anti-queerness. Therefore, by providing the rape survivor and the reader with this queer knowledge related to the police, the poetic voice becomes Ariadne's thread guiding them to queer survivorship and away from the perils of straight policing.

The climax of '*1. On the Third Anniversary of the Rape'* continues its allegorical tracing of the Ariadne myth as the poetic voice implores,

Don't say rapist

Say engineer of aerosol deodorant because pepper spray is  
illegal,

anything is illegal

Fight back too hard, and it's illegal

>your nails are illegal

Don't say you have a vagina, say

he stole your insurance policy/ your bank boxes/ your first car  
downpayment

Say

he took something he'll be punished for taking,

not something you're punished for holding

like red thread between your thighs[.] (*Haunting* 35-36).

I read Ramlochan's adoption of second person perspective in this section as a reminder for the rape survivor, and thus the reader, to manipulate their disclosures of trauma as a way to remain safe in a straight dominated world. The poetic voice provides this insight to the reader as the second person perspective is a directive,

by explaining '[F]ight back too hard, and it's illegal' because '>your nails are illegal' (*Haunting* 35). The use of angle brackets creates a semiotic incision into the narrative of the poem, meaning that the pathos of '>your nails are illegal' cuts through any accepted straight knowledge that the police exist to protect citizens. The poetic voice explains that the 'pepper spray' the survivor used must be reimagined as an 'engineer of aerosol deodorant' because 'pepper spray is illegal' just as 'anything' that may protect a victim from sexual harm by an abuser 'is illegal' (*Haunting* 35). '1. On the Third Anniversary of the Rape' thus presents the difficult truth in real-world examples, globally, that there is a lack of protection and care for rape survivors and that the police may in fact harbour the rapist. As with all anti-queer violence explored in this thesis, this engagement is not meant to suggest that Caribbean violence against women is exceptional, but rather that this violence is a mirror for global realities. '1. On the Third Anniversary of the Rape' remains honest and firm as a form of softness, in its representation that no comfort will be provided for the rape survivor, because this seeks to negate the further pain of having this expectation disappointed. The didactic voice of the poem provides an honest and firm love for queer survivors to re-write their narrative for themselves and for their own well-being. '1. On the Third Anniversary of the Rape' thus acts as a parenting voice for the poetic survivor to provide readers with the protection of knowledge, which reflects the protective magic of words read in my previous chapter, that can ensure their queer survivorship.

The climax of '1. On the Third Anniversary of the Rape' returns to the 'lap of red thread' (*Haunting* 35), amid an imperative for the rape survivor to not remind the police of their womanhood, by declaring '[D]on't say you have a vagina'

(*Haunting* 35). The reason for this demand is unpacked as a simple, yet difficult, queer truth, that the misogyny involved with the global condition of anti-queerness has no concern for women's safety or of a woman's right to self-possession. The poetic voice advises the rape victim to say that the rapist instead 'stole your insurance policy/ your bank boxes/ your first car/ downpayment' but to never 'say you have a vagina', because this is not 'something he'll be punished for taking', but only 'something you're punished for holding' (*Haunting* 35). As '1. *On the Third Anniversary of the Rape*' explains, then, the 'lap of red thread' is a burden that no person should have to bear under a straight dominance policed by rape as the 'red thread between your thighs' (*Haunting* 35). This red thread is, however, subsequently a source of womanhood and therefore not only a symbol of pain but also one of empowerment. The queer survivorship coordinated in '1. *On the Third Anniversary of the Rape*' informs the reader of a difficult truth, that which makes you a threat to the status quo can also be used to keep you safe. With the 'red thread between your thighs' signalling the survivor's vagina, as that which they are 'punished for holding', it is also the 'lap of red thread' (*Haunting* 35) which has provided a map to queer survivorship. This includes difficult queer truth that, within a world dominated by straightness and whiteness related to men and masculinity, the rape of anyone who does not embody straightness, whiteness, and hegemonic masculinity will be treated within a sliding scale of a less and less serious crime, to barely even a crime at all. This difficult truth informs the global condition of anti-queerness as unspoken or unspeakable. The difficult truth that although rape is lawfully a crime, just as violence against queers is purported to be lawfully

forbidden in many countries, it remains societally sanctioned by a straightness and racism fuelling misogyny amid the global condition of anti-queerness.

### **Sharing the Extra Textual Self**

I read Ramlochan's mothering voices as a poetic variation of Lyndon K Gill's critical writing on queer self-possession, which he specifically relates to Blackness and queerness. For Gill, queers must develop an 'uncompromising self-worth' which cannot be forced and must instead be 'lovingly and securely placed'.<sup>59</sup> In regard to Gill's focus on Black queer studies, I respect the complexity of arguments surrounding the need for a separate and distinct Black queer studies, and I can see its important necessity against the, often unchecked, white supremacy within contemporary queer studies. However, I am also wary of the ways that collecting around any type of existent identity category can in turn categorise, essentialise, and homogenise individual human experience. Thus, I agree with the need for the 'queer self-possession' argued for by Gill but see it as being present within *Paradise* and *Haunting* regardless of identity. However, the reality remains that self-parenting remains more difficult or less difficult based on the privileges afforded to a person by a proximity to whiteness and straightness.<sup>60</sup> The path to queer survivorship remains individual for all, but queer survivorship itself can still be

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<sup>59</sup> Gill, p. 173.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

understood as communal under the caveat that acceptance, acknowledgment, and respect for the validity of each person's path being different from your own.

I have supported my readings of *Paradise* and *Haunting* as biomythography in this chapter by conceptually framing *Zami* as queer and Caribbean, amid the proposal that queerness and Caribbeanness create a global literary resistance.<sup>61</sup> As the prologue to *Zami* explains, Lorde's womanhood is that of 'woman forever' with her 'body, a living representation of other life older longer wiser' (*Zami* 5). I suggest that *Paradise* and *Haunting* are empowered by Lorde's biomythography because they are queer Caribbean writings whose own radicalness, uniqueness, and worldliness mean that Chin and Ramlochan are representative of 'woman forever' (*Zami* 5). Thus, I hear the queer Caribbean chorus of Chin, Ramlochan, and Lorde as a global melody for queer survivorship, which defies any boundaries of identity and nation, because it does not ignore oppressions that stem from identity without supporting the idea that an identity in and of itself means a similarity between people. *Haunting* and *Paradise* provide a map to the 'uncompromising self-worth' which is vital for queers, but is found differently, and which cannot be forced but must be 'lovingly and securely placed' in the form of a communal queer survivorship that is capable of being a global queer resistance.<sup>62</sup>

The communal queer survivorship that I have read in *Paradise* and *Haunting* through *Zami*, has been informed by the particularities of Chin's, Ramlochan's, and Lorde's literary selves as queer others. This echoes Lucy Evans' reading of literary identity when writing race that 'refuses the representative role of speaking for a

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<sup>61</sup> Gill, p. 173.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*



marginalized community' and 'also question[s] the assumption that their work reflects an authentic, extra-textual self'.<sup>63</sup> The questioning of an 'authentic, extra-textual self' creates an ambiguity related to life writing and its writer, which arguably allows for an understanding of the communal nature of queer survivorship that I have proposed in relation to biomythography.<sup>64</sup> Assumptions remain that the protagonist of life writing actually exists in lived reality, and not that writing a literary self involves many of the same creative manipulations employed in the creation of fictional characters. The communal queer survivorship of *Paradise* and *Haunting* necessarily employs manipulation of the 'authentic, extra-textual' self as experiences from Lorde, Chin, and Ramlochan reject speaking on behalf of a false homogeneity of queer Caribbean persons and thus allows their writerly persona to have a global impact.<sup>65</sup> *Zami*, *Paradise*, and *Haunting* appear to consciously deploy a literary manipulation of the authentic extra-textual experiences of their writers. Lorde, Chin, and Ramlochan write about the reality of surviving trauma as queer women of colour, whilst representing the horror of these traumatic experiences through a biomythography which eschews the singularity of an authentic, extra-textual self. By eschewing the preconceived idea of a fixed and actual self existing outside of their writing, Chin and Ramlochan allow their personal narratives of queer survivorship to become part of their readers beyond constructed borders surrounding nation, race, gender, sexuality, class, or otherwise.

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<sup>63</sup> Lucy Evans, 'Questioning Black Identity: Strategies of Digression in E.A. Markham's *Meet Me in Mozambique*', *Moving Worlds*, Special Issue: Region/Writing/Home: Relocating Diasporic Writing in Britain, 9:2 (2009), 125-136 (p. 134).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

This chapter has exposed how Chin and Ramlochan create singularly queer radical narratives by writing their own lives into *Paradise* and *Haunting* as biomythography. The biomythography of *Paradise* and *Haunting* is inherent, because Chin and Ramlochan both creatively manipulate their own lives into literary narratives to speak to, inspire, and galvanise a queer Caribbean communality that is global because of its queerness and Caribbeanness. Models of queer parenting and reflexive voice within *Paradise* and *Haunting* mean that they map a course to Lorde's 'house of difference' (*Zami* 268), which is a stable dwelling because it exists within the queer self, and is not based on any geographical location or category of identity. The otherwise disparate perspectives of Chin, Ramlochan, and Lorde related to identity thus have a communality which exists because of their differences, and not due to specific similarities. In a queer theoretical context, these commitments to difference have formed further evidence for understanding queer communality as forged through a distinctly personal disavowal of fixed belongings, or existent categories, alongside an embrace of individual personal difference inherent to the biomythography of *Paradise*, *Haunting*, and, of course, *Zami*

## Chapter Four: Trickster Utopia: Anansi Stories, *Black Leopard Red Wolf* (2019), and *Unravelling* (2019) as Folxtales

This chapter explores the ethos against societal conformity, which I suggest is shared by traditional Caribbean storytelling and queer speculative writing. I will evidence how Caribbean storytelling traditions and queer speculative writing are, arguably, always and already in communality as folxtales. My conception of folxtales is interpreted through a focus on a Caribbean trickster utopia with global resonance for queer resistance, imagined in *Black Leopard Red Wolf* (2019) by Marlon James; *Unravelling* (2019) by Karen Lord, and the Caribbean tradition of Anansi stories.<sup>1</sup> My ability to engage with Anansi stories through my queer critical framework is indebted to Emily Zobel Marshall's *Anansi's Journey* (2012); this chapter will provide queer interpretation supporting Marshall's contention that Anansi stories symbolise 'resistance at a psychological level (exemplified in folklore)'.<sup>2</sup> I propose that Anansi is a transgressive disruptor who arguably shares 'resistance at a psychological level' (*Anansi 4*) with the queer speculative worlds of *Leopard* and *Unraveling*. This 'resistance at a psychological level' (*Anansi 4*) will be shown to act queerly against any iteration of dominant power — colonial, neo-colonial, postcolonial, or otherwise — which reframes the straightness of folxtales into the queerness of folxtales. This reconceptualization seeks to highlight the

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<sup>1</sup> Marlon James, *Black Leopard Red Wolf: Dark Star Trilogy Book One* (London, UK: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), and Karen Lord, *Unravelling* (New York, NY: DAW Books, 2019). Hereafter, references will appear in-text from these published versions; referred to as *Leopard* and *Unravelling*.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Zobel Marshall, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance* (Kingston, JA: University of West Indies Press, 2012), p. 4. Hereafter referenced in-text from this published edition as *Anansi*.

global reach of queer Caribbean literary resistance, by revealing its communal ethos to be a commitment to non-conformity within modes of storytelling.

I will argue that, as folxtales, the queer interconnections of Anansi stories, *Leopard*, and *Unraveling* resist categorization by a straight identity. Therefore, the queerness of Anansi stories is shown to be reflected in *Leopard* and *Unravelling*, because they are each inseparable from distinctly Caribbean legends, myths, spirits, proverbs and humours. This chapter posits that Anansi is queer as well as Caribbean, whilst the terms queer and Caribbean are evidenced as coterminous with a global queer resistance, against a worldwide straight status quo. The inseparability of queerness and Caribbeanness, from global resistance, is interpreted as a trickster utopian worldmaking within the Caribbean literary imagination. This worldmaking is a space for queer communality: a connectivity based on difference that is more able to prioritize autonomy, rather than shared similarities which demand conformity to any variation of straight “norms”.

### **Queer as Folx**

Traditions of storytelling from the anglophone Caribbean are vast and varied, yet they still make up only a small selection of those from the entire Caribbean region.<sup>3</sup> Tricksters tales are particularly common within Caribbean storytelling traditions. For example, a recent anthology ‘contains almost twice as many trickster tales’ than any other; ‘so many that they have been divided into three chapters of their own’,

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<sup>3</sup> For more insight into traditional stories from the entire Caribbean region please refer to S. B. Elswit, *The Caribbean Story Finder: A Guide to 438 Tales from 24 Nations and Territories, Listing Subjects and Sources* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017).

with 'variations from Antigua, Jamaica, The Bahamas, Cuba, Grenada, and Haiti'.<sup>4</sup> Anansi is an anthropomorphised spider, with origins from Ghanaian Asante tribal history and *Ananse* being Twi for spider. Anansi is thus perhaps the original Spiderman, whilst also being closely related to the Brer Rabbit figure from storytelling traditions by enslaved persons in the Antebellum South: Anansi is sometimes referred to as Brer Anansi (Brother Anansi).<sup>5</sup>

Reflecting my previous chapter which explored biomythography as queer survivorship, Anansi storytelling includes a didactic mode for navigating personal survival through narratives that reject fixed binaries: morality and immorality; legitimacy and illegitimacy, or, as I suggest, normality and queerness. It is this queer relationship to binaries, coupled with Anansi's ambiguous morals, amid his controversies surrounding an Evangelical Christian status quo, which, arguably, make Anansi queer. Anansi continually evidences a 'quickness, sharpness and guile needed to turn the tables' (*Anansi* 139) against oppression, which stems from an imperative for people 'to think for themselves and reflect' (*Anansi* 118). Therefore, Anansi is a supernatural being who exposes the queer knowledge that anybody can resist colonial power and its legacies in postcolonial power structures, by exercising the queerness of their autonomy as a personal ethos committed to non-conformity.

Anansi is a trickster antihero who is preoccupied with hustling for himself, in a 'drive for survival and freedom' that 'can result in the oppression of others' (*Anansi* 93). This is important because it marks Anansi as queer in his approach to

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<sup>4</sup> S. B. Elswit, p. 7 and p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the connections between Anansi and Brer Rabbit please see Emily Zobel Marshall, *American Trickster: Trauma, Tradition and Brer Rabbit* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

survival, as Anansi does not adhere to the laws of any authority, amid straight conformity, which is often represented in storytelling by a more fearsome animal. Anansi advocates for himself — by any means necessary — rather than following societal rules, conventions, and prescribed morality that do not work in his favour. I read Anansi as a reflection of Andil Gosine’s recent exploration of queer drives, against continued colonialism in the Caribbean, because Anansi rejects a ‘continued masochistic attachment to an epistemology that from its inception had no regard for our well-being, our pleasures, or our worth’.<sup>6</sup> This continuation of a colonial mindset, of straightness and racism, is a mirror for global “norms” meaning that, as a spider person who rejects power structures outside of himself, Anansi is an embodiment of Gosine’s concept of privileging ‘animal as an identifier’ which can allow queers to ‘refuse ethnonationalism’.<sup>7</sup> Gosine describes how the refusal to see queers as a human “norm”, and to characterise their behaviours as closer to ‘animal as an identifier’, can be reappropriated as a queer understanding to ‘refuse ethnonationalism’.<sup>8</sup> This is of note because ethnonationalism is representative of the status quo of straight norms, including an uncritical acceptance of identities related to nation, gender, sexuality, and race as essential and which limit queer freedoms. Thus, a queer person can refuse to be categorised by identity, and instead revel in animality, to rebel in the liberation of being beyond-human and a free part of the natural world, because non-human animals are freed from the binds of human identities much like Anansi.

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<sup>6</sup> Andil Gosine, *Nature’s Wild: Love, Sex and Law in the Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Gosine, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

In this vein, Anansi refuses to be labelled as anything except animal despite his anthropomorphic nature, which confuses a binary between the morality of human animal and non-human animal behaviours. For example, in the story 'Brer Anansi, Tiger and Rat' Anansi and Rat come across four tiger cubs who they wish to cook in a stew. Anansi places two living cubs into a basket; Rat kills two of the cubs before putting them in his basket. Tiger arrives and demands to know where his cubs are; Anansi calmly explains that he found two lost cubs whilst handing his basket to Tiger. On realising that the cubs in Rat's basket are dead, Tiger chases Rat whilst leaving Anansi free from harm and seemingly innocent.<sup>9</sup> I read Tiger as symbolising not only colonial dominance, but the control exerted over any personal autonomy under the global condition of anti-queerness. This is because although Tiger is the dominant power through his size and strength he is able to be outwitted by Anansi as a queer creature who is willing to use his rhetorical skill to ensure his safety, whereas Rat is left to the mercy of the dominant power. Further aspects of Anansi's queerness converge in Kei Miller's description of

Anansi, with his high-pitched voice, the ease with which he leaves his web in full drag — rouge and lipstick and his wife's high-heeled shoes on all eight legs — off to con some other animal out of a pot of food or money.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Anansi's disruption of power is not defined by a fixed moral "goodness", and is decidedly queer in its representation, is important because as

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<sup>9</sup> For a selection of Anansi Stories please see S. B. Elswit, *The Caribbean Story Finder: A Guide to 438 Tales from 24 Nations and Territories, Listing Subjects and Sources* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Kei Miller, *Writing Down the Vision: Essays & Prophecies* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), pp. 101-102.

well as Anansi being an anti-colonial folk hero he can also be understood, and perhaps understood better, as a queer antihero.

Anansi stories have an oral history that has informed their popularity and global proliferation as a cultural form. Carolyn Cooper describes how 'the dialogic nature of oral/scribal and Creole/English discourse' of Caribbean orality infuses Caribbean writing with 'accreted wisdom of generations'.<sup>11</sup> I read this dialogic space, between the oral and the scribal, as aiding 'the metamorphosis and cross-cultural fertilization' of Anansi as 'an emblem of opposition against the oppressive power structures of the colonial system' (*Anansi* 8). This means that, through their orality, Anansi stories were able to evade being fixed by literary texts, whilst remaining a part of the Caribbean literary imagination, by transgressing boundaries between writing and orality. For this chapter, the orality of Anansi stories is important as it informs their lack of fixed literary identity and their itinerant existence from Ghana, to the colonial plantation, and into the contemporary globe. Anansi stories remain popular across the Caribbean, and globally, despite their support for non-conformity, and I suggest that it is the orality of Anansi stories which has aided their queer survival against all odds. In this chapter I propose that this ethos of non-conformity remains necessary, to defy a straight dominance because it is a legacy of colonial oppression. This means that the dangers of submitting to any authority outside of the self remains a foundation for queer storytelling within the Caribbean literary imagination.

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<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 87 and p. 4.



Due to my proposition that Anansi is a queer anti-hero, I apply the neologism ‘folxtales’ to reconceptualise folk storytelling away from a straightness which connects traditional forms with nationalism. I use the lack of fixed identity implied by the term folx, because this term resists extant categories of identity, with folx being a genderqueer term without a set definition. There has been little scholarly research undertaken on how the term folx came into contemporary queer parlance amid the fact that folx was only added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in June 2022.<sup>12</sup> The OED records the first usage of folx in 1833 as an American-English variation of the plural folk and highlights its first use as a queer term in 2001. Folx as a queer term shares similarity to other contemporary attempts at introducing queer inclusive language — for example, latinx and womxn — whose efficacy remains contentious.<sup>13</sup> However, I propose that the perspectival shift in language I present in this chapter — folktales to folxtales — is important because, as Marlene NourbeSe Philip explains, ‘far too many of us still take language for granted’ and it is ‘seldom treated as a raw material, no different than stone’.<sup>14</sup> Thus, I believe it is important for folktales to become understood as folxtales so as to not ‘take language for granted’, because this language use highlights the queerness of traditional forms and thus the traditional nature of queerness.<sup>15</sup>

The proliferation of Anansi stories continues through their contemporary popularity in children’s books, published both inside of and outside of African and

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<sup>12</sup> <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97811248>> [accessed 20 September 2022].

<sup>13</sup> Although not a scholarly resource, this blog gives an interesting overview of the term folx <<https://www.wellandgood.com/folx-meaning/>> [accessed 20 Septemebr 2022]. For example, it provides a prevailing theory surrounding the queer etymology of the term folx - that the use of the ‘x’ is based on algebraic foundations, as a neutral expression of an unknown entity.

<sup>14</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip, *Bla\_k: Essays & Interviews* (Toronto, CA: Book\*Hug, 2017), p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

African Caribbean communities throughout the Caribbean and its diaspora, as well as globally.<sup>16</sup> Anansi has been an influential character for many Caribbean writers whose work is, at least currently, not thought of as queer, including in Kamau Brathwaite's 'Ananse' (1969) and Andrew Salkey's *Anancy's Score* (1973). The connections I make in this chapter between Anansi stories and queer Caribbean speculative writing, argue for the importance of understanding traditional stories as a global queer literary resistance. Anansi's resistance is arguably a global queer resistance because, as a trickster who refuses compliance to imposed binaries, Anansi resists the straightness of separating normal from abnormal, insider from outsider, and right from wrong. Thus, in my readings in this chapter, queerness exists wherever Anansi appears because Anansi has always been queer as folx. I will highlight that any continued avoidance of Anansi stories as folxtales continues to support the straightness of a status quo, because it remains part of the coloniality straightness in the global condition of anti-queerness.

### **The Queer Speculation of Trickster Utopia**

*Leopard* and *Unraveling* both adhere to core tenets of speculative fiction, because their narratives exist outside of the parameters of recorded history or nature, amid what Guillermina de Ferrari proposes as a 'narrativization of contingency'.<sup>17</sup> This narrativization of contingency — meaning that which is possible but cannot be

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<sup>16</sup> A selection of examples of Anansi in children's literature include H. Patten, *Clever Anansi and Boastful Frog: A Caribbean Tale* (London, UK: Francis Lincoln, 1999); Trish Cooke and Anna Violet, *How Anansi Got His Stories* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Taiye Selasi, *Anansi and the Golden Pot* (London, UK: DK Children, 2022). The most recognisable example of Anansi's reinterpretation outside of African and Caribbean contexts is Neil Gaiman's *Anansi Boys* (London, UK: Headline Publishing, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Guillermina De Ferrari, 'Science Fiction and the Rules of Uncertainty', *Small Axe*, 24:1 (March 2020), 1-10 (p. 2).

certain — relies ‘on the fact that fate has alternatives and therefore is not inevitable’.<sup>18</sup> This chapter posits that a narrativization of contingency is important in regard to folxtales, because it rejects a fixed idea that fantasy literary worlds definitively are or definitively are not planet Earth. For example, because Anansi stories, *Leopard*, and *Unravelling* are each not explicitly located on another planet, their seemingly separate literary worlds could remain the same shared speculative Earth: long past, distant future, or multiverse realm. With these complexities in mind, narrative markers which are informed by existent Caribbean traditions in speculative fiction garner even greater interest, as folxtales, due to their ability to create a uniquely queer utopian perspective which challenges the “truth” of historical narratives.

The speculative creation of Anansi stories, *Leopard*, and *Unraveling* are proposed as exceptional in their queerness and Caribbeanness, which thus makes them globally important because, as queer Caribbean writer Faizal Deen explains, ‘imperial histories were not predicated on us sitting here’ because ‘they were zero future histories’.<sup>19</sup> As with Audre Lorde’s work interpreted in my previous chapter, queers ‘were never meant to survive’.<sup>20</sup> However, speculative fiction has also participated in naturalizing colonial conquests because, as Native American scholar Blair Topash-Caldwell explains, the ‘crucial period of the emergence’ of speculative

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<sup>18</sup> De Ferrari, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Cummings and Nalini Mohabir, ‘The Anger of Very, Very Restless Spirits’, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 26: 1 (April 2018), 10-24 (p. 13).

<sup>20</sup> Audre Lorde, ‘A Litany for Survival’ in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (London, UK: Silver Press, 2017), pp. 200-201. To read an open access version of Lorde’s ‘A Litany of Survival’ (1978) please see: <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147275/a-litany-for-survival>>\_[accessed 6 September 2021].

fiction was ‘the period of most fervent imperialist expansion’.<sup>21</sup> This means that speculative fiction existed ‘first in those countries heavily involved in imperialist projects’.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the canon of speculative fiction can be read as one which supported the idea of colonial domination, by including future federations who act as imperial powers, by demanding the resettlement or assimilation of indigenous people whilst extracting their natural resources. It is against that which Topash-Caldwell terms the ‘racism and empire building’ of speculative fiction, that I suggest queer Caribbean speculative writing has a global queer literary resistance as folxtales.<sup>23</sup>

Speculative fiction is a growing area of interest for literary critics. However, in the context of this chapter, the specific definition of speculative writing remains connected to a relationship with Ernst Bloch’s utopian imaginings of science fiction. In a conversation with Theodor Adorno, Bloch connects science fiction with utopian thinking by explaining that ‘our epoch has brought with it an “upgrading” of the utopian — only it is not called this anymore’ because ‘it is called science fiction’.<sup>24</sup> Bloch traces a connection between traditional storytelling and speculative fiction, as he sees ‘the oldest wish-images of the fairy tale’ as ‘filled with technological utopia’, and a ‘utopia of the better life and justice’.<sup>25</sup> Through Bloch’s ontology, this chapter explores how a queer reconceptualization of folktales as folxtales highlights that traditional storytelling already includes trickster utopian imaginings. This

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<sup>21</sup> Blaire Topash-Caldwell, ‘Sovereign Futures in Neshnabé Speculative Fiction’, *Borderlands*, 19:2 (2020), 33-54 (p.35).

<sup>22</sup> Topash-Caldwell, p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> Topash-Caldwell, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Bloch, p. 5.

understanding positions folxtales as Bloch's 'gold bearing rubble of the past', which is interpreted by Caroline Edwards as that which reveals the 'latent, residual and emergent potentialities that act *within the present*'.<sup>26</sup> The need to redefine traditional storytelling as folxtales is to reveal them as the 'gold bearing rubble of the past' whose queerness is 'aggregated out of what has been abandoned'.<sup>27</sup> It is the global queer resistance of traditional storytelling which this chapter argues can be aggregated, out of abandonment, by understanding queer speculative fiction as folxtales.

This chapter evidences how and why *Leopard* and *Unravelling* reflect the ethos of Anansi stories, by creating utopian imaginings that resist the colonising natures of literary canonicity amid speculative fiction. These imaginings include a trickery which counters colonialism in speculative writing, as well as the flattening of sexual and gender difference against global nationalistic "norms" that are reflected through the Caribbean. This trickery adds complexity against Violet Eudine Barriteau's description of a general tendency by critics to 'speak very loosely about Caribbean culture, as though it were a homogenous entity', because in reality Caribbean culture always 'remains a contested sight on closer inspection'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, understanding folktales as folxtales can be the conduit that Linden Lewis views as necessary for 'discussing the unpalatable and the tabooed in the area of gender and sexuality' in the Caribbean, and by extension the world because the

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<sup>26</sup> Caroline Edwards, 'Uncovering the "gold-bearing rubble": Ernst Bloch's Literary Criticism', *Utopianism, Modernism and Literature in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2013), 182-203 (p. 184 and p. 187 emphasis in original).

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, p. 184.

<sup>28</sup> Violet Eudine Barriteau, 'Theorizing Ruptures in Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean', *Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), ed. Linden Lewis, 25-52 (p. 13).

Caribbean always ‘remains a contested sight’.<sup>29</sup> For example, if folxtales are understood as a global queer literary resistance, through their queerness and Caribbeanness, then the normalisation of these terms as coterminous could become more palatable and less tabooed.

I propose that queerness and utopia collide wherever a queerly inclusive world is created in writing. This includes a queerness which rejects the idea that a present straight status quo is all that is possible, to validate living within a queer utopia of your own design. This can be conceptualised as a queer framing of Belinda Carlisle’s 1987 pop hit, because queer utopia makes ‘Heaven a place on earth’ against the idea of waiting for a “better” tomorrow which is promised by ideas of linear progression.<sup>30</sup> This means that queers can always ‘make Heaven a place on earth’ where ‘love comes first’ both for themselves and on their own terms.<sup>31</sup> This thinking reflects José Esteban Muñoz’s utopic imagining for a queer futurity, which centres ‘an active refusal and salient demand for something else’, perhaps more of Carlisle’s Heaven, which also means that queers must ‘strain our vision to force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now’.<sup>32</sup> Crucially, the trickster utopia imagined by Anansi stories, *Leopard*, and *Unraveling* remains anything but naïvely positive, because each traces Muñoz’s thinking around a ‘refunctioned notion of utopia’, which acts ‘in the service of subaltern politics’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Linden Lewis, ‘Introduction’, *Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), ed. Linden Lewis, 1-21 (p. 8), and Barriteau, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Rick Nowels and Ellen Shipley, *Heaven is a Place on Earth*, Belinda Carlisle (MCA 1987), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2F4INQFjEI>> [accessed 20 September 2022].

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 6, and *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Muñoz, *Utopia*, p. 49.

Never naïve but always hopeful, and more realist than idealist, ‘utopia can never be prescriptive and is always destined to fail’ but is no less Carlisle’s Heaven for this failure.<sup>34</sup>

This chapter posits that the trickster utopian imagining of queer ‘Heaven’ is ‘a place on Earth’ shared across Anansi stories, *Leopard*, and *Unraveling*, as a resistance tactic against the continued dominance of a colonial mindset — specifically, the entanglement of straightness and racism — within the present.<sup>35</sup> Amy Rushton describes how ‘a utopian sensibility about the future’ is ‘one that suggests alternative forms of collectivity beyond national identity’.<sup>36</sup> This chapter will argue that the trickster utopia of *Unraveling* and *Leopard* has crossovers with the non-conformist ethos of Anansi stories, to creatively represent queer Caribbean ‘forms of collectivity beyond national identity’ as a queer resistance against the global straight status quo. This collectivity is necessary to explain how the impossible is made possible through contemporary queer Caribbeanness, because this thrives despite a social conservatism that is a continuation of colonial epistemologies in the Caribbean. The history of this social conservatism is summarized by Barriteau as how ‘postcolonial Caribbean states inherited a complex set of social relations and structures from the Enlightenment discourses of liberalism’, which then ‘became embedded in new social relations when states actively pursued the modernization project in the post-Cold War postcolonial phase of social and economic transformation’.<sup>37</sup> This was followed by ‘late twentieth

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<sup>34</sup> Muñoz, *Utopia*, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> Please refer to footnote 30.

<sup>36</sup> Amy Rushton, *Re-Reading Tragic Africa: Development, Neoliberalism and Contemporary Fiction* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> Barriteau, p. 26.

century state systems' which 'mutated into conqueror Christianity fused with crass capitalism' meaning that this 'continues to shape the institutions of the postcolonial Caribbean state'.<sup>38</sup> These social realities inform the idea that, as Shalini Puri asserts, the contemporary Caribbean is 'both an instance and interrogation of postcoloniality' because its 'modalities, and consequences, are unparalleled' globally.<sup>39</sup> This includes the specifics of Caribbean history on the world stage as always merging past, present and future, and which complicates any perceived antiquity of Caribbean storytelling traditions, because Anansi stories lends themselves so well to trickster utopian imaginings. Conceptualising Anansi stories, *Leopard*, and *Unraveling* as folxtales creates a contemporary presence for Anansi within fantasy speculation. Reading queer Caribbeanness through *Leopard*, *Unravelling* and Anansi stories will expose their speculative worlds, as a trickster utopia, amid the queerness of folxtales, which provides queerness a tradition of macrosocial importance.

### **The Fantasy of Reality and the Reality of Fantasy**

The first volume from Marlon James' epic *Dark Star* trilogy, *Black Leopard Red Wolf* (2019), follows an antihero protagonist called Tracker through the speculative North Lands. The North Lands are inhabited by both human and supernatural beings formed from a rich West African-inspired cosmology, including witches, giants, demons, shape shifters, vampires, mermaids, angels, and more. The narrative of *Black Leopard* is Tracker's testimony to an inquisitor after he has

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post/nationalism and Cultural Hybridity* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 1.



completed his mercenary mission to find a missing child, known only as The Boy, alongside a fellowship that includes Sogolon the moon witch and Leopard the shapeshifter. Tracker has queer romantic and sexual relations throughout *Black Leopard* with his closest friend, Leopard; his true love, Mossi, and his sworn enemy Nyka. Prior to the final sections of *Leopard*, the mercenary fellowship has found and freed The Boy, and, at climax, Sogolon murders Leopard whilst The Boy aids in killing Mossi, followed by Nyka killing The Boy and dying by suicide.

I posit that *Black Leopard* creates the trickster utopian imagining of Anansi stories through their adoption of a queer chronotope — a literary temporality and spatiality — within the context of their fantasy setting. This queer chronotope lies in the perspective adopted by *Black Leopard*, which, as with Anansi stories, rescinds the stability of a “factual” past, present, or future, reality and a “factual” global location, from material legacies of colonial oppression. This interpretation is consistent with Michael Bucknor’s exploration of wider themes in James’ oeuvre which ‘exposes the restrictions of normalcy’ as he ‘shows the ways in which the “real world” is itself a fictional construct’.<sup>40</sup> As opposed to representing a straightforward “real world”, *Black Leopard* and Anansi stories impart a queer perspective about the straight world to the reader, that it is a fictional construct with a creative narrative. This means that when asked by the inquisitor what year the actions of *Black Leopard* took place, Tracker explains that it was in ‘my year’ which he lived ‘in full’ and then ‘left all of it behind when it ended’ (*Leopard* 99; original emphasis).

Throughout the narrative of *Black Leopard* there is no security provided that

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<sup>40</sup> Michael A. Bucknor, ‘Horizons of Desire in Caribbean Queer Speculative Fiction: Marlon James’s *John Crow’s Devil*’, *Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, eds. Bénédicte Ledent, Evelyn O’Callaghan, and Daria Tunca, 137-160 (p. 139).

Tracker's narrative is the truth, because at '*the middle of Tracker's many tales*' there remains no certainty of '*which be true and which be false*' (Leopard 97). Anansi stories are similarly not fixed by a factual time, place, or objective truth of reality, which means that, as Marshall explains, there is an imperative to 'avoid fixing the Anansi tales' as nationalistic cultural forms that belong solely to specific Caribbean locations. This imperative is due to the historical realities of Anansi stories having existed, 'from the villages of West Africa to the slave quarters of the Caribbean plantations', as well as for 'white children in great houses' and 'the hidden communities of the Maroons' (Anansi 9). For Marshall, it is precisely the 'malleability of meaning in the tales [of Anansi]' which 'facilitates their adaption to different global contexts and ensures both their survival and popularity' (Anansi 9). Thus, by circumventing a factual time and recognizable location, whilst remaining involved with cultural markers of Caribbeanness, I suggest that *Black Leopard* exists in the same mode as Anansi stories in a queer chronotope of trickster utopia. This trickster utopia acts to highlight and subvert everyday social rejections of queerness related to the Caribbean, and by extension the world, in their reflected realities amidst the global condition of anti-queerness.

A tactic through which "factual" time and space are manipulated in *Leopard* derives from the inclusion of African and Caribbean cultural markers, outside of a recognisably African or Caribbean location. I propose that this is a backscattering for the setting of Anansi stories, which also include African and Caribbean cultural markers without taking place in a recognisably African or Caribbean location. These cultural markers mean that readers and audiences are not presented with a fixed reflection of the "real" world, but are also not provided with the ability to totally

suspended their disbelief into fantasy. Thus, *Black Leopard* and Anansi stories represent fantasy and reality — truth and lies — within a continually playful, or trickster, spectrum. I posit that this queer chronotope means that *Black Leopard* and Anansi stories can be understood as the snake-woman Bunshi whose use of truth remains ‘as slippery as her skin’. Like Bunshi, *Black Leopard* takes the truth and ‘twists it, shapes it, and lines it up’ (*Leopard* 190) to reject any fixed or objective meaning. A trickster spectrum between fantasy and reality, truth and lies, agrees with a key aspects of Bloch’s utopian imagining, because *Black Leopard* ‘does not play around and get lost in an Empty-possible, but psychologically anticipates a Real-possible’.<sup>41</sup> Ruth Levitas interprets Bloch’s ontology as a move away from the ‘tendency to become lost in fantasy and memory rather than being oriented to real possibility’.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the complexity of The North Lands and the setting of Anansi stories as both real and fantasy, means that *Leopard* and Anansi stories are not ‘lost in an Empty-possible’ but remain ‘oriented to real possibility’.<sup>43</sup>

This real possible involves the tricksiness of the queer chronotope created by Tracker in *Black Leopard*, which reflects his own rebellious autonomy, and sees Tracker telling his narrative not ‘*from the dusk of it to the dawn of it*’ but instead moving ‘*as crabs do from one side to the next*’ (*Leopard* 100). Reflecting interpretations from Shani Mootoo’s *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014) in my first chapter, this queer chronotope is a fantasy that includes the real imperative for queer stories to be understood beyond the straight-forwardness of

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<sup>41</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. N. Plaice, S. Plaice, and P. Knight (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Press, 1986), p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Levitas, ‘Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia’, *Utopian Studies*, 1:2 (1990), 13-26 (p. 15).

<sup>43</sup> Bloch, p. 144.

received knowledge. By relating his story on his own terms, 'as crabs do from one side to the next' (*Leopard* 100), Tracker evidences the storytelling mode of folxtales as a queer, because it remains in the realms of the Real-possible instead of an Empty-possible. This trickster utopian imagining aligns with Bloch's *docta spes* which is read by Levitas as an 'educated hope' that 'operates as a dialectic between reason and passion'.<sup>44</sup> For queers, speculative stories are also folxtales that are Real-possible because they inspire 'the transformation of wishful thinking into will-full and effective acting', by depicting how to both find and exercise queer autonomy. Thus, the trickster utopian imagining of folxtales is not Empty-possible because it also inspires Levitas' interpretation of utopian drives as a 'move from the dream to the dream come true'.<sup>45</sup>

I posit that Tracker's consistent refusal of any authority outside of himself depicts the actions for queers to 'move from the dream to the dream come true'.<sup>46</sup> For example, when told of the 'need to respect your elders' Tracker explains that he will when he 'meets elders I can respect' (*Leopard* 68). The queerness of this worldview lies in its reliance on the individual over the collective, which includes a disavowal of the idea that supposed similarities based on identity will be able to form a community borne of essential connection. This disavowal is necessary for queer autonomy because any community based on identity is, by definition, exclusionary in its creation of familiar structures of insiders and outsiders whilst demanding for conformity to powers outside of the self. In contrast, Tracker refuses his community elders until he 'meets elders I can respect' (*Leopard* 68) with a

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<sup>44</sup> Levitas, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Levitas, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

rebelliousness which parallels Anansi's ethos of non-conformity that some critique as a 'selfish individualism' (*Anansi* 174). The supposed selfish individualism of Anansi is rejected by a contemporary Caribbean status quo, to the extent that there have been political demands for schools to replace 'the tales of Anansi with stories such as Pinocchio' (*Anansi* 174). Anansi stories have not only been perceived as having 'a legacy that created suspicion in Jamaican society', but also as fostering 'a mistrust among Jamaican people; a distrust of the system and mistrust of one another' (*Anansi* 174). Rather than simply rejecting this perspective, I suggest that a foundational 'distrust of the system and mistrust of one another' (*Anansi* 174) can be reframed as a negativity which empowers queer freedoms, as a way for people 'to think for themselves and reflect' (*Anansi* 118), which sanctions the critical thinking necessary to create your own trickster utopia.

I read a kind of trickster utopian imagining highlighted by James in an interview with Roxanne Gay about his *Dark Star Trilogy*. James explains to Gay that 'in lot of African stories, the trickster is telling the story, so you already know this is an unreliable narrator'.<sup>47</sup> African tales, including Anansi stories, were recited by 'the great storytellers of their families, who, coincidentally, were also great liars'.<sup>48</sup> This unreliability is important because, as well as positioning Tracker explicitly as 'the trickster' narrator of *Black Leopard*, it also evidences a narrative form whose foundation is trickery because 'great storytellers' are simply 'great liars'.<sup>49</sup> An understanding of 'great storytellers' as 'great liars' in *Black Leopard* further

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<sup>47</sup> Christian Orozco, 'Roxanne Gay and Marlon James explore his African myth-inspired *Black Leopard Red Wolf*', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 February 2019 <<https://www.latimes.com/books/la-et-jc-marlon-james-roxane-gay-20190221-story.html>> [accessed 1 December 2022].

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Please see footnote 47.

highlights the queer potential of interpreting traditional stories as folxtales, because, despite their Caribbean origins as an anti-colonial resistance, Anansi stories continue to resist a contemporary postcolonial status quo. Anansi's ethos of non-conformity is based on adhering strictly to personal autonomy, which was specifically fashioned in the Caribbean as a weapon to resist the colonial status quo. However, Anansi continues to resist the present Caribbean status quo which means it can be inferred that the straight status quo is a remnant of coloniality.

Tracker's self-possession is as instructive and didactic as Anansi stories, because, as his shapeshifter lover Leopard explains, everyone should do 'as gods do' for 'of all the terrible features of your form, shame is the worst' (*Leopard* 76). It is not that shame is not felt by Tracker and Leopard but that it is ignored which stops Tracker and Leopard from becoming beholden to other's perceptions of them. Thus, I suggest that The Leopard and Tracker connect with the ethos of Anansi, to propose a route to queer communality through a reframing of negative affect as a connector. My reading reflects Nadia Ellis's critique of queerness as 'a mode of collectivity constituted around "negative" affect' which 'emerges as a compelling alternative to compulsory sameness'.<sup>50</sup> This negativity remains a utopian drive because it contains hope, and this hope is relevant because, as Bloch and Adorno explain, hope 'is the opposite of naïve optimism' and it is 'the opposite of security' because 'the category of danger is always within it'.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, understanding Leopard's repeated refrain that that 'nobody loves no one' (*Leopard*

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<sup>50</sup> Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Bloch and Adorno, p 16.

62), meaning that interpersonal love does not exist, is paradoxically a better path to finding true love.

For example, as Tracker explains ‘love can do nothing other than love’ (*Leopard* 381), so it is not that love does not exist but rather that true love cannot come from others and must be forged in the self. This critique comes closer to one of a very few, arguably, knowable human truths: that self-love is the only type of love which can be unconditional or non-contingent and can be objectively known to exist. This known truth relies on the fact that self-love is the only kind of love which does not require knowledge of another person’s true feelings, because these unfortunately cannot be proven. As Sophie Lewis explains, currently, ‘the only way we know how to offer security to one another’ is ‘pretending that our love is non-contingent’.<sup>52</sup> But Tracker refuses to ‘pretend that’ any ‘love is non-contingent’ as an uncompromising commitment to his queer selfhood, which I propose as a foundation of trickster utopian imagining.<sup>53</sup> Instead of external validation, self-love must be fully embraced to allow for the creation of connections between people which accept difference, as opposed to the fantasy of a similarity which cannot be proven to exist. I suggest that this connection is that which José Esteban Muñoz recognizes as ‘a still-nascent articulation of a particular mode of belonging-in-difference’.<sup>54</sup> In the context of *Black Leopard*, the necessity for this belonging-in-difference comes from the realities of surviving a straight dominated world which I propose is reflected by the queerness of Anansi stories.

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<sup>52</sup> Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (London, UK: Verso, 2022), p. 85.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Muñoz, *Brown*, p. 46.

The necessity of belonging-in-difference stems from the harsh realities of lived experience, which Tracker explains as a matter of power dynamics when, in quizzing his lover Mossi he declares that ‘you think as they do that suffering comes from cruelty or escaping is a matter of choice or means, when it is a matter of power’ (*Leopard* 6). This ‘matter of power’ (*Leopard* 6) is relevant because it rescinds any moral judgment upon Tracker, and by extension Anansi, as selfish individualists. Here, Tracker represents the discrepancy of Anansi as being ‘a purveyor of corruption and a dangerous role model’ because his ‘empowerment’ is ‘in the face of the harsh realities of contemporary Jamaican life’ (*Anansi* 141), meaning that it is not ‘a matter of choice or means’ but ‘a matter of power’ (*Leopard* 6). This reflects the nature of “bad” and “good” related to the context of protection magics interpreted in my second chapter. The celebrated Caribbean social critic Rex Nettleford reflects this sentiment, in his explanation that ‘in order to cope with an unstraight and crooked world one needs unstraight and crooked paths’.<sup>55</sup> Further agreeing with explorations in my first chapter, via Édouard Glissant’s *detournement* (rerouting), this is another literary disorientation which demands work and attention from the reader, and that ensures a queer Caribbean narrative is not reduced to straight terms. Not being reduced to straight terms means not judging queer actions, that may necessarily include ‘unstraight and crooked paths’, because these paths are morally relative within the global condition of anti-queerness.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Rex Nettleford, Introduction to W. Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story: Annancy Stories, Digging Sings, Dancing Times and Ring Tunes* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966) p. xiii.

<sup>56</sup> Nettleford, p. xiii.



I have argued so far that reconceptualising folktales as folxtales makes them a useful space for holding up a mirror to the continued coloniality of straightness. I further suggest that the coloniality of straightness exists not only within a status quo, but also within anticolonial theories and practices which do not centre queer freedoms and continue to support straight structures. One such example of continuing to support straight structures lies in the ideation of familial “norms”, and their reflections in social and national identity making, which are arguably undermined by both Anansi stories and *Black Leopard*. Tracker explains that ‘all fathers should die as soon as we are born’ and that ‘he does not hate’ his mother but he also ‘has nothing for her’, because when she dies Tracker ‘will not mourn’ and he ‘will not laugh’ (*Leopard* 65). This follows Anansi as a destroyer of existent structures; a non-conformist who not only informs ‘a mistrust among Jamaican people’ but also ‘a distrust of the system and mistrust of one another’ (*Anansi* 174). This means that for Anansi and Tracker, there is a no need to conform to a societal pressure which demands they have an uncritical view of the concept of family, and its reflection in a mandatory national belonging.

To be clear, I do not mean to homogenise the concept of family or nation because these exist in multiform variations across the globe. In a Caribbean context, Leighan Renaud has examined the preponderance of matrifocal Caribbean family unit, whilst still capturing all ‘the complexity of all these family dynamics’ beyond a singular “norm”.<sup>57</sup> I agree with Renaud’s argument that Caribbean family dynamics ‘repurpose genealogy and grant it metaphorical agency’ related to the

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<sup>57</sup> Leighan Renaud, ‘Representations of Matrifocality in Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean Fiction’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, School of English, 2018), <<https://hdl.handle.net/2381/43169>> [accessed 1 November 2022], pp. 22-23.

genealogical trauma of historical African Caribbean enslavement.<sup>58</sup> However, these matrifocal structures remain predicated upon a recognisable straightness, which also tends to frame the nation as an extension of the family unit. Reflecting M. Jacqui Alexander's assertion that 'heterosexuality becomes coterminous with and gives birth to the nation', the concept of family is straight and it continues to 'give birth to the nation'.<sup>59</sup> My point here is that any recognisable conception of family remains inseparable from a more insidious cultural "norm": the demand to conform to a family belonging and by extension the demand to conform to a national belonging. Furthermore, the concept of family or nation, in whatever form, can limit queer autonomy if conformity to a shared identity is the price for familial or national belonging. This idea can be understood through the lyrical musings of contemporary Jamaican popular musical artist Shenseea, in her collaboration with the American singer Zum, from 'Rebel' (2020). The refrain of 'Rebel' is for women to remain '[A]utonomous' because no one, including the family and the nation, '[C]yaah try cum program me' [Can't try to program me]. As Shenseea also asserts, 'Nanny neva guh a war/ [F]imi siddung inna 2020 slavery' [Nanny of the Maroons didn't go to war/ for me to be in 2020 slavery].<sup>60</sup> Reflectively, I suggest that it is the demand for conformity to a family or nation that Tracker and Anansi stories reject, through engagement in the trickster utopian imagining of folxtales, which include not to 'siddung inna 2020 slavery' [be in 2020 slavery] of a straight status quo and

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Jacqui M. 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 (1994), 5-23 (p. 10).

<sup>60</sup> Zum feat. Shenseea, *Rebel*, (Liquid Sunshine Riddim, 2020). To watch a rendition of *Rebel* please see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od4QdGa7I20>> and for translation from Jamaican Patwah to Standard English please see <<https://reggaetranslate.com/song/rebel/287>> [accessed 1 December 2022].

that autonomy is key to allowing for the diversity of connection between people to thrive.<sup>61</sup>

Tracker makes his resistance to the ideation of family related to the nation clear, because, when conformity to a tribal belonging is demanded he declares that ‘Elders are stupid, and their beliefs are old’ (*Leopard* 35). Tracker also explains that if you ‘stay with family’ then ‘blood will betray you’ and that ‘to know family after they are gone is better than to watch them go’ (*Leopard* 35). This rejection of conventional concepts of familial and national belonging does not mean I am suggesting that these forms are globally homogenous, but that in macrosocial terms there is an ideation of familial and national belonging. However, the foundation of literary world-making in *Black Leopard* is a trickster utopia founded on the knowledge, which queers often know all too well, that if you ‘stay with family’ then ‘blood will betray you’ (*Leopard* 35). The reason that family structures may be known too well as a form of betrayal for queers relates to the difficult reality that family can restrict queer autonomy. This difficult reality exists because, even with the best of intentions, a family unit often diminishes the capacity for a person to express a selfhood which is unmitigated and unpoliced by outsiders. Arguably, in order to live an autonomous queer life there can be no outsider — family, nation, or otherwise — that has control over the self. Tracker embodies this autonomy by taking power over his own original name, and to become Tracker, because his name was his ‘father’s possession’ so he ‘left it by the gate’ (*Leopard* 9). Tracker’s name has no meaning outside of himself except as a mercenary hunter,

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<sup>61</sup> Please see footnote 60.

much as *Ananse* as the Ghanaian Twi word for spider gives Anansi no meaning beyond his physical form. I posit that this representation of names and naming depicts how queers must decide for themselves what parts of their self are in fact theirs, and what parts are those imposed by the family and by extension the nation. Tracker reminds queers that he lives his queer life defined by himself alone, which means leaving the false comforts of family and nation 'by the gate' (*Leopard* 9).

In my interpretation then, the concept of family has the potential to restrict an expression of selfhood, which is coupled with the fact that the demand for an uncritical understanding of the family can be dangerous, because, as Sophie Lewis regrettably reminds her readers, 'the family is where most of the rape happens on this earth, and most of the murder'.<sup>62</sup> Tracker embodies a seemingly selfish individualism, which is arguably closer to the realities of human relationships, and which prioritises personal safety: that 'nothing means nothing and nobody loves no one' (*Leopard* 170). Rather than being simply nihilistic, this viewpoint retains a utopic imagining as it takes Bloch's understanding that 'people cannot make of themselves what has not already previously begun with them' to a logical, if seemingly extreme, conclusion. If 'nothing means nothing and nobody loves no one' (*Leopard* 170), then more can be made of the queer self because it is all that can be relied on. Tracker evidences this reality as he learns that 'true wisdom is never without, it is within' for it 'was always within' and '[W]ithin always' (*Leopard* 584). Amid the perspective that wisdom is '[W]ithin always' (*Leopard* 584), the potential nihilism that 'nothing means nothing and nobody loves no one' (*Leopard*

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<sup>62</sup> Lewis, p. 9.

170) becomes reoriented as a personal strength. Tracker becomes stronger in his resistance to any version of collective love, by breaking away from any expectation that it can exist. Tracker 'had a purpose given to me by my blood, my father and my grandfather' reflecting the demand for social and family conformity. However, Tracker 'had purpose' and then he 'told them to go fuck themselves with it' (*Leopard* 235). Tracker represents that achieving queer autonomy means telling others to 'go fuck themselves' with any other 'purpose given' (*Leopard* 235) by family or nation.

Anansi stories also similarly do not idealise familial or national loyalty, but transcend these ideas as boundaries to selfhood, because to 'survive in these conditions' means to free your mind from the chains of other people's expectations: 'to duck and dive and, most importantly to use your brains and have a plan' (*Anansi* 164). The queerness of these actions lies in Marshall's further description that Anansi embodies 'the champion of oppositional practices in everyday life' (*Anansi* 164). Championing oppositional practices, means acting from your own personal autonomy and refusing to allow negative affect to be a shaming device that shapes your own behaviours. Exercising personal autonomy also means no longer putting yourself in harm's way of a family, because, as Lewis explains, 'no one is likelier to rob, bully, blackmail, manipulate, or hit you, or inflict unwanted touch, than family' and its extension in national belonging.<sup>63</sup> Tracker agrees with this idea when he explains that the ideal family is a dead family, because 'a dead thing never lies, cheats or betrays', and a family is a 'place where all three bloomed

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<sup>63</sup> Lewis, p. 9.

like moss' (*Leopard* 68). Lying, cheating, and betrayal inarguably remain core aspects of human behaviour, and therefore by extension families and nations, meaning that these are positioned in a family and a nation as behaviours that must be accepted without critique. *Black Leopard* represents the worrying naïveté of conformity to straight concepts of family and nation, within a literary setting where power structures of family, identity, and belonging are able to be safely critiqued and learned from.

*Black Leopard* and Anansi stories represent that queers are able to transcend any existent patterns of straight conventions, to gain freedom from the family and the nation. However, this freedom is not promised to be a comfortable experience by either *Black Leopard* or Anansi stories. Those who have been taught idealised concepts of family and nation since birth will, of course, find it difficult and uncomfortable to reject what is known in favour of the unknown. In this way, the family and nation represent the bondage from which Tracker frees the enslaved persons of Dolingo in *Black Leopard*. Tracker notes that the joy of the freemen of Dolingo will be temporary when 'the slaves see they would rather the bondage they know than the freedom they do not' (*Leopard* 468). This means that danger lies in the fear of freedom that is new, over the safety of familiarity, but, as Paul Gilroy explains, 'the family' should never supply 'the only symbols of political agency' because we must continually 'remind ourselves that there are other possibilities'.<sup>64</sup> This supports the readings from my previous chapter, related to queer self-parenting, and my first chapter related to de-familiarising familiarity, which means

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London, UK: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p. 207.

that it is not a refashioned family structure which must be created, but rather that these concepts must be self-imagined and self-empowered. If each person were to become their own mother, father, brother, sister, and so on figure, then the need to conform to anything outside of the queer self becomes unnecessary. Thus, it is not the type of family structure — nuclear, matrifocal, or otherwise — which must be sacrificed for queer autonomy, but that any conception of family which lies outside of the self must be questioned, because this only ever takes a person's self-empowerment and places it in the hands of another.

As Tracker explains, fealty should never be presupposed to a family because even though 'all gods make', there is 'no reason to worship them', whilst he explains that 'my mother and father made me' he also declares that he doesn't 'owe them worship for it' (*Leopard* 356). This idea reflects Donna Haraway's assertion that 'ties through blood—including blood recast in the coins of genes and information—have been bloody enough already'.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to 'ties through blood', my conception of queer communality involves connections between those who embrace queer difference, and do not demand similarity from others, because models of false similarity have 'been bloody enough already'.<sup>66</sup> The reason that this queer difference must reject the ideation of family and nation is because, even when these are recast as chosen family, these structures remain inseparable from a straight status quo. The stakes of rejecting family must be high because the rewards of personal autonomy remain higher. As Tracker learns on his narrative journey throughout *Black Leopard*, those in power most often 'achieve nothing because

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<sup>65</sup> Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. Female Man\_Meets\_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), p. 265.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

they risk nothing' (*Leopard* 586), which reflects my readings above that there cannot be a queer autonomy that conforms to current models of family and nation, because this risks nothing. The stakes of losing family and nation are necessarily high to achieve actual results. Queers need to think in radically different ways if they are to circumscribe straight patterns of behaviour; for example, the ways in which a straight status quo will 'risk nothing' and ultimately 'achieve nothing' (*Leopard* 586) in terms of new relational models, which keep the concepts of family and nation and anti-queerness intact whilst professing to engage in an anti-colonial praxis.

Both the family and the nation are often connected by a societal pressure that demands an uncritical or unconditional respect or love, and that collects around an idea of sameness based on national or family groups. As Olive Senior explains, in the Caribbean, 'although family forms greatly differ from the nuclear ideal', 'all kinds of unions express conformity' to 'ideals of sexual division of labour' and to a 'patriarchal family structure'.<sup>67</sup> It is the reality that 'all kinds of unions express conformity' which is undermined by the queer perspectives of *Black Leopard* and Anansi as queer folxtales.<sup>68</sup> Arguably, any construction of family is a dangerous space regardless of race, geographical location, or class. This means that critiquing family and nation as a global queer necessity, means critiquing all families and nations as a queer necessity, even, as Lewis explains 'perish the thought, *your* complex, financially struggling, queer and/or radically marginalised kinship

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<sup>67</sup> Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 102.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



network'.<sup>69</sup> Although I can see its potential problematics, I also view the importance of Lewis' question, 'what would it mean not to *need* the Black family?', which I reframe: what would it mean not to *need* the queer family?<sup>70</sup> In support of her ideas, Lewis cites Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh in their 'tremendous answer to the question 'what would you put in the place of family?', which 'was, simply: "Nothing"'.<sup>71</sup> Tracker and Leopard both express extreme versions of rejecting family which make them useful characters to understand why this perspective functions as a form of queer autonomy, because they need no new structure instead of the family and 'simply: "Nothing"' but the queer self, which can connect with other another queer self by not demanding similarity or conformity.

*Black Leopard* is arguably connected to the ethos of Anansi stories, as folxtales, because they both critique the logic of any version of a status quo which demands conformity to an identity. This demand reflects Anansi because he is always out for himself beyond family or national loyalty, as part of the complexities of 'Jamaica's continued celebration of, and fascination with, individuals who have challenged the dominant colonial order' (*Anansi* 104). However, crucially, I suggest that Anansi cannot be read as a creative variation of Jamaica's national heroes, because, like Tracker, Anansi remains too queer for nationalistic comfort.<sup>72</sup> The queerness of *Black Leopard* and Anansi stories as folxtales is too queer for nationalistic comfort, because their trickster imagining which undermines the

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<sup>69</sup> Lewis, p. 20 emphasis in original.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> Michèle Barrett and Marcy McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family* (London, UK: Verso, 1991), p. 158.

<sup>72</sup> To date, Jamaica has seven official national heroes: the first Prime Minister of Jamaica, Alexander Bustamante; the political activist, Marcus Garvey; the businessman, George William Gordon; the statesman, Norman Manley; the resistance fighter, Nanny of the Maroons; the Baptist War (1831-32) leader, Samuel Sharpe, and Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) leader, Paul Bogle.

power of a dominant straight narrative. *Black Leopard* and Anansi stories evidence that straightness is a singular narrative, of a continued colonial mindset, but that this is not the only narrative and that other options are always available.

The narratives of Anansi stories and *Black Leopard* are folxtales because they take ‘unstraight and crooked paths’ to reflect an ‘unstraight and crooked world’.<sup>73</sup> This ability lies within their literary imagining as a form of trickster utopia related to representations of identity, family, nation, truth, storytelling, and complicating fact from fiction, as well as reality from fantasy. Thus, Anansi and Tracker are neither simply a beacon of empowerment or a bad influence because they are simultaneously both. Tracker is reminded of this complexity when he listens to tales from Sogolon whose tales

felt like I was around children waiting on the grandfather to tell them a new story about old Nan-Si, the spider demon who was a man once (*Leopard* 159).

Placing Anansi into the literary world of *Black Leopard* as the ‘spider demon who was a man once’ (*Leopard* 159), arrives alongside a queer truth of trickster utopian imagining: ‘to never take the story of any god or spirit or magical being to be all true’, because, ‘if god created everything, was truth not just another creation?’ (*Leopard* 159). I suggest that the complexities and ambiguities of the term folx lend themselves particularly well to queer storytelling traditions, because the foundations of Anansi stories included a desire to ‘confirm that the world is not constructed in binary oppositions, but is confusing, ambivalent, challenging and contradictory’ (*Anansi* 179). Fixed binary logics inform colonial power structures —

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<sup>73</sup> Nettleford, p. xiii.

good and bad, white and black, civilisation and wildness — and conceptualising folxtales questions this colonial power because isn't colonial 'truth not just another creation?' (*Leopard* 159).

Conceptualising the term folxtales highlights a queer complexity within trickster utopian imagining, which means that *Black Leopard*, like Anansi stories, remains 'confusing, ambivalent, challenging and contradictory' (*Anansi* 179). The complexity of this queer Caribbean speculation resists a binary of fact and fiction because binaries are 'just another creation' (*Leopard* 159) in the coloniality of global straight dominance. This dominance lies in the global "norm" of a fixed and essential identity which is only ever one version of the truth. *Black Leopard* functions in the same mode as Anansi, to reveal that the path to queer communality lies beyond false structures of community that surround identity, and instead lies in uncomfortable and unfamiliar new modes of relating. The queer ethos of Anansi stories is communal with *Black Leopard*, to imagine a trickster utopia which is unbound by any similarities, and instead connects through an opposition to social conformity, which is not something to wait for but something that can already be created by each individual, autonomously.

### **Embracing Your Inner Antihero**

*Unraveling* (2019) is the sequel to Karen Lord's *Redemption in Indigo* (2010), with a unique narrative that includes traditional Caribbean folk figures and whose sole crossover character, Paama, is mother to the twin male protagonists, Yao and Ajit. Yao and Ajit are also known by their Elemental names, Chance and Trickster; Elementals are supernatural beings who exist outside of human perception.

Elementals hold dominion over the Earth through web-like labyrinths which are woven by Chance and Trickster, to create access points to specific temporalities of the human world. Trickster is of particular interest to this chapter as an embodiment of Anansi, because he can transfigure himself into a spider whilst creating labyrinths from his webs. The detective-style narrative of *Unraveling* takes place within Trickster's labyrinthine realm, after forensic psychologist Miranda Ecouvo is saved by Trickster from her imminent death.

I suggest that Trickster represents the utopian imagining I have examined so far in *Black Leopard*, and which reflects Anansi's ethos of non-conformity as 'ever changing and eternally ambiguous' (*Anansi* 180). Trickster mirrors Anansi's ethos, as a fundamental necessity for living an autonomous queer life, by rejecting societally imposed narratives of morality and embracing being an antihero. Being this trickster anti-hero includes a commitment to non-conformity against social conventions, which in turn allows for the freedoms of a moral relativism defined autonomously by each individual. This moral relativism is part of a didactic mode of Anansi storytelling, or, as explored in my previous chapter, a queer map to survivorship, because I propose that *Unraveling* too engages in 'teaching techniques of survival and resistance' (*Anansi* 94) as 'a type of toolkit or form of mental revision' (*Anansi* 126). Trickster encapsulates this didactic mode for queer survival, by recounting his own regrets in the practice of accepting himself; explaining that 'I still regret the time I wasted when I was . . . when I was learning to become myself' (*Unraveling* 25). For Trickster, 'learning to become myself' is similar to the journey taken by Tracker in *Black Leopard* in being sovereign to himself without a community, family, or nation. Therefore, I propose that Trickster is a

creatively remixed Anansi, who defines himself by his own moral compass, and in turn depicts objective morality as a construct which supports straight dominance. Fixed ideas of morality are shown to stem from a culture borne of communities, families, and nations In *Unravelling* which means that they remain tied to a demand for straight conformity.

An example of this critique of straight morality lies in Trickster's explanation to his brother Chance that the value of a human life is only ever based on his perception, because he does not care about humans 'unless they happen to be humans I know' (*Unraveling* 39). Trickster describes this relativist morality as the norm, because 'a lot of humans think the same way I do' whilst viewing Chance as 'too tenderhearted' (*Unraveling* 39). I suggest that Trickster addresses a difficult reality of the human condition, that, when it comes to survival, nothing can be reduced to a binary of good and bad or hero and villain. Later, Chance recognises the reality of relative morality in his reply to Trickster's attempt to console him over a mistake, for, when Trickster tells him that 'you meant well' Chance questions 'is that ever enough?' (*Unraveling* 75). I interpret a trickster utopian imagining in Chance's questioning — 'is that ever enough?' (*Unraveling* 75) — because, as explored earlier through *Black Leopard*, negative affect can be understood as part of the critical thinking necessary to ensure queer survival. This queering can be understood through Bloch's description that 'every criticism of imperfection' already 'presupposes the conception, and longing for, a possible perfection'.<sup>74</sup> So, following Bloch, 'if we had not already gone beyond the barriers, we could not even

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<sup>74</sup> Bloch and Adorno, p 16.

perceive them as barriers', which means that recognising present problematics — if anything is 'ever enough?' (*Unraveling* 75) — is not the negation of hope but instead represents the ability to go 'beyond the barriers' and imagine beyond the straight present.<sup>75</sup>

For Trickster, 'the unconscious villainy of well-meaning people' is what most 'interests me' (*Unraveling* 269), which arguably highlights that utopia can already exist in the present beyond a binary of good and evil. By explaining that even 'well-meaning people' enact 'unconscious villainy' (*Unraveling* 269), Trickster subverts an understanding that being a "good" human will not cause harm to others. So, if the idealisation of being "good" is replaced by simply being human, then idealised "norms" of straightness no longer require a queer villain for straightness to be "good". Trickster creates his own imagining of utopia by remaining, like Anansi, 'confusing, ambivalent, challenging and contradictory' (*Anansi* 179) so that "norms" can be rejected, and humanness can be defined by himself alone, beyond the straight conformity of being "good". This commitment to being human, rather than being "good", is summated by Trickster at the climax of *Unravelling* in his declaration that in order to live 'you are not meant to do anything' because 'your only task is to be' (*Unraveling* 287).

For Marshall, Anansi's ethos remains 'confusing, ambivalent, challenging and contradictory' (*Anansi* 179) in a reflection of moral complexities surrounding Maroon resistance, because it shows 'how acts of survival, such as those used by the Jamaican Maroons, can occasionally *undermine* slave resistance' (*Anansi* 92;

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

original emphasis). I propose that this resistance has crossovers with the ways that queer living can ‘occasionally *undermine*’ (*Anansi* 92) idealisations of an LGBT+ community, which is collected solely around identity. By eschewing a perspective that any behaviour which is necessary for survival is essentially “good” or “bad”, Trickster is able to present the queer reality of being human: that there is no essential “good” or “bad” when it comes to survival, because there is only living. The pragmatism shown by Trickster to not care about humans ‘unless they happen to be humans I know’, allows for a concise view on reality to be laid bare, which reflects the precise cuts of critique via Occam’s Razor read through my first chapter, that ‘a lot of humans think the same way’ (*Unraveling* 39). A moral relativism which rejects a binary of “good” and “bad” remains integral to Anansi stories, due to the complicated realities of resistance to colonialism represented by Ghanaian Asante and Maroon cultures. For, ‘the Asante were both captured as slaves as well as involved in the selling of slaves’, in as much as ‘Maroon societies not only captured slaves but kept slaves themselves’ (*Anansi* 7; 98). This complexity is key to determining the queerness of traditional storytelling as folxtales, because it allows for the humanity of an antihero rather than the fantasy of saviour heroics. I posit that *Unraveling* is a folxtale like Anansi, because Trickster continues complicating the moral code of a ‘colonial worldview of binary oppositions: white/black, exploiter/exploited, “First World”/ “Third World”’ (*Anansi* 161). *Unraveling* represents the ethos of non-conformity in Anansi’s moral code, which never reduces the complexity of human behaviour to a binary and proposes that we each embrace our inner antihero.

As much as Anansi stories were ‘used to teach young people in the Maroon community to think for themselves and reflect’, they also taught that ‘self-preservation is paramount whatever the cost to others’ (*Anansi* 118; 126). Anansi is thus always ‘willing to make use of the tools of oppressors for his own gain’ (*Anansi* 139), and yet I posit that Anansi and Trickster are not villains because they embrace being an antihero. As Velma Pollard explains, Anansi ‘is not the villain but somebody who can see the opportunity to get to your weakness’ which means that, crucially, ‘it is up to *you* to be aware of what he is doing’ (*Anansi* 178; original emphasis). I argue that the queer speculative mode of *Unravelling* is reflected in Anansi stories, and vice versa, to create a critique of the contemporary world. *Unravelling* and Anansi stories hold a mirror up to continued colonial constructions that dominate this world, by depicting a literary world that circumvents a straight status quo. Therefore, crucially, ‘it is up to *you* to be aware of what’ the contemporary straight world ‘is doing’ (*Anansi* 178; original emphasis) because ‘Tricksters should never trick themselves’ (*Unraveling* 204). *Unravelling* refuses to reduce the complexity and ambiguity of the contemporary world to a fixed meaning, in opposition to what Kate Perillo describes as ‘reductive binaries between utopian and dystopian futures in the postcolonial Caribbean’.<sup>76</sup> This complexity means that *Unravelling* does not provide a comfortable moral straight-forwardness for its for readers. This lack of straight-forwardness is, as Amber Jamilla Musser explains whilst interpreting *Black Leopard* with Anansi, part of ‘the pleasure of the stories’ which ‘is not moral’ because ‘Anansi is never in the right’

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<sup>76</sup> Katie Perillo, ‘The Science Fictional Caribbean: Technological Futurity in Nalo Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* and Beyond’, *Small Axe*, 22:2:56 (July 2018), 1-17 (pp. 2-3).



and the power of their speculation lies in ‘that of admiring intelligence and the power of a joke unveiled’.<sup>77</sup> Arguably, *Unravelling* involves the same pleasures of ‘admiring intelligence’ and the ‘joke unveiled’ because Trickster is a remixed Anansi whose queerness is a ‘[T]rickster gift in action’ (*Unraveling* 230). Queerness as a ‘[T]rickster gift in action’ (*Unraveling* 230) does not mean that Anansi and Trickster are an otherness against a straight status quo, because they ‘are not more or less than they are’ but remain ‘different and rare’ (*Unraveling* 292). This difference and rareness does not make Anansi or Trickster ‘more or less’ than straight persons, but it also means that ‘their expectations should not, *cannot* limit’ Trickster and Anansi (*Unraveling* 292; original emphasis).

I suggest that Trickster’s reflection of Anansi in nomenclature is important, because, as Trickster himself explains, ‘names are important’ as ‘humans can make the act of naming powerful, even dangerous’ (*Unraveling* 29). I propose that Trickster is a metonym for Anansi that evidences the queer power within the ‘act of naming’ (*Unraveling* 29). In this context, creatively remixing Anansi into Trickster, within a queer literary world, is important because it contravenes the idea that the antiquity of traditional stories means that they have less contemporary relevance. The queerness of Trickster as Anansi in *Unravelling* is represented as he too exists ‘in children’s rhymes and grandmother’s tales, which means that he can ‘understand what it is like to be made into a *thing* by the power of words’ (*Unraveling* 258; original emphasis). Anansi and Trickster have had to resist ‘being made into a *thing* by the power of words’ (*Unraveling* 258), whilst in an anglophone

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<sup>77</sup> Amber Jamilla Musser, ‘Queer Talk: *Black Leopard Red Wolf* and the Black Diaspora’, *ASAP/ Journal*, 6:2 (May 2021), 290-294 (p. 291).

Caribbean context ‘being made into a *thing* by the power of words’ (*Unraveling* 258) has its realities in the atrocities of British colonial chattel slavery — specifically, the dehumanisation of the term “slave”. However, I argue that not only is this tradition continued in the Caribbean, but it is also reflected in global realities, where a straight majority dehumanise queerness ‘into a *thing*’ (*Unraveling* 258). As a caveat to this proposition, I do not suggest an exceptional use of dehumanising anti-queer language in the Caribbean, because dehumanising anti-queer language is normalised throughout the globe. For example, in an anglophone context, this exists not only through obvious examples in pejorative terms like faggot and dyke, but also in the blithe contemporary parlance of words like bugger, sod, and gay as negatives (bugger off, sod off, and that’s gay). However, the relationship between what Thomas Glave describes as the making of Caribbean queers into ‘[U]npersons’ and ‘[N]ot-people’ but instead ‘[T]hings’ through language is exceptional to an African Caribbean majority, that have also been historically subjected to dehumanisation and dispossession through the English language.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, Caribbean anti-queer terminology like battyman or antiman, which Faizal Deen explains are both ‘a negation of a man but also an auntiemans as in a wommanish man’, have a particularity in the anglophone Caribbean as the coloniality of straightness which dehumanises and dispossesses queer people.<sup>79</sup> So, I propose that trickster utopian imagining against the straight world is so necessary, for Anansi and Trickster, because queers must engage in a daily resistance against ‘being made into a *thing* by the power of words’ (*Unraveling* 258).

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas Glave, *Among the Bloodpeople: Politics and Flesh* (New York, NY: Akashic Books, 2013), p. 53.

<sup>79</sup> Cummings and Mohabir, p. 13.

## Spinning Folxtales

I propose that a relationship between spiders, queerness, Anansi, and *Unraveling* informs both trickster utopian imagining and embracing being an antihero, as stratagems for queer literary resistance with a macrosocial reach. Spiders are most often either ignored or feared by humans, and live alongside them throughout the global, so I propose that spiders remain queerly empowered because of ignorance and fear, which makes spiders exceptional symbols for global queer resistance. Spiders have a long history of being attributed to resistance strategies of disruption that has often been linked to female empowerment as well as world-making. For example, Katarzyna Michalski and Sergiusz Michalski explain that

The spectrum of the symbolic meanings of the spider is a very broad and varied one. Ovid's famous narrative in the *Metamorphoses* proposed – through the reference to the Lydian weaver Arachne – a personalized etymology of its Greek name, connecting the activity of the spider with the concept of weaving and artistic craft. The spider might thus symbolize creation, in some cases even the creation of the world.<sup>80</sup>

When spiders are ignored, they are able to gain a privileged perspective on the world, because a 'spider in the house is easily ignored, even when it talks' (*Unraveling* 143): invisibility is a queer power. As Trickster playfully explains, when on the hunt for covert information, '*if only I could be a fly on the wall. Or a spider*' (*Unraveling* 172, original emphasis). Trickster explains that making a human change their actions is a worldmaking exercise, because you 'change or thwart those

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<sup>80</sup> Katarzyna Michalski and Sergiusz Michalski, *Spider* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2010), p. 10.

choices, and you change the world — past and future’ (*Unraveling* 130). When spiders scare humans, they ‘change or thwart those choices’ (*Unraveling* 130) about to be made, meaning that fear of spiders is a manipulation of human behaviour, which impacts on a subjective experience of the world by queerly disrupting choices to create what is otherwise possible.

*Unraveling* and Anansi stories are like spiders by disrupting what is known, folktales, in favour of what is otherwise possible, folktales, and which creates what Ronald Cummings and Njelle Hamilton have suggested as a literary Caribbean queerness where ‘queer is futurity, a quest for what is otherwise possible’.<sup>81</sup> In order to represent the ‘otherwise possible’ of folktales there is a need for a representative motif, which I present as the queer power of invisibility and fear related to spider senses. This invisibility and fear of spiders represented by *Unraveling* and Anansi may be ‘only myth, but a myth powerful enough to acquire a kind of shared reality’ (*Unraveling* 247). This ‘kind of shared reality’ (*Unraveling* 247) is of interest because of the lack of direct thematic, narrative, and formal similarities between Anansi stories, *Black Leopard*, and *Unraveling*. Although dissimilar in themes, narratives, and form, they remain connected in their ethos of non-conformity which spins a web of folktales throughout their narratives. This commitment is arguably a queer autonomy, where individual and exceptional narratives become communal because their only similarity lies in difference. Folktales allow for a ‘kind of shared reality’ (*Unraveling* 247) whose power lies in being a ritual or ceremony of queer survival, and ‘even the rumour of ritual’ is ‘so

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<sup>81</sup> Ronald Cummings and Njelle Hamilton, ‘Dialogues: Reviewing the Queer Caribbean’, *Anthurium*, 17:1 (2021), 1-6 (p. 6), <<http://doi.org/10.33596/anth.465>> [accessed 6 July 2023].

powerful' because it provides a meaning or a pattern (*Unraveling* 248). Trickster explains that 'humans would look for a pattern in anything — a face in the clouds, a voice in the wind, and a reason in chaos' (*Unraveling* 248). These patterns 'gave meaning, however ill-founded' (*Unraveling* 248), however, the 'problem was not that patterns did not exist but that people were better at fabricating them than discovering them' (*Unraveling* 248).

These patterns reflect the spirals and circles interpret in my second chapter which paradoxically exist through a seeming disorder. Jack Halberstam explains how the desire for fantasy structures means 'we want to believe' that 'waves come in sets, storms at sea have patterns and Kings arise out of the depths to walk on land and restore order'.<sup>82</sup> However, if, as Halberstam notes, 'the wild has other plans for us', then queers must create their own patterns in folxtales and spin their own webs by using their spider senses.<sup>83</sup> In the context of Anansi stories, *Black Leopard*, and *Unraveling*, it is not a surface level of similarity that creates this queer web pattern, because these can be fabricated when sameness is based solely on identity. Instead, my reading is the discovering of a queer communality of folxtales, which is informed by the relationship between trickster utopian imagining and embracing your own inner antihero.

As passed down from the British enslavement of African people to elders in Caribbean communities, Anansi stories 'played a part in moulding the quickness, sharpness and guile needed to turn the tables on their oppressors' (*Anansi* 139). Anansi symbolises anti-authoritarianism, in a commitment to non-conformity,

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<sup>82</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 176.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

which I have argued creates a queer worldview of trickster utopian imagining. I have suggested that this worldview is a communal necessity for *Black Leopard* and *Unravelling* to create a global formation of queer literary resistance, and that the trickster utopian imagining of Anansi stories makes them queer folxtales that exist as contemporary queer Caribbean speculative fiction. Furthermore, conceptualising folxtales acts to dispel any false sense of security of the present having “progressed” past a colonial mindset, whilst straightness remains the dominant global narrative. As Trickster explains, traditional stories are important for disrupting accepted knowledge because

[I]n every country old wives’ wisdom warned children to keep away from otherworldly creatures lest they be stolen. Most never needed such a warning, as they encountered only the danger of flesh and bone (*Unraveling* 73).

Arguably, the queerness of trickster utopia is a storytelling mode for folxtales, which informs a literary connectivity borne of understanding human beings as ‘the danger of flesh and bone’ (*Unraveling* 73). This means that instead of listening to straight advice to ‘keep away from otherworldly creatures’ in fact ‘otherworldly creatures’ become beings from which to imagine queer freedom (*Unraveling* 73). These desires mould a speculative fantasticalness where the queerly impossible is made possible, and becomes a useful tool for critiquing contemporary lived experience.

This critique of the present is queer because it reframes negative affect, in a reflection of the explanation by Cummings and Hamilton that ‘queer is joy despite, regardless’ of oppression because ‘it is future joy and liberation performed in the

present'.<sup>84</sup> By refracting Anansi through the lens of queer gender and sexuality *Black Leopard* and *Unraveling* reveal folktales to be folxtales, as a queer 'liberation' of traditional stories from the past and from a straight status quo which is 'performed in the present'.<sup>85</sup> The rejection of binary logic by Anansi stories has emboldened my analysis of them as part of queer Caribbean speculative writing, amid the communal literary connections of folxtales. This connection is encapsulated by Trickster's statement that humans misconstrue the meaning behind a traditional story because 'it's a folk tale that doesn't mean what they think it means' (*Unravelling* 46). Expanding on this statement, this chapter has suggested that Anansi stories do not mean what a straight status quo may think they mean. This is supported by Kei Miller's description of convergences he reads between 'queer, postcolonial', which Miller suggests create 'mythical beings'.<sup>86</sup> For Miller, queerness amid Caribbeanness means 'beings that are more real than they are mythical, but perhaps exist on the border — the folk getting ready to transition into folklore'.<sup>87</sup> I have argued that Lord and James centre both queerness and Caribbeanness, as 'ready to transition into folklore' and as ready to join Anansi stories as folxtales.<sup>88</sup> The folx of folxtales may be just like characters of *Black Leopard* and *Unraveling* which are 'only myth', but remain a 'myth powerful enough to acquire a kind of shared reality' in queer communality (*Unraveling* 247). I have suggested that the queer possibilities of folxtales provide them the 'Real-

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<sup>84</sup> Cummings and Hamilton, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Kei Miller, 'Maybe Bellywoman was on "Di Tape"', *Writing Down the Vision: Essays and Prophecies* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), 96-109 (p. 101).

<sup>87</sup> Miller, p. 102.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

possible' power of Bloch's 'gold bearing rubble', which means they exist far beyond 'a game of make believe'.<sup>89</sup> This gold bearing rubble is formed from an ethos of non-conformity which I have suggested aids in the queer utopian imaginings of Anansi stories, *Black Leopard*, and *Unraveling*. This reconceptualising of folktales as folxtales holds a mirror up to the contemporary world as a Real-possible global queer literary resistance.

*Unraveling* and *Black Leopard* remain representational of a queer Caribbean speculative writing, where queer creatures and happenings of traditional stories are presented without sanitisation in their literary worlds. Similar to each of the comparative readings within this thesis, the connections between Anansi stories, *Black Leopard*, and *Unraveling* are never based on sameness, but instead revel in difference. In practice, this means that the adoption of Anansi by Lord is not similar to that by James, and neither do I propose a homogeneity between these writers. Instead, it is the ethos of non-conformity with which the stories are created that I have proposed connects them as global queer literary resistances. This can be understood through the Anansi mode embodied by Tracker and Trickster, because each embody Anansi without mimicking the other — meaning that they connect through a shared difference. The happenings of folxtales remain arguably queer in their peculiarity, because they include unorthodox sexual and gender subjects, for example, sexual and gender transgressions between otherworldly figures and humans. By imagining this queerness in reoriented literary variations, and on patently Caribbean terms, Anansi stories, *Black Leopard*, and *Unravelling* are

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<sup>89</sup> Edwards, p. 184.



folxtales which critique the difficulties of being queer within the global condition of anti-queerness. By conceptualising folxtales, I have framed the implicit queerness of traditional stories in their resistance to colonialism, because they have remained culturally relevant despite any attempt at their destruction. This survival makes folxtales an important and necessary space from which global literary resistance to the coloniality of straightness can take place, within the safety of creative writing where less blame or harm can be attributed to the listeners, storytellers, or writers.

## **Chapter Five: An Epitome of Carnival Spirit: The Global Queer Confrontation of *In Nearby Bushes* (2019) and *The Dreaming* (2022)**

Carnival in the anglophone Caribbean is a cultural phenomenon whose theatricalities, affectations, and performances began in opposition to British colonial oppression. The origins of Carnival involved resistance to enslavement, and later was joined by resistance to indentured servitude, meaning that the spirit of Carnival was born as a challenge to the edict that only colonizers and sanctioned free persons were autonomous human beings. In this chapter I argue that queer Caribbean writing epitomises Carnival spirit, in a confrontation against the accepted knowledge that only straight people, and those sanctioned by a straight status quo, are allowed to act as autonomous human beings. I support my argument in this chapter through interpretation of Kei Miller's poetry collection *In Nearby Bushes* (2019) and Andre Bagoo's assembled short stories *The Dreaming* (2022), by examining how their writerly perspectives reject the pastness of colonial oppression by representing the continuing dispossession of queer persons as a global condition.<sup>1</sup> This has global implications because Caribbean Carnival began as a form of writing back against the dominant narrative of British colonialism, which contravened the epistemic violence of categorising, dividing, and separating humans based on an imposed identity. Although there is a complex heritage related to the specific forms of straight dominance as they have existed globally, the recognisable similarities of contemporary straight dominance are informed by

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<sup>1</sup> Kei Miller, *In Nearby Bushes* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2019); Andre Bagoo, *The Dreaming* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2022). Hereafter, references will appear from these published editions in-text as *Bushes* and *Dreaming*.

legacies of colonialism in the Caribbean which arguably reflect an influence from colonial structured on global straight dominance as it exists on the world stage.

Categorising, dividing, and separating humans based on identity is refused by queerness through its desire to disidentify from binaries and its dictums of fixed “norms”. In José Esteban Muñoz’s description, disidentification ‘tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form’, rather than positioning itself as a new homogenous identity.<sup>2</sup> This is important because it does not include an insider and outsider dichotomy of groups based around community belonging. As Muñoz explains, disidentification allows for ‘neither the “Good Subject” who has an easy or magical identification with dominant culture, or the “Bad Subject”’ as its outsider.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the spirit of Carnival includes disidentification because it does not recreate a ‘magical identification with dominant culture’, of postcolonial powers, which works to fight the exclusions of categorised identity.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, I suggest that the spirit of Carnival remains resistant to global oppressions of anti-queerness, because, by defying the largest empire yet known, without being fixed by an identity, Carnival has worldwide importance for understanding disidentification as anticolonial praxis.

### **A Touch of Camp**

Camp is a notoriously slippery subject to define, but arguably has core elements connecting it to Carnival, including its theatricality, affectation, and performance in

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<sup>2</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

relation to self-expression and self-determination. Exactly how and when camp was first defined is contentious, but is often cited through Stephen Monk, the protagonist from Christopher Isherwood's *The World in the Evening* (1954). For Monk, camp means 'expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice' and 'you can't camp about something you don't take seriously'.<sup>5</sup> Crucially, 'you can't camp about something you don't take seriously' but you also respect camp by refusing to take it too seriously.<sup>6</sup> So, camp includes not taking too seriously that which you personally view as a serious subject, or object, and which disregards the importance of being popular as judged by fashions of a social majority. In these terms, the queer confrontation I read in the spirit of Carnival involves camp, because it has the 'basically serious' aim of freedom from dispossession, which is expressed 'in terms of fun and artifice' against the trends of a straight status quo.<sup>7</sup> It was Susan Sontag's collection *Against Interpretation* (1966) which catalysed an academic interest in camp through the renown of 'Notes on "Camp"' (1964).<sup>8</sup> However, as is often the case, Sontag's essay has gained a reputation for lacking more than it contains. Although I agree that Sontag's essay lacks, so does, arguably, all critical writing on camp; I see the continued power of Sontag's essay as deriving from its ability to provoke camp confrontation. Thus, this chapter aims at a revival of camp through interpretation of Miller's and Baggio's writing, by using and

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2009).

critiquing Sontag whilst refusing to take her camp too seriously, as opposed to adopting a contrarian position against Sontag's *Against Interpretation*.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst detailing at length the inaccuracies of Sontag's essay, Mark Booth debunks the idea that camp was borne of Isherwood, but firmly retains a 1980s Eurocentric academy lens. Booth historicizes camp through James Redding Ware's *Passing English of the Victorian Era* (1909) which described camp as 'actions of an exaggerated emphasis' that was 'probably from the French', referring to the term *ser camper* which Booth reads through Théophile Gautier's *Capitaine Fracasse* (1862).<sup>10</sup> *Ser camper* means 'to present oneself in an expansive but flimsy manner (like a tent) with overtones here of theatricality' which Booth explores further through representations of the Palace of Versailles in Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671).<sup>11</sup> Although I have reservations about Booth's Eurocentric framing, I am drawn towards his assertion that 'all camp people are to be found in the margins of society', whilst the 'richest vein of camp is generally to be found in the margins of the margins'.<sup>12</sup> This chapter suggests that it is because the queerness of Carnival is 'found in the margins of the margins' that it informs the 'richest vein' of camp, that connects the spirit of Carnival and queer confrontation.<sup>13</sup>

My argument in this chapter aims to expose interconnections between Carnival, conventional understandings of camp, and an emergent reconceptualization of camp related to queer and decolonial approaches, including

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<sup>9</sup> Sontag, p. 280.

<sup>10</sup> James Redding Ware quoted in Mark Booth, 'Campe-Toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp', *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> Booth, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

important work by Sequoia Barnes and Israel Reyes.<sup>14</sup> This chapter does not attempt to fully address a potentially vast area for research on camp and Carnival in relation to global queer resistance. In this chapter I focus on two facets of camp — not taking serious subjects too seriously and being-as-playing-a-role — to highlight the spirit of Carnival as a queer confrontation. I propose that these camp facets are at work in the literary mode of queer Caribbean writing as the epitome of Carnival spirit, because they each do not take the serious business of resisting the status quo too seriously, whilst questioning how much of being yourself is always playing-a-role. For example, the spirit of Carnival is shown to aid in successfully navigating the harsh realities of life, amid the camp knowledge that you always have autonomy over your own characterisation, because you are the role you choose to play. In this chapter, I read the Carnival activities of masquerade and character embodiment as a support for the camp understanding that being yourself involves playing-a-role. This is important for queer resistance, because being-as-playing-a-role can be a tool for a person to take action against oppression. For example, instead of being passive against a status quo under the false belief that this forms part of a fixed identity, by understanding that selfhood is not immutable, queer resistance can be acted out in the present by all in their understanding that action or inaction are roles we can each choose to play.

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<sup>14</sup> Sequoia Barnes, 'If you don't Bring No Grits, Don't Come': Critiquing a Critique of Patrick Kelly Golliwogs, And Camp as a Technique of Black Queer Expression', *Open Cultural Studies* (2017), pp. 678-689, and Israel Reyes, 'Decolonizing Queer Camp in Edwin Sánchez's *Diary of a Puerto Rican Demigod*', *College Literature*, 46:3 (Summer 2019), pp. 517-541.

## **Carnival as a Queer Revelation**

I read *Bushes* and *Dreaming* in this chapter as exposing camp particularities related to Carnival, which inform my interpretation of queer Caribbean writing as a subversion of community based solely on identity. This subversion involves a specifically queer confrontation, because it includes disidentifying from accepted modes of human categorisations, and advocates for a rejection of imposed ideas of selfhood in favour of radical autonomy. This radical autonomy informs my ideas of a queer communality based around difference, rather than a community filled with supposed similarities based on identity. Confrontation involves the clashing of forces or ideas: opposition, conflict, contestation, a battle, a fight. Queerness rejects the categorising and dividing nature of fixed identity, because accepting an identity you did not choose creates groups of insiders and outsiders that favour a straight status quo, which limits the potential for allyship. In my conceptualisation queer confrontation is a fight against the contemporary façade of freedom which remains conditional to identity.

I focus predominantly on Trinidad's Carnival traditions in this chapter to obtain critical clarity, including a queer reading of its Pierrot Grenade character. I am not proposing that Carnival traditions are homogenous across the Caribbean. However, due to the Trinidad Carnival being the oldest in the Caribbean, I propose that it can justly be understood as influential throughout the Caribbean literary imagination. This reading is informed by Lyndon K. Gill's interpretation of queerness

amid Trinidad Carnival in their unique anthropological study, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (2018).<sup>15</sup>

From its inception circa 1780, Trinidad Carnival saw white colonists and free persons of colour stage 'elaborate masquerade balls at Christmas and as a "farewell to the flesh" prior to the Catholic Lenten season'.<sup>16</sup> These actions were newly informed by French engagements with Trinidad, but it is important to note that Trinidad was only colonised by Britain and not France. However, this does bring into focus a connection between Trinidad and Mark Booth's suggestion of camp as derived from the French *ser camper* amid the Pierrot Grenade Carnival character. Emily Zobel Marshall explains how Pierrots contain literary elements and derive from the French tradition of Pierrot jesters: a noble scholar who chooses to wear rags over an elegant costume, and 'challenges other Pierrots to a spelling competition' with 'claims to be able to spell any word'.<sup>17</sup> This French influence on Trinidad saw the adoption of Fat Tuesday (Mardi Gras) traditions and plantation celebrations known as *cannes brûlées* [burning cane] where enslaved persons harvested sugar cane using fires.

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<sup>15</sup> Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). Hereafter, references will appear from this published edition in-text referred to as *Erotic*.

<sup>16</sup> For a concise summation of the history of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago please see: <<https://www.discovertnt.com/articles/Trinidad/The-Birth-Evolution-of-Trinidad-Carnival/109/3/32#axzz7w84kNZQc>> [accessed 11 March 2023].

<sup>17</sup> Emily Zobel Marshall, "I Stole the Torturer's Tongue': Caribbean Carnival Speaks Back to the Canon", *Caribbean Quarterly*, 65:4 (2019), 621-645 (p. 627). Marshall writes about her own attendance of Trinidad Carnival. I believe that it is vital to understand important cultural phenomena from personal experience. This is arguably even more necessary when these events are outside of your own personal sphere of reference, including myself as a white British queer researcher interpreting Caribbean literature. Unfortunately, due to the realities of the Coronavirus pandemic my ability to attend Trinidad Carnival was made impossible during my PhD study. Trinidad Carnival was cancelled each year of my PhD study except for 2023. I did apply for extended funding to allow me the time to engage in research travel in February 2023. However, this funding request was denied by my home institution.



However, 'enslaved West Africans, meanwhile, had their own masking traditions and processions (called kambule in the Kikongo language)' now known as Canboulay.<sup>18</sup> Gill gives insight on Canboulay as a celebration 'after emancipation and in commemoration of the end of apprenticeship on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1838', which involved a familiar schedule to contemporary Carnival: 'extended over three days and nights, beginning with a spiritual ritual by torchlight during the predawn hours' (*Erotic* 35). Gill explains that 'Canboulay is perhaps an appropriate beginning for Carnival because it is pregnant with the racial plays that have always characterised the season' (*Erotic* 35). Canboulay later morphed into J'ouvert (also known as Jouvay) celebrations which officially begin Trinidad Carnival; where pre-dawn celebrants dance to calypso and soca music and play mud mas as the sun rises: covering themselves and each other in mud, colourful paints, and dyes. Thus, I propose that it is the inception of Carnival via Canboulay traditions where Carnival becomes a queer confrontation against a straight status quo, in its challenge to the colonial *cannes brûlées* and its rejection of involvement by enslaved persons and lower-class free persons. After emancipation, middle-class and upper-class Trinidadians boycotted Carnival due to the sanctioning of ex-enslaved persons and lower-class persons being allowed in Carnival which was termed Jamette Carnival. The word Jamette 'comes from the French word *diametre*' which referred 'to the class of people below the diameter of respectability or the underworld'.<sup>19</sup> I propose that the reality of Canboulay as the 'underworld' of Carnival highlights the non-

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<sup>18</sup> Please refer to footnote 16.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Carnival of the Underworld — Trinidad's Jamette Carnival', *National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago*, 8 January 2016, <<https://nationalarchivestt.wordpress.com/2016/01/08/the-carnival-of-the-underworld-trinidads-jamette-carnival/>> [accessed 20 June 2023].

conformist, anti-authoritative, or queer spirit of Carnival, where the combined resistance of both enslaved persons and lower-class free persons further examples Carnival's transcendence of fixed identity.

Michael LaRose explains that 'in Trinidad, the meeting of the great African and East Indian cultures of formerly enslaved and indentured persons produced new and exciting fusions'.<sup>20</sup> One of the most exciting of these fusions is Carnival. LaRose's statement is also relevant to the Indian Trinidadian influence on Carnival, as '40 percent of the population of Trinidad are of Indian descent'; 'Indians were brought to the islands as indentured labourers from 1845-1917', alongside Chinese indentured servitude which took place from 1853-1866.<sup>21</sup> The role of Irish indentured labourers in relation to the Trinidad Carnival is a sparse area of scholarly research. However, an Irish influence is likely due to the British colonial practice of indenturing Irish persons in the Caribbean, which took place from the Cromwellian "settlement" of Ireland in 1649 up to the Victorian era. With this context in mind, I read the roots of Carnival as queer because they involved the rejection of oppression by different persons, as categorised by identity, that demanded their personal autonomy empowered by their collective, or communal, differences against a colonial status quo.

The wider field of scholarship on the Trinidad Carnival is expansive. Relevant examples from the field include the edited essay collections *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival* (2007) and *Carnival: Culture in Action*

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<sup>20</sup> Michael La Rose "The City Could Burn Down, We Jammin' Still!": The History and Tradition of Cultural Resistance in the Art, Music, Masquerade and Politics of the Caribbean Carnival', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 65:4 (2019), 491-512 (p. 492).

<sup>21</sup> Marshall, p. 623.

(2004).<sup>22</sup> A specific topic of contention throughout Carnival theory is the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque to Caribbean Carnival. Marshall explains that

Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theories of the carnivalesque have dominated carnival scholarship, do little to help us understand the profoundly transformative effect that playing mas has on the individual.<sup>23</sup>

I do not engage with the carnivalesque in this chapter to allow the necessary space for my examination of the spirit of Carnival as a queer confrontation. However, I can see how an engagement with Bakhtin's carnivalesque and Carnival might remain possible in the same mode as my use of Sontag's camp in this chapter. By this I mean, a tactic could be adopted which does not reject Bakhtin but instead playfully engages with his carnivalesque: to pick Bakhtin's ideas up, critique them, and throw them around a little, but without taking Bakhtin or his ideas too seriously.

The vast majority of critical studies on Caribbean Carnival do not directly engage with queerness, but, from my perspective, they do continually allude to there being something queer about Carnival. I read a queer framework in the lack of authority, conformity, and hierarchy in Carnival explicated by Garth Green and Philip Scher that 'when it comes to Carnival 'there is no "right" or "authentic" form'.<sup>24</sup> Further, this means that 'there is no "best" form' of Carnival 'that everyone should adopt and to which everyone should conform'.<sup>25</sup> I interpret this non-

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<sup>22</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio ed., *Carnival: Culture in Action - the Trinidad Experience* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004), and Garth L. Green, and Philip W Scher eds., *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Marshall, p. 633.

<sup>24</sup> Green and Scher, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

conformist attitude as having conceptual crossovers with the differences between queer resistance and LGBT+ community pride read by David Halperin. For example, the way that queers seek ‘an affirmative queer future unrestricted by the increasingly exhausted and restrictive ethos of gay pride’ as the fixed form of queer freedom.<sup>26</sup> In relation to queerness and Carnival ‘there is no “best” form’ of resistance ‘that everyone should adopt and to which everyone should conform’.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Milla Cozart Riggio’s work on Trinidadian Carnival time as ‘more fluid and organic but no less “real” than that measured by the regularity of a clock’ is reflective of Elizabeth Freeman’s writing on queer temporalities and how ‘there are very few natural tempos on a macrosocial level’.<sup>28</sup> As Riggio’s ideas of Carnival time are ‘more fluid and organic but no less “real”’ it means, following Freeman, there is always the opportunity for ‘a certain enjoyably porous relation to unpredictable futures’.<sup>29</sup>

The disruptions and transgressions of Carnival are also arguably queer when Richard Schechner describes how ‘its hybridity gives Trinidad Carnival both its particular qualities and its edginess’, because ‘what is played out is dangerous, almost about to come apart’.<sup>30</sup> This hybridity resonates with Michael Bucknor’s proposition that the ‘ambiguity, excess and fluidity’ of the Caribbean means that ‘Caribbean popular culture is as much a space of dangerous crossings as is queer

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<sup>26</sup> David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Green and Scher, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Riggio, p. 23, and Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 171

<sup>29</sup> Riggio, p. 23, and Freeman, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Schechner, ‘Carnival (Theory) after Bakhtin’, ed. Milla Cozart Riggio, *Carnival: Culture in Action - the Trinidad Experience*, pp. 3-9, p. 7.

subjectivity', which in turn supports my reading of Carnival spirit as the epitome of queer confrontation.<sup>31</sup> In a refusal or inability to conform to the false sense of safety provided by social convention, queers embrace the difficult realities of human behaviour which remain 'dangerous, almost about to come apart'.<sup>32</sup> With these connections as evidence I read the context of Carnival as the queerness of Carnival.

In the context of my critical focus, the Jamaican heritage of Miller could be read as incompatible with explorations informed by Trinidad Carnival. However, as recounted in Miller's non-fiction, he has lived in Trinidad and attended its Carnival. A further connection to Trinidad Carnival can be noted here between both Badoo's writing and Miller's writing, as they have each chronicled Trinidad Carnival in their recent non-fiction writing: Miller's *Writing Down the Vision* (2013) and *Things I have Withheld* (2021); and Badoo's *The Undiscovered Country* (2020).<sup>33</sup> As Miller explains, 'Carnival in Trinidad has a particular layered history' and 'the history of Jamaican Carnival is much thinner' which is still seen as 'a poor facsimile of the real thing' (*Withheld* 107). In Miller's opinion, Carnival involves queer depths beyond its aesthetic surface because 'Carnival is its own country' meaning that

Carnival have its own citizens, and that those citizens (like me) are not always from Trinidad, and that those citizens (unlike me) are not always human or corporeal (*Withheld* 96).

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<sup>31</sup> Michael A. Bucknor, 'Dangerous Crossings: Caribbean Masculinities and the Politics of Challenging Gendered Borderlines', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 21:1/2 (April 2013) vii-xxx (p. xxvii).

<sup>32</sup> Schechner, p. 7, and Bucknor, p. xxvii.

<sup>33</sup> Kei Miller, *Things I Have Withheld* (Edinburgh, UK: Canongate Books, 2021), and Andre Badoo, *The Undiscovered Country: Essays by Andre Badoo* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2020). Hereafter referenced from these published versions in-text as *Withheld* and *Country*.

Therefore, I propose that it remains appropriate to engage in a critical exploration of the queer confrontation of Carnival, through the writing of Bagoo and Miller, because ‘Carnival have its own citizens’ and ‘those citizens (like me) are not always from Trinidad’ (*Withheld* 96). I explore this queerness founded on the inseparableness of Carnival from the queer Caribbean literary imagination, with Carnival ‘its own country’ (*Withheld* 96): a sovereign state which confronts the global condition of anti-queerness.

### **Confronting Boundaries**

*In Nearby Bushes* (2019) is a poetry collection that blurs boundaries between queer and straight poetic subjects to reveal their fluidity. By this I mean that *Bushes* highlights the prevalent threat of an insidious form of violence commonly enacted by cisgender men, of all ethnicities and nationalities, on Caribbean queers, women, and their cisgender male allies. As a caveat to my readings, I have chosen to only focus on poems from the first two sections of *Bushes*, because I feel that these sections are most appropriate for my engagement with queer confrontation and Carnival. I do not engage with the final section of *Bushes* out of respect for its content, which includes detailed poetic reflections on the murder of African Caribbean women. *Bushes* poetically narrates how and why this cisgender male violence is hidden from a social public — in nearby bushes — as well as depicting the potential for these bushes to be a hidden space of safety, discovery, and freedom. *Bushes* contains forty-four poems, each with capitalized titles, separated into three sections: ‘HERE’ (*Bushes* 7-26); ‘SOMETHINES I CONSIDER THE NAMES OF PLACES’ (*Bushes* 29-40); and ‘IN NEARBY BUSHES’ (*Bushes* 48-76). The title of

*Bushes* is used for the collection's third part which highlights the preponderance of the statement "in nearby bushes" within accounts of murders in Jamaica. However, *Bushes* also celebrates the joy of queer Caribbean lives, and connects them to the remarkable realities of the contemporary existence of the Caribbean and its inhabitants. I interpret a selection of poems and non-fictional writing from *Bushes* and *Withheld* in this chapter to make my proposed connection between queerness and Carnival as clear as possible: 'THE UNDERSTORY' (*Bushes* 8); 'after EBONY G. PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses'' (*Bushes* 15-16), 'HERE WHERE RUN THE WILD DEER' (*Bushes* 18-20); 'The Buck, The Bacchanal, and Again, the Body' (*Withheld* 96-106), and 'Our Worst Behaviour' (*Withheld* 107-119).

I posit that queer Caribbean writing exhibits a communal literary mode which epitomizes the spirit of Carnival, because it defies any boundaries, rules, or authorities of a straight status quo as a way to create queer havens. These queer havens are like Carnival in not being limited by a specific time of freedom. For example, the preparations and aftermath of Carnival are a constant cultural backdrop in Trinidad, similar to the havens created by queer writers which exist far beyond the page by engaging with the lives of their readers. As Gill explains, 'Carnival is a season' whose foundations lie in 'hiding rebellious organising in plain sight' (*Erotic* 32-33). Therefore, I propose that queer Caribbean writing epitomizes the spirit of Carnival as an ongoing praxis for living a thriving queer life, as a form of 'hiding rebellious organising in plain sight' (*Erotic* 33). This means that perhaps much of what takes place as queer freedom exists beneath the surface level, or dominant narrative, of contemporary Carnival in what Miller conceives of as 'THE UNDERSTORY'.

Crucially, a surface story cannot take place without its understory, and an understory is not a single or fixed entity. Connecting with explorations of Anansi stories in my previous chapter, Miller's poetic persona explains that

to every story is someone who don't know the true  
nature of stories. Try two hundred, or two thousand,  
& they are all here. A web of Nansi story hangs thick

between the trees. The original accounts  
of witnesses are here, as well a careful record  
of all subsequent changes; you may compare.

*(Bushes 8).*

I suggest that 'THE UNDERSTORY' presents a literary mode which creates its own queer haven, as a 'web of Nansi story' which 'hangs thick between the trees' (*Bushes 8*), and never allows for the false teleology of fixed answers. This is created as 'THE UNDERSTORY', which explains how 'original accounts' and 'subsequent changes' are provided to confront the falsehood of received knowledge, that provides a "right", or straight, and "wrong", or queer, way of being. *Bushes* is a queer poetic haven that reflects Carnival by challenging and transgressing remnant legacies of colonial societal policing, which declare a straight perspective to be "right", and which remain within the supposed freedom of Carnival spaces. 'THE UNDERSTORY' provides the reader with the permission to make their own "right", because, as Miller's poetic persona explains, 'you may compare' (*Bushes 8*). The open and individual nature of allowing the reader the power to 'compare' (*Bushes 8*) epitomizes a Carnival spirit, because, as Miller explains in his essay 'The Buck, The Bacchanal, and Again, the Body' (*Withheld 96-106*), 'Carnival is not a selfish



country' it 'is a generous space' and 'can mean plenty things to plenty people' (*Withheld* 98).

The permission granted to the reader, when they 'may compare', is a queer confrontation against the fixed understandings of accepted or conventional knowledge. This resistance to accepted or conventional knowledge is alive in the spirit of Carnival, because, as explained earlier by Green and Scher, 'when it comes to Carnival 'there is no "right" or "authentic" form'.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Carnival invites individual perspectives over a single dominant narrative; Carnival allows for 'the true nature of stories' because 'they are all here' and 'you may compare' (*Bushes* 8). By suggesting this connection, I do not mean to reduce Carnival to an entirely safe space of queer freedom, because nowhere is, but that it is space with the same intersectional dynamic — of joy, danger, and everything in-between — which allows 'the true nature of stories' (*Bushes* 8) to play out and that makes Carnival, Carnival. This reflects Miller's experience of being in the Road March of the Jamaica Carnival parade, which also merges the natural and supernatural of Carnival, because 'the crossroads is a powerful place'; 'an intersection not just of streets, but of the real and unreal' (*Withheld* 103). I posit that the joy, danger, and everything in-between of Carnival is an understory existing as 'the real and unreal' (*Withheld* 103) and a 'web of Nansi story' which 'hangs thick between the trees' (*Bushes* 8), and which is able to include the individual variations of human experience at 'the crossroads' (*Withheld* 103) of Carnival spirit. This is represented in 'THE UNDERSTORY' as the 'two hundred, or two thousand' variations in the 'true nature

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<sup>34</sup> Green and Scher, p. 9.

of stories' (*Bushes* 8) which crossover a queer confrontation in *Bushes*, as 'the crossroads' have a power because as Miller explains it is 'at the crossroads that we was always finding spirit' (*Withheld* 103). Similarly, I suggest that in beginning with 'THE UNDERSTORY' *Bushes* is given a foundation for the poetic mode of the collection as an understory to Carnival. Miller positions 'THE UNDERSTORY' as a poetic mode for *Bushes* which allows it to be a literary 'crossroads' where we are 'always finding spirit' (*Withheld* 103) in a queer confrontation epitomizing the spirit of Carnival.

The contemporary straight boundaries which continue in Carnival mean that, although there is arguably more sanctioned gender and sexual fluidity, freedom remains limited by identity. This reality means that the queer confrontation of Carnival is now ignored as integral to its creation, in favour of a dominant straight and nationalistic narrative tied to the "norms" of straightness and citizenship. Therefore, that the daily strict status quo of nations which host Carnival each attempt to make the dominant narrative of Carnival straight, where there remains a conformity to only sanctioning certain types of non-conformity. 'THE UNDERSTORY' subverts the idea of a dominant straight and nationalistic narrative by presenting 'the long story that will not be cut short'

Here where is

the hard luck story, the likely & unlikely stories,

& all the tales that were put on shelves,

'Oh,' the teller had said, waving a hand,

'that's a whole other story!' Well, my dear,

they are here — in the complication of roots, in the dirtiness

of dirt. Are there stories you have heard about Jamaica?

Well here are the stories underneath[.] (Bushes 8)

The understory includes 'the likely & unlikely stories' which have now been 'put on shelves', and that subvert the dominant straight narrative of the Caribbean, which is always a reflection of an anti-queer world, includes 'a whole other story' that must be acknowledged (*Bushes* 8). As the opening poem of *Bushes*, I suggest that 'THE UNDERSTORY' serves as an introductory lens through which to view the entirety of *Bushes* because it foregrounds its queer confrontation, by climaxing with the signal that within *Bushes* 'are the stories underneath' (*Bushes* 8). These 'stories underneath' remain entwined with the understory of queerness in Carnival, because as Miller explains of his experiences in Carnival 'what is simmering underneath' is 'a distinctly queer possibility' (*Withheld* 112). The interpretative tactic of reading queerness as 'simmering underneath' presents queerness far beyond its exclusion and othering as a limitation, because this exclusion has allowed queerness to become 'the complication of roots' (*Bushes* 8) necessary for a tree to thrive. Understanding the queer nature of Carnival spirit as a 'complication of roots' (*Bushes* 8) is one way to conceptually imagine Gill's claims that 'overemphasizing exclusions' of queers in the Caribbean can 'prematurely blind us to various kinds of queer embeddedness' in the region (*Erotic* 1). This is because the queer 'complication of roots' (*Bushes* 8) of Carnival spirit are always embedded in the underneath, understory, or the 'simmering underneath' (*Withheld* 112) of straight dominance.

It is not that queerness is forbidden or exceptionally sanctioned in Carnival that makes it of particular interest, but because queerness is always and already

*embedded* in Carnival as ‘the stories underneath’ (Bushes 8): Carnival is a Caribbean cultural phenomenon which cannot be understood without its understory of resistance, which grew from a queer ‘complication of roots’ (Bushes 8). I refer to Carnival as having queer roots because of its establishment by enslaved African persons, whose success in confronting the seemingly insurmountable oppressions of British colonialism, especially as the largest empire the world has yet known, remains extraordinary to the point of supernatural. These roots were later inosculated — meaning unusually, or queerly, conjoined — with resistance from indentured servants of multiple cultural backgrounds, including Indian, Chinese, and Irish all united against colonial powers. This cultural milieu means that Carnival as it exists today is a resistance to societal oppression which cannot be defined by a single identity category, and remains a ‘complication of roots’ (Bushes 8). So, the foundations of Carnival in the anglophone Caribbean involved defiant non-conformity, which was unfixed by any identity category, and demanded autonomy against seemingly insurmountable oppression. In this context, then, the foundations of Carnival are a queer confrontation. Following Gill further, this interpretation of Carnival is ‘not intended as a subtle side-step of homophobia’ and anti-queerness ‘as a vector of oppression’ but is a ‘refusal of homophobia’ and anti-queerness ‘as a stopping point in the conversation’ (*Erotic* 4). I suggest that the queer rhythms of the Caribbean literary imagination are involved with the queer confrontation of Carnival because ‘they are here — in the complication of roots’, revelling in ‘the dirtiness/ of dirt’ with all the embedded ‘stories underneath’ (Bushes 8). This interpretation is important because it means that the surface story of accepted social norms is only ever possible due to a boundary which is imposed

upon the 'stories underneath' (Bushes 8) and which make 'THE UNDERSTORY' a queer confrontation.

I propose that Miller also avoids reducing the complexities of boundaries which designate what subjects, and what objects — what people and what things — are able to be understood as queer in *Bushes* because 'they are here — in the complication of roots' (Bushes 8). In *Bushes* there is no exclusion of queerness from the semiotics, symbols, and phenomena of resistance to colonialism, which contests a contemporary reinterpretation of resistance to colonialism that excludes queerness. This reinterpretation is a drive towards anticolonial or decolonial practices which also reject the queerness of subjects and objects against "norms" derived from colonisation. For example, a decolonial or anticolonial aim which rejects indigenous or West African derived epistemologies of gender and sexuality, in favour of those derived from Christianity and Enlightenment logics. I posit that Miller's 'after EBONY G. PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses'' defies a contemporary reinterpretation of resistance to colonialism that excludes queerness. A poetic ode and work of ekphrasis — meaning a description of a visual artwork as a literary device — 'after EBONY G. PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses'' is inspired by a 2020 touring show by Jamaican visual artist Ebony G. Patterson who is best known for her large-scale multimedia tapestry artworks. These often include fabric, glitter, and faux flowers, and she also has an ongoing portraiture series, 'Gangstas for Life' (2008-), related to masculinity in dancehall culture.<sup>35</sup> 'after EBONY G. PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses'' begins:

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<sup>35</sup> For a virtual walk through of Ebony G. Patterson's ... *while the dew is still on the roses* ... (2020) courtesy of Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University please see:

Here where are the bodices (spectacularly  
jewelled) & the bodies (spectacularly jewelled).  
Observe them — each one a catalogue

of fine sewing: back tack, cross-stitch, tentstitch —  
made by women with hands as sure as surgeons  
Here where are the hairpins; they glitter

like dew on the roses. Goodison reminds us  
*to us, all flowers are roses.* & here  
where is the hair, a braid, dancehall red,

now abandoned as if it had freed itself  
from one head duly conked — the Neanderthal  
pull of a man [...] (*Bushes* 15)

In ‘after EBONY G. PATTERSON’S ‘while the dew is still on the roses’’ I read the  
‘bodice (spectacularly/ jewelled) & the bodies (spectacularly jewelled)’ (*Bushes* 15)  
as implicit of Carnival aesthetics: costuming and adornment of the body which in  
this Jamaican context also intersect with dancehall culture. The preparations and  
exaggerations of Carnival exist in the time and attention to detail of ‘fine sewing:  
back tack, cross-stitch, tentstitch’ of the ‘bodice (spectacularly/ jewelled) & the  
bodies (spectacularly jewelled)’ (*Bushes* 15). Miller’s anaphoric repetition blurs the  
boundaries between the object, ‘bodice’, and the subject, ‘bodies’, of Carnival to  
reveal the transformative qualities of adorning and spectacularising the body. I read  
these qualities of adorning and spectacularising the body as Miller’s ‘distinctly  
queer possibility’ that is ‘simmering underneath’ (*Withheld* 112) Carnival through

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<<https://nasher.duke.edu/exhibitions/ebony-g-patterson-while-the-dew-is-still-on-the-roses/>>  
[accessed 15 March 2023].

masquerading self-expression. Miller explains that in Carnival ‘everyone looks a little bit like everyone else’, ‘under the dual covering of dusk and paint’, but also that this means ‘gender has become ambiguous’ declaring once more that ‘[H]ere it is — the queer possibility’ of Carnival (*Withheld* 114). This aesthetic dimension related to expression through the adornment of clothing and bodies, reflects Miller’s description that ‘in that country called Carnival you can be yourself and not yourself’ (*Withheld* 99). Miller embroils the separations of self-expression and costuming further, in his description that masquerading continues even when ‘some of us’ come to Carnival ‘as just ourselves’ (*Withheld* 106). Therefore, even attending Carnival ‘as just ourselves’ remains a form of playing a role ‘because sometimes that is the hardest mas to play’ (*Withheld* 106).

Miller’s poetic persona does not allow the reader to imagine this ‘spectacularly jewelled’ (*Bushes* 15) aesthetic without following it with the representation of ‘the hair, a braid, dancehall red,’ which is ‘now abandoned as if it had freed itself’ but is the result of the ‘[N]eanderthal pull/ of a man’ (*Bushes* 15). This male brutality is juxtaposed with the aesthetic beauty of ‘a braid, dancehall red’ (*Bushes* 15), which elicits the same form of exaggeration, as a red whose vibrancy and spectacle mimic ‘dancehall’ (*Bushes* 15) but that also imply the sanguine imagery of blood-red male violence. However, this ‘[N]eanderthal pull/ of a man’ (*Bushes* 15) is never positioned as a shallow representation of a maleness which cannot also be soft, tender, or perhaps queer. This complication is provided as Miller’s poetic ode reflects on a poignant artwork from Patterson’s exhibition, a three-channel digital colour video installation lasting 8 minutes and 34 seconds, entitled . . . *three kings weep* . . . (2018). In . . . *three kings weep* . . . a trio of young

Black men are shown nude from the waist up on separate screens, with each facing the camera against a background of floral wallpaper and CGI butterflies. The video plays in reverse and in slow motion as the three men cry whilst they dress themselves in spectacular outfits, which according to the exhibition description reflect both dancehall and Carnival aesthetics.<sup>36</sup> As the video plays, Claude McKay's poem 'If We Must Die' (1919) is orated by the voice of a young boy.<sup>37</sup> Miller relates this artwork, explaining,

Here that pulls the tears back into the soft  
bodies of boys, & observe them —  
their soft & spectacular bodies,

their spectacular bodices, the spectacular  
corsets, the spectacular. I want so much  
to say this - that our bodies are spectacular

& not the harder truth — that our bodies  
are spectacles; our deaths blossom like roses  
in the dark garden behind the house[.]

(*Bushes* 15-16).

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<sup>36</sup> Ebony G. Patterson, ... *three kings weep ...*, 2018, three-channel digital colour video installation with sound, 8 minutes 34 seconds. A selection of stills from . . . *three kings weep* . . . can be found below courtesy of Brooklyn Museum:  
<[https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11\\_view01\\_SC.jpg](https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11_view01_SC.jpg)>,  
<[https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11\\_view02\\_SC.jpg](https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11_view02_SC.jpg)>,  
<[https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11\\_view03\\_SC.jpg](https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11_view03_SC.jpg)>, and  
<[https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11\\_view04\\_SC.jpg](https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size4/2019.11_view04_SC.jpg)> [accessed 22 June 2023].

<sup>37</sup> Claude McKay, 'If We Must Die' (1919) <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44694/if-we-must-die>> [accessed 22 June 2023].



Here, the emotional register of ‘after EBONY G. PATTERSON’S ‘while the dew is still on the roses’’ shifts to explain ‘the harder truth — that our bodies/ are spectacles’, because the ‘spectacular bodices, the spectacular/ Corsets’ (*Bushes* 16) are symbolic of a queer confrontation against the harsh realities of violent policing, which is sanctioned by a straight status quo. This straight status quo is the global condition of anti-queerness that impacts all women and queers, but multiply impacts women of colour, queers of colour, and male allies of colour on a scale predicted by colourism and a proximity to whiteness and straightness. Through the ‘bodice (spectacularly/ jewelled) & the bodies (spectacularly jewelled)’; ‘the hair, a braid, dancehall red’, and the ‘soft & spectacular bodies’ of the crying men, Miller poetically narrates a ‘Carnival parody’ (*Erotic* 34), though his queer use of Ebony G. Patterson’s visual art as an ekphrasis poem. This ‘Carnival parody’ (*Erotic* 34) is not simplistic or saccharine satire, but rather exists as ‘the principle means by which social anxieties are performed and expressed’ (*Erotic* 34). The spectacular spectacle of Carnival interpreted in Miller’s engagement, in queer ekphrasis through ‘after EBONY G. PATTERSON’S ‘while the dew is still on the roses’’, allows Miller to challenge the multiple oppressions of a straight status quo, as an example of how queer Caribbean writers epitomise the spirit of Carnival by addressing very real ‘social anxieties’ that are then ‘performed and expressed’ (*Erotic* 34) in writing.

Miller complicates the boundaries of which people and which things can be understood as queer, through the complex affective register of queer confrontation in ‘after EBONY G. PATTERSON’S ‘while the dew is still on the roses’’, where not only is Caribbean male violence represented but also the power of male vulnerability. In creating this poem as a queer confrontation, ‘after EBONY G.

PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses'' continually involves the pathos of being both spectacular and a spectacle for others, as part of a cultural production exemplified by Carnival, poetry, and visual art. As witnesses to these cultural forms, the audience, readers, and revellers become part of these 'social anxieties', allowing them to be confronted by being 'performed and expressed' (*Erotic* 34). Thus, I suggest that *Bushes* defies the divisions between women, queers, and their male allies as a best practice for connecting through difference, a queer communality which can engage in clearing a space for Gill's 'queer imagining and queer fellowship' (*Erotic* 11) of Carnival. So, in my conceptualisation, this 'queer imagining and queer fellowship' (*Erotic* 11) is a queer communality which has a global cultural importance, to confront the boundaries of nation and identity which fuel the global condition of anti-queerness. In 'after EBONY G. PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses'', Gill's 'Carnival parody' (*Erotic* 34) exists in daring the viewer to ignore it: the 'spectacularly jewelled' (*Bushes* 15) spectacle of Carnival become a distinctly queer confrontation. As I will explore in more detail later through *Dreaming*, this queer confrontation lies in an ability see masquerading as a tool to not take yourself too seriously, because your own self is not fixed but is always playing-a-role, which can be empowered through the 'spectacularly jewelled' (*Bushes* 15) 'Carnival parody' (*Erotic* 34) detailed in 'after EBONY G. PATTERSON'S 'while the dew is still on the roses''.

Miller returns in his writing to disparities between the need for continued queer resistance and the nature of contemporary freedoms. Miller specifically complicates the nature of freedom in contemporary Carnival through his account of witnessing queer resistance by the so-called Gully Queens of Jamaica, at Carnival in

2013 (*Withheld* 107-119). I connect this representation with a queer confrontation created by creatures in the Caribbean, who thrive through their fantasticalness and strangeness in 'HERE WHERE RUN THE WILD DEER'. 'HERE WHERE RUN THE WILD DEER' begins with the contextual explanation that

*In 1988, a show bought six reindeer to Jamaica. A subsequent hurricane allowed for their escape in the hills of Portland. Without natural predators, the population of Jamaican reindeer now stands at approximately 6,000 (Bushes 18; original emphasis).*

The existence of a thriving reindeer population in Jamaica is a queer occurrence, because these animals have created their own freedom, on their own terms, in Jamaica whilst remaining out of place. The reindeer represent the beauty, danger, and radicalness created when queer entities thrive beyond accepted knowledge related to barriers, borders, and boundaries. To be clear, I do not mean to dehumanise the Gully Queens by reading them with these reindeer, but to imply that that they share a resistant spirit — the queer confrontation of Carnival — because they disrupt what is understood or expected as the “norm”, and highlight the constructed and insecure nature of accepted or fixed knowledge. In my readings, the uncanniness and out of place nature of the anglophone Caribbean, as Rinaldo Walcott’s ‘unique invention in the colonial and modern world’, remains a global reflection of the queerness exemplified by the Gully Queens and reindeer population. This means that the reindeer and the Gully Queens reflect the embedded queerness of the Caribbean, in macrosocial terms, and show that

belonging can derive from sharing difference as an affinity for existing estranged within your homeland.<sup>38</sup>

In Miller's recounting of his experience of Jamaica Carnival, he explains that the focal Road March took its usual route through large swathes of Kingston with spectators and 'security who have formed themselves like a chain gain, long metres of rope held in their hand to maintain separation' (*Withheld* 115). Miller explains how, in Trinidad, some 'refuse to march with this kind of security' because 'the rope, they argue, is too powerful a symbol of other divisions' (*Withheld* 115). Continuing, Miller explains that a few 'boys of disrepute (to put it plainly, they were transgendered)' dared to rise 'out of the gullies in which they had been forced to live and they danced' (*Withheld* 116). I will note here that Miller's gendering fluctuates about these 'boys of disrepute' in his writing; Miller explains that these are the Gully Queens who he has previously referred to as male sex workers in his essay 'The Boys from the Harbour' (2021) (*Withheld* 81-95). However, Miller also recounts with care and reverence the queer defiance of the Gully Queens as they confront the boundaries which separate them from straight Carnival revellers.

I read straight boundaries against queer freedom in the security 'rope' that 'is too powerful a symbol of other divisions' (*Withheld* 115), and which represents that autonomy remains contemporarily policed through identity. The Gully Queens of Kingston are forced to live — as their naming suggests, often literally — underground in Jamaica. But, in their defiance of social norms the Gully Queens do much more than survive, they thrive through an autonomous freedom of their own

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<sup>38</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, 'Genres of Human: Multiculturalism, Cosmo-politics, and the Caribbean Basin', *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 83-202 (p. 186).

design, by disrupting and transgressing the surface lives of the straight status quo. The Gully Queens squat 'in nice neighbourhoods' where they challenge any false security of social norms, because 'in the nice neighbourhoods' they do 'not keep quiet' (*Withheld* 116). I propose that the Gully Queens embody a queer confrontation that epitomizes the spirit of Carnival, connected to Miller's poetic zoomorphism of 'the wild deer' (*Bushes* 19) where

Here run the wild deer —  
the Caribbean Caribou — does this  
surprise you, deer without snow

not even the possibility  
of snow? Here, they are like echoes  
of a long story — the brutal

history of *dis place* (*Bushes* 19; original emphasis)

By transgressing and disrupting the 'nice neighbourhoods', where they do 'not keep quiet' (*Withheld* 116), the Gully Queens thrive on their own terms in a hostile environment. Just as Miller's poetic persona questions if the 'Caribbean Caribou' may 'surprise you' (*Bushes* 19) as the reader, so too do the Gully Queens 'surprise you' in their ability to thrive.

The queer importance of imaginatively confronting boundaries is supported by Miller's complication of contemporary freedom in the Caribbean, as part of a global reality, including 'one of the most enduring criticisms of Jamaica Carnival' which is 'the class lines that it erects' (*Withheld* 110). This means that from Miller's perspective, 'what Jamaica has inherited is the elite Carnival of the French Planters and not the one that had been transformed' (*Withheld* 110), which means a

continued colonial Carnival of oppression that remains informed by the colonality of straightness. This complication means that contemporary iterations of Carnival do not necessarily involve the spirit of Carnival, because they are not 'the one that had been transformed' (*Withheld* 110) which I read as the transformation of a 'distinctly queer possibility' (*Withheld* 112), that epitomizes the spirit of Carnival. By inheriting 'the elite Carnival' boundaries between people continue as 'the class lines that it erects' are part of a straightness tied to their British colonial creation, that continue to be supported by postcolonial powers. The Gully Queens highlight 'the brutal/ history of *dis place*' (*Bushes* 19) which disrupt any false security created for straight citizens by sanctioned social norms. In the 'nice neighbourhoods' where they do 'not keep quiet' (*Withheld* 116), the Gully Queens remain 'like echoes/ of a long story' (*Bushes* 19); both the patwah and standard English forms of '*dis place*' (*Bushes* 19) suggest the displacement of the reindeer in Jamaica as well as the history of The Middle Passage. The Gully Queens remain displaced of their right to citizenship in Jamaica, as a result of their queer confrontation against the status quo. Therefore, I suggest that it is the Gully Queens who represent the disparity between the freedom celebrated by contemporary Carnival, and the fact that these freedoms remain conditional to a straight identity. Miller connects these conceptions directly, by explaining that the Gully Queens dancing in the Carnival Road March 'caused such a scandal on the island' that it reminds Miller of 'something of the sort' which had happened before in Trinidad' (*Withheld* 108). The queer confrontation of the Gully Queens is directly related to the defiance of enslaved persons in Trinidad 'after emancipation when the French planters saw

black bodies include themselves in what had been their own private revelry' (*Withheld* 108).

A straight status quo related to Carnival is confronted by the Gully Queens, to declare their autonomy not only in Jamaica but by proxy their personhood within the world. This thinking follows Paul B. Preciado's conception that national citizenship is one way for all to 'construct themselves as living political fictions', including 'administrative prostheses (names, right to reside, papers, passports...) and bio-cultural ones (food, medicine, biochemical components, refuge, language, self-representation...)'.<sup>39</sup> The truth remains that even if queers are sanctioned by the 'right to reside, papers, passports...' they remain denied 'bio-cultural ones'; most notably unencumbered access to specific 'medicine, biochemical components, refuge, language, self-representation...'.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the Caribbean is not exceptional in not recognising queer citizens, because, under a global straight status quo, arguably queer people always world denizens rather than world citizens. Miller reveals this reality through the Gully Queens when 'the Carnival spectators in Jamaica watched in horror' because 'bodies that they would have preferred sidelined, included themselves in the masquerade' (*Withheld* 108). The Gully Queen's dancing at the Carnival Road March represents the spirit of Carnival, because they 'included themselves' and refused to be 'sidelined' as an alternative to accepting being made into Preciado's 'living political fictions'.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, by not taking these 'living political fictions' too seriously, despite the fact that they can have serious impacts, the Gully Queens performed 'the inclusion of their spectacular bodies' which

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<sup>39</sup> Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus* (London, UK: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020), p. 109.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

‘changed the meaning of the mas’ (*Withheld* 108). In a direct reflection of Miller’s representation of the inception of Trinidad Carnival against French planters, in 2013 the Gully Queens ‘include themselves’ in Carnival to confront the contemporary hypocrisy of a straight status quo celebrating “freedom”, by refusing to allow revellers the wilful ignorance that ‘their own private revelry’ (*Withheld* 108) excludes queer people.

In ‘HERE WHERE RUN THE WILD DEER’ the reindeer are able ‘to escape/ Into hills that have always been escape’ because ‘[T]hey are the new maroons’ who ‘descend on quiet hooves/ to loot from estates . . .’ (*Bushes* 19). The Gully queens are able to escape into the gullies of Jamaica as well as to squat ‘in nice neighbourhoods’ where they are often accused of theft. These connections mean that the Gully Queens can arguably be read as ‘the new maroons’ who ‘descend on quiet hooves/ to loot from estates . . .’ (*Bushes* 19). The Gully Queens represent ‘the new maroons’ (*Bushes* 19) as the ‘boys who came out on Sunday to play mas’ (*Withheld* 116) when they resist the social and community violence they are subjected to. The

Gully Queens were only dancing but suddenly stones were being thrown at them. It surprises me even now that they did not flinch at the attack. They had already learned the lesson; there is only one way to deal with a bully even if, sometimes, that bully feels like an entire island. You must stand your ground (*Withheld* 117).

My interpretation of this violent event of anti-queerness is not meant to inform any idea of an exceptionally violent anti-queer Caribbean. In a personal example, after having recently “come out” at the age of sixteen, I was subjected to a stoning by a



group of straight teenagers in 2006 at a GCSE results party in Nottingham, England. Anti-queer violence impacts each individual differently, and in differing levels related to a person's proximity to straightness and whiteness, but anti-queer violence is a global phenomenon. The Gully Queens refuse to be passive victims against the violence they are subjected to; they become active survivors by throwing rocks back at their attackers, until they must flee for their own safety. Here, the Gully Queens epitomize the spirit of Carnival in their queer confrontation against a straight status quo, to become 'the new maroons' (*Bushes* 19) who resist their 'bully', which not only 'feels like an entire island' (*Withheld* 116) but is a global condition of anti-queerness. The Gully Queens throw back the rocks, 'with as much conviction and as much defiance as they could summon' and in so doing 'a whole new bacchanal began' (*Withheld* 117). By defending themselves, the Gully Queens reappropriate their own reputation as dangerous characters, through which caricature their implicit queer threat makes them 'the new maroons' (*Bushes* 19), with their supposed dangerousness reclaimed by the Gully Queens as a powerful tool for confronting a straight status quo.

The Gully Queens exhibit Rex Nettleford's proposition which my argument has returned to often during this thesis, that, 'in order to cope with an unstraight and crooked world one needs unstraight and crooked paths'.<sup>42</sup> I propose that Nettleford's 'unstraight and crooked paths' are to routes of queer confrontation in Carnival — a rejection of oppressive authority — embodied by the Gully Queens and in zoomorphosis through 'HERE WHERE RUN THE WILD DEER'.<sup>43</sup> As Miller

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<sup>42</sup> Rex Nettleford, Introduction to W. Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story: Annancy Stories, Digging Sings, Dancing Times and Ring Tunes* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), p. xiii.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

explains, 'the offence' the Gully Queens 'caused was in their bodies, and the way they danced in their bodies' (*Withheld* 118); the Gully Queens did nothing wrong by attending Carnival, but were abused by a straight status quo because their mere presence meant that they could do nothing right in the eyes of a straight status quo. The inception of Carnival was a challenge to the status quo; to disrupt the dehumanisation and bigotry of enslavement and indentured labour. In 2013 the Gully Queens chose to dance at Carnival, and through their dancing held up a mirror to the hypocrisy of a crowd celebrating freedom from colonialism and provided a lesson on queer resistance. I suggest that at the climax of 'HERE WHERE RUN THE WILD DEER' the reader is signalled towards the wild deer holding the same lessons for gaining freedom. Like the reindeer, the Gully Queens

[...] are here, with us in this strange,  
strange land. Will you come now  
to the river? Will you teach us

King Alpha's song, & how to survive  
Babylon — how to belong  
where we do not belong[.] (*Bushes* 20).

The reindeer and Gully Queens are as much part of 'this strange,/ strange land' as any other occupant, with 'this strange,/ strange land' being arguably synonymous with a queer, queer land. Therefore, the reindeer and Gully Queens as queer beings in a queer — or 'strange,/ strange' (*Bushes* 20) — land also have precious knowledge of how to live the estrangement of difference as a praxis: how 'to belong/ where we do not belong' (*Bushes* 20). The Gully Queens teach the crowd that straight freedoms come at their expense, and undermine the anticolonial spirit of Carnival. Crucially, the reindeer and Gully Queens also show 'how to survive/

Babylon' (*Bushes* 20), the Rastafari term for ongoing white European imperialist powers, which is not achieved when anti-queerness remains the norm. The reindeer and Gully Queens 'teach us' all 'how to survive/ Babylon' (*Bushes* 20), with a spirit of Carnival that is absent for those global powers which continue to utilise the dehumanisation, dispossession, and abuse of queer difference.

### **Being-as-Playing-a-Role**

*The Dreaming* (2022) consists of twelve short stories which centre queer Trinidadian narratives, and are interconnected through 1960s Trinidad to early 2000s London, with the majority set in contemporary Trinidad and Tobago. The title of *The Dreaming* is an allusion to Kate Bush's album of the same name, through which Badoo's chorus of literary Trinidadian voices are part of a globally focussed queer consciousness: past, present, and future.<sup>44</sup> Many of the characters in *Dreaming* connect across the stories. For example, Trevor, who is ostensibly a straight taxi driver that leads a straight public life, including a girlfriend, whilst secretly having sex with a number of the male characters from *Dreaming*. *Dreaming* surprises and delights in equal measure, whilst meditating on living a queer Caribbean life and complicating the idealisation of queer freedom in other global locations. Key stories for interpretation in this chapter will be: 'PRELUDES' (*Dreaming* 120-132), 'CONUNDRUM' (*Dreaming* 20-33), and 'SELECTED BOYS: 2013-2016' (*Dreaming* 69-81). *Dreaming* represents the ways that Caribbean queers subvert a narrative of straightness as the "norm", by creating their lives as the

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<sup>44</sup> The allusion to Kate Bush is confirmed by Badoo in his acknowledgements section from *Dreaming*.

epitome of Carnival spirit whose confrontation lies in securing that their queer lives remain tempoed by their own individual rhythms.

The seemingly insurmountable oppression of a global straight status quo is revealed as a façade throughout *Dreaming*, by unveiling straight dominance as specious, superficial, and mutable. This is important because if straight dominance is undermined then it should not be taken too seriously and can be resisted with a playfulness characterising the camp aspects of queer confrontation in Carnival spirit. This queer confrontation is narrated through 'PRELUDES' by challenging the idea that queer freedom is exclusive to certain global locations. 'PRELUDES' narrates the experiences of Finn, living his queerness whilst between Trinidad and London and studying Law at King's College. 'PRELUDES' creates a queer confrontation against conventional understandings of gender and sexual freedoms, by depicting how anti-queerness remains a global phenomenon in an unbroken timeline within colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial power structures. It is important for this conventional understanding to be confronted, because having this knowledge exposes the fact that queer freedom is always possible in the here and now and wherever you are located. This arguably reflects the spirit of Carnival because Carnival began as a confrontation of enslavement — dehumanisation and dispossession — rooted in the anti-queer force of colonialism.

The queer confrontation of 'PRELUDES' is represented by Finn while in London during a trip to 'Heaven, the gay club near the university', because when finding that he 'was only the second black person in the room' (*Dreaming* 121) he becomes 'nervous' in a way he had never experienced in Trinidad. This experience is added to when Finn walks home, as 'a car pulled up and a man shouted Paki and

sped away' (*Dreaming* 122). Finn's sexual life in London reflects these realities as 'hookups were tough' and included 'a sea of rejection' (*Dreaming* 129). This 'sea of rejection' goes beyond attraction and personal preference, as Finn's Grindr replies include the bigoted responses: 'No Asians, No Blacks, No femmes, No fats, No offence but not into Arabs (?)' (*Dreaming* 129). These responses confront the idea that being freer to express gayness creates queer freedom. Finn's experiences reflect Matthew Jones' description that 'for queers, moments of rupture, failure or fissure remind us – as does camp – that subjectivity is indeed subjective'.<sup>45</sup> Here, Finn's 'rupture, failure or fissure' to assimilate to gayness in London, because he cannot reconcile it with bigotry, confronts the reader with the fact 'that subjectivity is indeed subjective' so autonomy for some does not mean autonomy for all.<sup>46</sup> The subjective experiences of Finn reflect ideas of biomythography read in this thesis' third chapter, because *Dreaming* often represents literary figures who share characteristics with Bago. Bago also studied Law at King's College London, meaning that the Finn's narrative reminds the reader that Bago's 'subjectivity is indeed subjective', because Bago's own experiences inform 'PRELUDES' as an outsider in the supposedly queer friendly location of London.<sup>47</sup> Bago reorients the idea that, as it has often been imagined, London is a queer haven because this is entirely subjective. By representing a subjective negative experience by a queer Trinidadian person, Bago confronts, and then negates, the perception that legal sanctions related to queerness have any impact on the cultural shifts necessary for

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew J. Jones, "Enough of being Basely Tearful': 'Glitter and Be Gay' and the Camp Politics of Queer Resistance', *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 10:4 (2016), 422-445 (p. 435).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

queer freedom to exist. Crucially, the bigoted messages that Finn experiences in the replies 'No femmes, No fats, No offence but not into Arabs (?)' are not only racist but are intersected with other abuses against queers, felt globally, including internalised homophobia, misogyny, fatphobia and xenophobia.

Reflecting Miller's experience that expressing his most authentic queerness occurs only when he is in Jamaica, Finn loses confidence in his queerness in London due to the bigotry experienced against his blackness, effeminacy, body type, and Caribbeanness. Finn had previously believed that in London he 'could go to dinner parties and be free and it was fine' but Finn discovers that this was only 'what I had been led to believe, or allowed myself to believe, or wanted to believe, from my island afar' (*Dreaming* 123). Finn explains that even 'those people' he 'did manage to bed' whilst in London 'consumed' him 'only because they felt I was rare and exotic in some way' (*Dreaming* 129). These sexual encounters in London remain a fetishization of Finn, for being 'rare and exotic in some way', by British people who 'could see no further than that' (*Dreaming* 129). As opposed to achieving queer freedom in London, Finn loses a sense of his worth; having 'believed that leaving Trinidad would set me free' he instead 'became invisible' (*Dreaming* 129). As Finn 'became invisible' (*Dreaming* 129) in London, he gains the self-realization that he 'wanted Trinidad' and he 'had to come back' (*Dreaming* 129). On returning to Trinidad, Finn comes to terms with what living as a queer person in Trinidad will mean; living in the uncertainty that 'I wanted Trinidad, but did Trinidad want me?' (*Dreaming* 129). This uncertainty characterises the queer confrontation of 'PRELUDES', where there remains no fixed answer that freedom can be found in any global location, because queer freedom is only found in the self. However, the

fact that Finn ‘wanted Trinidad’ and he ‘had to come back’ (*Dreaming* 129) represents Israel Reyes’s contention that through ‘queer camp, the performer and audience share the ability to discern the double meaning’ of a subject or object.<sup>48</sup> Finn ‘wanted Trinidad’ and he ‘had to come back’ (*Dreaming* 129) as a queer confrontation which allows the reader the ‘ability to discern the double meaning’ of his return from London: queer freedom must not be tied to a location but is a home designed, founded, and constructed within the self.<sup>49</sup> ‘PRELUDES’ depicts the queer confrontation of Carnival spirit, because when Finn learns he was incorrect in his belief ‘that leaving Trinidad would set me free’ (*Dreaming* 129) he gains insight that queer freedom is always unfixed by nation. Freedom as being unfixed by nation remains alive within the spirit of Carnival because, as Gill explains, it includes ‘a *there* that is not ever there completely but shifting perpetually like an uneasy spirit between the material world and a fetishistic longing’ (*Erotic* xxiii; emphasis original). Finn embodies this ‘uneasy spirit’ of Carnival with its ‘fetishistic longing’ (*Erotic* xxiii), for a freedom which can undoubtedly be found in Trinidad, no matter the now globally proliferated falsehood of exceptional anti-queerness in the Caribbean.

Finn leaves London to return to Trinidad and quickly becomes sexually involved with Trevor, the taxi driver who connects many of the stories in *Dreaming*. This encounter is interpreted by Finn as one-time and casual when he awakes without Trevor. However, Trevor’s ‘taxi hadn’t gone’ as he had ‘gotten up early’ and ‘parked it discretely at the side of the house’ (*Dreaming* 132). ‘PRELUDES’ ends with

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<sup>48</sup> Reyes, p. 522.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Finn finding Trevor amid the final line: 'there he was, on the sand, walking towards me' (*Dreaming* 132). 'PRELUDES' disrupts the global realities of dehumanisation and dispossession experienced by queer persons, to confront the reader with the fact that a queer home can be found in Trinidad and not London. Thus, 'PRELUDES' confronts the global realities of anti-queerness through content which arguably epitomises the resistant spirit of Carnival.

I posit that the queer confrontation of Finn connects with the biomythography of Badoo to represent Marshall's interpretation of the 'complex rituals of mimicry and resistance' within Carnival. For Marshall, the mimicry and resistance of Carnival 'encourages postcolonial communities to engage with historical memory' and this occurs in 'PRELUDES', when, just like Badoo, Finn finds his own queer freedom in Trinidad.<sup>50</sup> In Trinidad, Finn's queerness can 'decolonise both the mind and the spirit' by invoking 'complex rituals of mimicry and resistance', allowing Finn queer freedom in the present, on his terms, and in his mode.<sup>51</sup> The 'complex rituals of mimicry and resistance' related to Finn are alive within the seemingly quotidian act of Trevor deciding to stay with Finn.<sup>52</sup> By choosing to stay with Finn, Trevor ensures the possibility for them to thrive in Trinidad on their own terms, and in resistance to a global straight status quo which means that queer freedom in Trinidad is as possible as in any other global location. The climax of 'PRELUDES' remains open to Finn's ability to live his own queer freedom in Trinidad, as a defiant act that cannot be denied or judged as not "free" enough. When the final lines of 'PRELUDES' portray Trevor 'on the sand, walking

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<sup>50</sup> Marshall, p. 621.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



towards me' (*Dreaming* 132), the reader is provided with a utopian horizon of queerness — the gold in the rubble, and hope — explored in my previous chapter. Trevor becomes a horizon of queer desire and utopian longing for Finn: the hope for Finn's queer future in Trinidad. This potential future is one which will thrive through difficult realities, embodying the queer confrontation of Carnival spirit, because, by living queerly in Trinidad, Finn can 'decolonise both the mind and the spirit', as an autonomous freedom which cannot be defined, or judged, against another geographical location.<sup>53</sup>

In 'CONUNDRUM' a textual embodiment of Carnival spirit is created in a queer confrontation between masquerading, Pierrot Grenade, and the love story of two male poets: Newton and Klaus. Prior to meeting Klaus, Newton exposes his difficulty connecting with other men as the exposition of 'CONUNDRUM' explains that he 'had recently deleted Grindr again' (*Dreaming* 20). Here, 'CONUNDRUM' represents a globally shared queer social phenomenon — the tensions of online dating apps — that connects 'CONUNDRUM' with 'PRELUDES' as well as later to 'SELECTED BOYS: 2013-2016'. Newton mimics Finn by finding queer connection difficult, as 'it wasn't just the men online', it was also 'the cool, pretty boys at Boycode parties'; 'the Muscle Marys at Carnival fetes'; and 'the slightly pretentious gays at Drink! Wine Bar' (*Dreaming* 20). This representation characterises Newton, like Finn, and many protagonists of *Dreaming*, as an outsider to established LGBT+ communities: Newton remains marginal to the marginalized because Newton is queer. Finn's time in London in 'PRELUDES' connects with Badoo's lived experiences

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<sup>53</sup> Marshall, p. 621.

just as in 'CONUNDRUM' Newton both is and is not Badoo, as an 'obscure mid-career poet' who believes he 'might possibly break through and become a household name' as 'the author of unprecedented Caribbean poetry bestsellers' (*Dreaming* 26).

I propose that Newton and Finn both being and not being Badoo involves the queer confrontation of Carnival amid masking, as Badoo's characters form a Carnival masquerade band with himself. In Carnival masquerading, revellers costume into other character but remain themselves which reflects a core facet of camp: that being yourself includes creating yourself and taking control of your own narrative. In Sontag's terms: 'being-as-Playing-a-Role'.<sup>54</sup> This 'being-as-Playing-a-Role' is a camp confrontation against the seriousness with which essential, fixed, and immutable identities are often understood. Badoo explains in an essay that he 'always felt that masking reveals more than it conceals' and that this is 'a truth those who play mas in Trinidad's Carnival know' (*Undiscovered* 74). The queer confrontation of this action lies in literary figures evidencing their camp 'being' as 'playing-a-Role' because, as with Carnival, a 'costume — whether an elaborate fantasy of imperial life in Rome or a skimpy bikini with feathers and beads — betrays our choices' (*Undiscovered* 74). This is important because 'choices say something' (*Undiscovered* 74), and by revealing personal choices, which always include and exclude aspects of ourselves, masking 'reveals more than it conceals' (*Undiscovered* 74). The self-fashioning that comes from camp means that deciding to hide yourself in a costume, or a literary character, can in fact create a queer

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<sup>54</sup> Sontag, p. 280.

confrontation which portrays more of yourself to the world. In 'CONUNDRUM' Newton is involved with the spirit of Carnival, where Bagoos both does and not depict himself to represent how all our 'choices say something' (*Undiscovered* 74). This means that seemingly concealing aspects of ourselves in costume, or in a literary character, actually allows for a queer freedom of self-expression, by knowing that the choice of our mask in masquerading 'reveals more than it conceals' (*Undiscovered* 74).

In 'CONUNDRUM' Klaus is an emerging poet whilst Newton is more established. Newton cattily critiques that 'perhaps with a little editing, a little shaping' Klaus' poetics 'could become less like something you might have once read on Tumblr'; 'a little less wannabe Rapi Kaur and more Klaus Antonine' (*Dreaming* 26). Here, Newton engages in Halperin's view of the importance of quipping and queerness because it 'punctuates the atmosphere of masculine seriousness'.<sup>55</sup> Newton 'punctuates the atmosphere of masculine seriousness' related to literature by referencing Klaus' poetics as 'something you might have once read on Tumblr' (*Dreaming* 26).<sup>56</sup> Quipping involves a queer confrontation against the seriousness of who gets to decide what is "high", "low", "good", or "bad", culture. Newton's observation that one day Klaus' poems 'could become less like something you might have once read on Tumblr' (*Dreaming* 26) 'punctuates the atmosphere of masculine seriousness', related to literature, by representing the affectation of Klaus in being unoriginal and Newton in playful quipping.<sup>57</sup> By making contradistinction between something being better if it is 'a little less wannabe Rapi

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<sup>55</sup> Halperin, p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Kaur and more Klaus Antonine' (*Dreaming* 26), Newton highlights an attention to personal autonomy: the need for Klaus to define his poetics on his own terms.

This quipping continues on to connect with the spirit of Carnival through the representation of Newton and Klaus as queer poets and Pierrot challengers.<sup>58</sup> The queerness of Carnival characters — their resistance to straight norms amid their rejection of fixed meaning — is a space which often includes gender and sexual playfulness. This playfulness echoes my previous chapter's examination of Caribbean folk figures as folx figures. Regarding my previous reading of Anansi stories, I do not newly propose Carnival characters as a queer confrontation, but rather that queer confrontation has always existed in Carnival and connects it with queer writing. The queering of Newton's critique surrounding taste arguably connects with Newton's poetic engagement with Pierrot Grenade, because Newton relates how he was invited by the University of West Indies 'to participate in a colloquium on the Pierrot Grenade after his poem on the Carnival character had been published in *Callaloo*' (*Dreaming* 28). By representing a relationship between the queerness of Newton and Klaus with Pierrots, Bagoo confronts the reader with the queer spirit of Carnival. As explained in this chapter's introduction, Pierrot Grenade is a noble scholar who chooses to wear rags over an elegant costume, and, as Marshall explains, 'challenges other Pierrots to a spelling competition' with 'claims to be able to spell any word'.<sup>59</sup> I propose that Newton's description that Klaus could one day be 'a little less wannabe Rapi Kaur and more Klaus Antonine' (*Dreaming* 26) performatively represents Newton and Klaus as Pierrot challengers

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<sup>58</sup> Jones, p. 435.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall p. 627.

because they remain in literary competition. Moreover, that Bago's representation of Newton and Klaus as Pierrots performatively enacts the queerness of Carnival.

I interpret a relationship between performativity and camp following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorisation that 'performativity may get us a lot further with the cluster of phenomena generally called "camp" than the notion of parody will' because performativity works to subvert the idea of an essential or original cultural "norm".<sup>60</sup> Sedgwick's understanding of performativity remains Butlerian in so far as 'recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject'.<sup>61</sup> In 'CONUNDRUM', the queerness of Carnival is entwined with Newton and Klaus meaning that camp is not 'conferred' on Pierrots but 'forms' its queer confrontation.<sup>62</sup> It is important to note that this creatively imagined Pierrot remains no less transformative for being a literary representation, because, as Homi K. Bhabha explains, the performative means 'adding *to*' a cultural form which 'does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge' resulting in the production of 'other spaces of subaltern signification'.<sup>63</sup> In 'CONUNDRUM' I posit that these 'other spaces of subaltern signification' are the queerness of Carnival, where Newton (as both Bago and not Bago) and Klaus are each performative Pierrots. Newton's and Klaus' performative Pierrots confront the

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<sup>60</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James' *The Art of the Novel*', *Gay Shame*, eds. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 49-62 (p. 61).

<sup>61</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2011), p. 171.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), p. 225; emphasis in original.

straightness and nationalism surrounding contemporary conceptions of Carnival.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Newton, Badoo, and Klaus, are not Pierrot parodies but are embodiments of Pierrot queerness. By representing Newton and Klaus as Pierrots, Badoo also involves himself within the function of performativity, as an action which can inform social change, because it reveals the spirit of Carnival as existing not only through queer characters but through queer people, which may be one and the same.

Donna McCormack unpacks Bhabha's performativity in queer terms, by interpreting how 'the performative is the excess that never quite lets boundaries, narratives or historical accounts cohere'.<sup>65</sup> Following McCormack, I read this 'excess that never quiet lets boundaries, narratives or historical accounts cohere' in 'CONUNDRUM' as Badoo's queer representation of Newton in an academic colloquium.<sup>66</sup> Here, Newton is intimately connected to Pierrot, whilst disorienting 'boundaries, narratives or historical accounts' that separate queerness, Carnival, and academic scholarship, even including those surrounding the relevant African diasporic journal *Callaloo*. This action is important as the queer confrontation epitomized by the spirit of Carnival, because, as Gill explains, historically, Carnival was a 'satirical play' (*Erotic 6*), or a seemingly unserious critique, which had profound meaning for participants. Gill describes that Carnival was 'a symbolic enactment of the very challenge to authority that might ultimately culminate in a revolt of the enslaved' (*Erotic 6*). Thus, 'a symbolic enactment of' queerness and

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<sup>64</sup> Bhabha, p. 225.

<sup>65</sup> Donna McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Pierrots in 'CONUNDRUM' complicates 'boundaries, narratives or historical accounts' which can be 'the very challenge to authority' (*Erotic* 6) that expose the queer confrontation of Carnival.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, Badoo's representation of an interconnection between queerness and Pierrots in 'CONUNDRUM', has the potential to empower perspectival change to question if Carnival, postcolonial, and global freedoms can be said to exist if anti-queerness remains the norm.

The queer confrontation of *Dreaming* arguably remains involved with the originary spirit of Carnival, because I posit that they lie within Alberto Fernandez Carbajal's conceptual 'crossroads between postcolonial and queer discourses'.<sup>68</sup> The spirit of Carnival remains representational of this 'crossroads' because it is a 'joint battleground that dissolves a singular envisioning of national identity by favouring the mixing of cultural perspectives and sexualities'.<sup>69</sup> This crossroads is reflected in Carnival and *Dreaming*, because neither remain fixed by 'national identity', instead 'favouring the mixing of cultural perspectives and sexualities' to advocate for the autonomy of queers, globally.<sup>70</sup> Similar intersections between queer freedom, camp confrontation, and Carnival are represented in 'SELECTED BOYS: 2013-2016', where Duane and Geoffrey adopt polyamory at Carnival time. The names of the third parties who join Duane and Geoffrey are italicised as subtitles in 'SELECTED BOYS: 2013-2016' which depict vignettes from their relationship. In *Manuel*, Duane 'switched on Geoffrey's stereo' and as 'it was Carnival time' he 'found something simple, something pulsing' (*Dreaming* 69). This

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<sup>67</sup> McCormack, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Alberto Fernández Carbajal, 'On Being Queer and Postcolonial: Reading Zadie Smith's *NW* through Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 51:1 (2016), 76-91 (p. 78).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

'Carnival time' becomes the soundtrack of queer sexual freedoms, which still come at a price for Duane because he is adopting polyamory only because he would 'do anything for Geoffrey' including priming his 'cock that was now incredibly eager as it curved to a destination that didn't include him' (*Dreaming* 69). The background tempo of Carnival and soca intersect with this queer sex as this is a 'destination that, tonight, was this other guy's seemingly perfect, irresistible hole' (*Dreaming* 69). The explicitness of this queer polyamory and cuckoldry contains an aural mis-en-scène of Carnival to confront the idea that Carnival is not for queer people, because it is a nationalistic cultural form or is tied to a fixed identity. The tempos of Carnival and soca create a queer confrontation against the supposed straight "norms" of these cultural forms by being interspersed with queer sex. This representation reflects Miller's disclosure that there is 'a difficult and complicated truth: the place where I have always felt most comfortably gay is in Jamaica' because in Jamaica Miller knows 'the language and the mannerisms of queerness' (*Withheld* 124). Specifically, in relation to the musical forms of Trinidadian soca and Jamaican dancehall as the aural *mis-en-scène* of contemporary Carnival, Miller finds that in the global North it is 'difficult to dance my queerness to soca or to dancehall or to reggae' (*Withheld* 124). Often, there is the demand to 'dance my queerness to the hard thump of a techno beat', because 'in Britain, my black body often hides the truth of my queerness' (*Withheld* 124). As opposed to locating queer freedom in one region or another, Miller and Bago's writing epitomizes the originary spirit of Carnival — autonomy for everyone, everywhere. This correlation between queer sex, Carnival, and soca, occurs again in *Jameson*, where Geoffrey and Duane ultimately fail to seduce Jameson but Duane imagines that 'it might have been nice



to do more than kiss' Jameson 'on a smoky dance floor' as he had 'earlier that night, dancing to 'Carnival Tabanca' by Bunji' (*Dreaming* 74). Creating a synergy between the rhythms of soca, Carnival, and queer desire, Badoo's vignettes, inform a confrontation against the conventional understandings of these cultural forms as straight to complicate who and what they belong to.

After a further series of sexual adventures and misadventures, in the sections *Dexter*, *Kyle*, and *Eddie*, Geoffrey and Duane decide that 'the open relationship experiment was over' (*Dreaming* 69). Duane explains that 'things were going fine until the fete' when 'it was carnival time again' (*Dreaming* 70). The queer confrontation of this vignette is marked by the freedom and clarity which Duane achieves from a seemingly unlikely space: engaging in queer sex at a Carnival fete. At the Carnival fete, Duane loses Geoffrey in the crowd and becomes enraptured by 'Destra Garcia' who 'sang "Lucy"', and 'Michael Montano' who 'followed her, belting out "Like a Boss"' (*Dreaming* 71). Losing himself in the soca and the Carnival crowd, Duane finds himself drawn to a new man who remains nameless with the section entitled S—, but is remembered by Duane as perhaps 'Sean?' or 'Shane?' (*Dreaming* 71). Duane and 'Sean?' or 'Shane?' (*Dreaming* 71) proceed to have a sex in the car park of the fete, an encounter which provides Duane with clarity on his own personal queer freedom in Trinidad. Duane has the epiphany that his 'relationship just wasn't working out' even though he 'had tried so hard to deny so much' (*Dreaming* 71). Duane can 'hear someone singing a soca about falling' and at the jouissance of this sexual union he feels as though he 'was that singer's dulcet voice, climbing a staircase of clouds into the night sky' (*Dreaming* 71). Duane merges with the spirit of Carnival here by imaginatively transforming himself into

‘that singer’s dulcet voice’, allowing Duane to begin ‘climbing a staircase of clouds into the night sky’ (*Dreaming* 71) of queer freedom. This ‘staircase of clouds into the night sky’ (*Dreaming* 71) becomes Duane’s momentary freedom from uncertainty found through queer sex at the Carnival fete.

Duane’s personal revelation through queer sex at Carnival functions to further confront a reductive simplicity: that a location where queers cannot be legally recognized as citizens is any more or less anti-queer than other global location. This is a queer confrontation in the spirit of Carnival, because it utilises the playfulness of queer sex in a Carnival car park to create Israel Reyes’ proposition that ‘decolonizing camp humour’ shifts ‘the standards of taste and distinction that are associated with white privilege and upward mobility’.<sup>71</sup> Here, the playfulness of merging queer sex and Carnival function as Reye’s ‘decolonizing camp humour’, because they undermine the conception that queer freedom is not possible in in the Caribbean. Confronting this falsity, queer freedom is depicted through Duane’s imagining of himself as the soca singer’s voice, ‘climbing a staircase of clouds into the night sky’ (*Dreaming* 71), as he climaxes in the car park at a Carnival fete, representing how queer freedom can and does exist anywhere, and for everyone, on their own terms.

I propose that utilising the title of *Dreaming* as an allusion to Kate Bush’s *The Dreaming* (1982) connects the reality of queer communality and its possibilities for global resistance strategies against a straight status quo. The fact of ‘The Dreaming’ being implicit to *Dreaming* is made clear in paratextual material to

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<sup>71</sup> Reyes, p. 524.

*Dreaming*, where Bagoo relates that ‘I must thank Kate Bush for helping me up this hill’ (*Dreaming Acknowledgements*). Bush’s *The Dreaming* is of specific interest because it has been the least commercially successful, most experimental, as well as retroactively the most critically acclaimed of Bush’s discography. *Dreaming* is encapsulated by Bush’s *The Dreaming*, because, in being the collection’s title ‘The Dreaming’ has a relationship to each of the stories within *Dreaming*. *Dreaming* thus invokes the spirit of Carnival through use of ‘The Dreaming’ whose own queer confrontation extolls that meaning and truth must be made for yourself, by yourself, because no one has the answers so you should follow your own independent perspective. Bush describes this succinctly in *Sat in Your Lap* (1982), the debut single from *The Dreaming*, where personal truth and inner knowledge are all that can be obtained because

Some say that knowledge is something that you never  
have  
Some say that knowledge is something sat in your lap  
Some say that heaven is hell  
Some say that hell is heaven.<sup>72</sup>

When there is no objective truth, because ‘Some say that knowledge is something that you never have/ Some say that knowledge is something sat in your lap’, and there is no fixed meaning, because ‘Some say that heaven is hell/ Some say that hell is heaven’ then all a person has is their own queer dreaming. Bagoo utilises the queer exceptionality of Bush’s ‘The Dreaming’ as an indication not only of the power of self-discovery, but also of the global reach of queer confrontation: a spirit

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<sup>72</sup> Kate Bush, *Sat in Your Lap* (EMI Records 1982). Lyrics: <<https://genius.com/Kate-bush-sat-in-your-lap-lyrics>> [accessed 2 May 2023]. Music video: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4csr6pLZLg>> [accessed 2 May 2023].

of Carnival which cannot be bound by one location, or belong to any one category of people, but that exists as a queer resistance in the service of all global citizens.

### **The Succulency of Queer Relation**

I have interpreted the spirit of Carnival as a queer confrontation in this chapter through *Bushes* and *Dreaming*, to evidence the global potential in understanding their intersections. Examining the global nature of queerness is particularly useful related to the anglophone Caribbean, whose exceptional history make it arguably the first global region. These particularities form part of Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation in terms of the Caribbean which includes its many 'succulencies of Relation in other parts of the world (and already at work in an underground manner)'.<sup>73</sup> Being 'already at work in an underground manner' includes 'what is simmering underneath' for Miller, and is the global importance within 'a distinctly queer possibility' of Caribbean relations to the world (*Withheld* 112).<sup>74</sup> Crucially, there remains the need to never reduce the Caribbean literary imagination as incompatible with global queerness, meaning, to follow Glissant, 'to correct whatever simplifying, ethnocentric exclusions' have disavowed queerness as being explored as fundamental to Caribbeanness.<sup>75</sup> Thus, I have not argued that the spirit of Carnival has become queer, but that it has always been a queer confrontation against a straight status quo informed by British colonialism, which distinguishes queerness from an LGBT+ community and more akin to communality. This

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<sup>73</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betty Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

distinction reflects the decisions of masquerading in Carnival where, for Badoo, 'choices say something' (*Undiscovered* 74) and masking 'reveals more than it conceals' (*Undiscovered* 74). The mask of a contemporary straight status quo related to the Caribbean reflects the global condition of anti-queerness, and it is the choices made in attempts to conceal queer resistance which in fact reveal its macrosocial presence, and strength, in communality.

Understanding Carnival as a queer confrontation has been informed by the reality that Carnival has continued to reject contemporary social conformity, beyond colonial oppression and into postcolonial modernity. This is because the spirit of Carnival advocates for freedom from any oppression of the self, including that of contemporary powers and any possible future authority. In this way, Carnival involves Badoo's 'sophisticated queerness that is sometimes not fully appreciated' because '[I]t's a radical inside job' (*Undiscovered* 75) by residing within Miller's 'complication of roots' (*Bushes* 8). Highlighting the queer roots of Carnival follows insights from Ronald Cummings and Njelle Hamilton 'that queerness and Caribbeanness — *Caribbeing* — might actually be synonymous'.<sup>76</sup> So, if it is broadly agreed that Carnival is fuelled by a history of resistance to authoritarian oppression, then, because queerness exists as the apex of non-conformity, Carnival can reasonably be understood as a metonym for queer resistance. The contemporary existence of anti-queerness within dominant power structures is the self-same oppression resisted by the original spirit of Carnival, which means the confrontation against a global straight status quo epitomized by queer Caribbean writing.

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<sup>76</sup> Ronald Cummings and Njelle Hamilton, 'Dialogues: Reviewing the Queer Caribbean', *Anthurium*, 17:1 (2021), 1-6 (p. 4), <<http://doi.org/10.33596/anth.465>> [accessed 6 July 2023].

## Conclusion

The chapters in this thesis have explored the specific movements, relationalities, modes, ethos, and fights of contemporary queer Caribbean writing. I have proposed that these moves form a literary resistance with a queer communality, which acts against the demand for social conformity to straightness, and which I have proposed as entwined with white supremacy. My close readings of queer Caribbean writings have framed my conceptualisation of queer communality as a reorientation on solidarity, which involves being alongside one another through difference rather than becoming one through similarity. My interpretation of writing by Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo, Marlon James, Nalo Hopkinson, Staceyann Chin, Shivane Ramlochan, Karen Lord, Kei Miller, and Andre Bagoo has informed my proposal that their queer communality has global resonance as a form of resistance to a straight status quo.

This thesis has provided a critical platform from which to view the inseparability of defying colonial oppression and defying straight dominance, because they have been shown to share a final destination: resisting the global condition of anti-queerness. I have conceptualised anti-queerness as a global condition because, although straightness exists in multiform iterations across the globe, a social hierarchy based upon heterosexism and racism remains a contemporary social “norm” in each global nation.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has thus evidenced

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<sup>1</sup> As throughout this thesis, I use speech marks around “norms” to continually highlight that any single normative way of being as only a fantasy ideal that should be treated with the suspicion and criticism implied by air quotes.

the global, macrosocial, and worldly importance of queer resistance and communality related to Caribbean writing, as a cultural form for all to learn from in its rejections of the colonial inception of straightness in the Caribbean, because this mirrors the entanglement of straightness with racism under white supremacy.

The movement of queer communality was initially proposed in my first chapter as a disorienting twist — forward and sideways — exemplified through Shani Mootoo's *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014) with Dionne Brand's *Theory: A Novel* (2018) and *Blue Clerk: Ars Poetics in 59 Versos* (2018). Literary twisting was shown to disorient fixed ideas of identity and community related to a specific form of slippery protection, which was read in my second chapter as a way for anti-queerness to be evaded by spiritualities which cannot be categorised. As explored through Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* (2009) and Nalo Hopkinson's *Sister Mine* (2013), this mode for evading categorisation, dispossession, and subsequent destruction by dominant powers was shown to stem from a refusal to explain yourself to others. This includes an imperative to remain a queer concept as a self-protection, which can be employed to resist any demand that queer people define themselves in pre-codified terms. My first and second chapters began framing how transcultural connections can exist alongside one another beyond identity and community, amid the tenet that solidarity is not to be gained in exchange for autonomy. In practice, queer communality has been presented as a human connection found through difference, whose modalities have been read through the sequential chapter's interpretive foci of survivorship, utopia, and confrontation against a global straight status quo. By disorienting any ideal based

on identity or community as structuring devices, contemporary queer Caribbean writing has global resonance for queer resistance strategies.

This thesis has maintained the argument that subjective experiences related to a person's perceived identity can, and do, make so-called developed nations as much a hostile environment for queer people as any so-called developing nation ever has. The queer Caribbean writers in this thesis are no more or less free when they leave one location for another, because living in diaspora does not necessarily mean leaving the Caribbean. For example, Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo, and Staceyann Chin have each, like Audre Lorde's creative-self explored through *Zami* (1982) in my third chapter, found a return to the imaginative queer foundations of the Caribbean as a space for their queer selves to thrive. The poetic personae of Shivane Ramlochan's *Everyone Knows I am a Haunting* (2017) also depict that all aspects of queer joy, danger, threat, and love are as alive in the Caribbean as anywhere else, because straight and racist dominance exist globally.

Although throughout this thesis I have described that queer Caribbean people experience unique and individual oppression under the global condition of anti-queerness, I have not meant to present a victimized Caribbean or global queer life. I have insisted on amplifying the multiform ways that queer people thrive beyond survival, which is notably interpreted as queer survivorship in my third chapter, related to the creative agency of directing a queer life trajectory in writing, via Audre Lorde's biomythography, Staceyann Chin's memoir *The Other Side of Paradise* (2009), and the poetics of Shivane Ramlochan. The biomythography of writing queer survivorship provided evidence of the ways that a creative queer Caribbean literary self can guide readers to the queer work of self-parenting as a



unique and individual practice. The queer work of writing the self into being is shared across the texts explored in this thesis: in literary representations of being-as-playing-a-role between Andre Bagoo's *The Dreaming* (2022) and Kei Miller's *In Nearby Bushes* (2019); the ethos of non-conformity in *Black Leopard Red Wolf* (2019), and Dionne Brand's disorientating use of her own biography as an academic and poet through *Theory* and *Blue Clerk*. The oppressions experienced by each queer person remain unique related to their perceived identity; however, these oppressions are also strengthening devices for queer people as they must subvert, adapt, and resist straight order to live on their own terms. This skill set is crucial for existing as queer under the global scrutiny of a straight status quo, amid the reality that straight oppression can only be different and not better or worse when anti-queerness is a global condition.

This thesis has interrogated the idea that queer freedom is limited by a person's global location, through exploring the ways that each person is capable of writing their own narrative for queer freedom: from where they are and with what they have. This critical position has disrupted a conception that certain global locations are more or less anti-queer than others, which is important because this thinking can involve a dangerous essentialism regarding human behaviour tied to identity. For example, there is a personal queer freedom represented in the Caribbean and in diaspora, which is shown to thrive through Shani Mootoo's trans male protagonist in my first chapter, and Andre Bagoo's cisgender gay male characters in my final chapter. These texts depict queer freedoms found in the Caribbean as no better or worse than those found abroad and that queer freedom itself remains individually defined.

The continuation of a colonial mind-set within contemporary straight dominance has not been read as vestigial, benign, or accidental in this thesis, because, as Violet Eudine Barriteau explains, ‘states have choices and they choose to maintain unjust gender systems’.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Caribbean state powers continue to fix gender and sexual “norms”, just as each global nation state power continues to fix gender and sexual “norms”, ‘because these satisfy specific, indigenously defined objectives of state interest’.<sup>3</sup> This includes a support of familiar structures by national powers — heterosexism, racism, colourism, and all types of othering bigotry — which inform the global condition of anti-queerness. However, as my fourth chapter explored in relation to folk storytelling, if a nation rejects queerness in exchange for straight “norms” then a nation arguably contravenes their own traditions because these are often queer as folk. The vital necessity for queer Caribbean literary worlds to be imaginings with a global reach allows them to transcend a continued othering of queers by postcolonial ethnonationalism, whilst refusing to be anything other than queer Caribbean. Therefore, I have argued that queer Caribbean literary resistance retains a global reach whilst remaining focussed on a specific context, to transcend these limits and pay heed to M. Jacqui Alexander’s view that ‘self-determination is both an individual and collective project’.<sup>4</sup> I have read the ‘individual and collective project’ of ‘self-determination’ as queer communality, where recognition, acceptance, and empowerment of

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<sup>2</sup> Violet Eudine Barriteau, ‘Theorizing Ruptures in Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean’, *Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. Linden Lewis, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 25-52 (p. 36).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 282.

difference transgresses the separations, categorisations, and divisions necessary for both identity and community.<sup>5</sup> Community and identity are both concepts which were historically borne from straightness and racism, as each identity and community is based on the idea that a person's race, gender, or sexuality intrinsically mean something about a person and so can connect them. The concept of community has thus been interpreted throughout this thesis with as much critical suspicion as the concept of identity. This thesis has proposed that if queer people seek to disidentify then they must also be contra-community, and that both actions exist as a globally focussed anticolonial praxis.

A direct engagement with colonialism related to the social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality amid queerness have been shown to be vital for the global reach of queer resistance, but this has not been proposed in relation to the racial identity of a writer. This is an area for further scholarly engagement because, for example, writing by white authors could, of course, be part of queer communality with the caveat that racial privilege under white supremacy, such as my own, is not consciously or unconsciously ignored. A creative representation by a white queer writer that deals directly with their own privilege and internalised racism may already exist, or it may not. The specific complexities of whiteness in relation to queerness, anglophone Caribbean writing, and global resistance strategies would be a fascinating area for further research but would necessitate more of a primary focus on critical whiteness studies than this thesis could reasonably provide. Relatedly, in my fourth chapter the nature of orality as a queer

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander, p. 282.

literary transgression would be a vast and rich area for further scholarly exploration especially in relation to the anti-colonial slipperiness of oral traditions in their evasion of fixed categorisation.

Another area for further scholarly exploration derived from this thesis could lie in a broader examination of how drives towards anti-colonial resistance remain colonial if they do not embrace queerness. This could include further studies into how differing iterations of postcolonial ethnonationalism remain tied to racism and straightness, by purporting that one straight ethnic group of persons embody the core components and experiences of the nation. Similarly, this could also be explored in relation to nationalistic LGBT+ variations of resistance against a straight status quo as remaining embedded within it by focussing solely on nationalistic LGBT+ concerns. If queerness broadly means the rejection of existing identity constructs to focus on connecting through absolute individual difference, then resistance strategies against a straight status quo which remain distinct from versions of nationalistic LGBT+ calls for a collective action, solely based around being any variation of LGBT+ person, would be a fascinating area for further study.

My insight as a white British queer critic interpreting anglophone Caribbean writing has remained part of explicating how and why the modalities of queer Caribbeanness model a more globally-focussed form of queer resistance, than writing which does not intersect race and colonialism with gender and sexuality. This includes the imperative to not ignore race and colonialism in any conversation about queerness, because these topics can aid queer theory to be a more globally-focussed scholarship. This reading has also included the need for queer people to remain cautious of defining group belonging solely around a supposed similarity, or

a localism, because this has the potential to recreate categorizations, divisions, and separations between people that support the global condition of anti-queerness. Therefore, although singular and unlike, the queer writings in this thesis remain connected by positioning queerness as a human “norm”, because queerness is exposed beneath imposed social orders of categorisation, division, and separation. This perception reorients natural order away from straight-forwardness and towards entropy. The entropy I have explored in relation to the incalculable concept of Caribbeanness reflects that perhaps the only natural order lies in disorder. This argument has been traced through Jack Halberstam’s perspective on queerness as wildness, and the incalculability of queerness amid Caribbeanness related to José Esteban Muñoz’s imperative for a new cosmology. Which is a

cosmology that responds cogently to precarious histories of singular and multiple dispossessions that may seem different at first glance like the histories of violence against women and the imperial subjugation of Caribbean people.<sup>6</sup>

Muñozian conceptions of queerness have had such distinct crossovers with queer Caribbean writing in this thesis, because they hint at the coloniality of a straight mindset which I have conceptualised as the global condition of anti-queerness. Therefore, this thesis has proposed that rather than needing to ‘build a cosmology that responds cogently to precarious histories of singular and multiple dispossessions’, this cosmology already exists as a communality related to queer Caribbeanness that has the potential to be more globally affective when defying straightness in anticolonial terms.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, eds. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong’o (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

In my final chapter I explored why global queer literary resistance is informed by a personal empowerment that comes from refusing to take a straight status quo too seriously, via the camp and playful mode of Carnival. This playful mode for resistance is not frivolous, because, in a reflection of Carnival spirit described by celebrated Trinidadian Mas Man Peter Minshall, it means ‘you are challenging people’ by saying ‘come on let’s stop being so quaint’.<sup>8</sup> I view Minshall’s declaration as a call for queer resistance, against the seriousness of a global straight status quo, which informed my reading of Carnival spirit as a metonym for global queer resistance. The queer confrontation of Carnival is thus present throughout the texts explored in this thesis: from the unruly, joyful, and spirited representations of gender fluidity in *Sister Mine* and *Black Leopard*, to the supernatural, erotic, and lively expressions of taboo sexual pleasures in *Zami* and *Haunting*. The writings explored throughout this thesis have each included a playful queer confrontation against serious subjects, that involves ‘challenging people’ beyond their comfort zone to ‘stop being so quaint’.<sup>9</sup>

As a white gay man who has been internationally lauded for his artistry in the Trinidad Carnival, Peter Minshall is of particular interest to this thesis regarding the global dimensions of a Caribbean racial and cultural milieu: Minshall was born in Guyana and honed his talents at London’s Central School of Art and Design. For Lyndon K. Gill, Minshall embodies a Carnival, and by extension a Caribbean,

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<sup>8</sup> Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 46. Minshall’s art has been a Carnival sensation since the creation of his first costume in 1974 made for his sister and entitled ‘From the Land of the Hummingbird’: <[https://nicholashuggins.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/20080730160127\\_ncba-40.jpg](https://nicholashuggins.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/20080730160127_ncba-40.jpg)> [accessed 1 September 2023].

<sup>9</sup> Gill, p. 46.

‘multiracial and multicultural *mis-en-scène*’ where ‘it is generally understood that even whiteness is far from simple’.<sup>10</sup> The global queer communality I have proposed in this thesis remains similarly committed to this ‘multiracial and multicultural *mis-en-scène*’, by adopting a transgressive boundlessness when it comes to interpreting global queer resistance.<sup>11</sup> This has meant that each subject explored in this thesis has remained ‘far from simple’, because I have been committed to Gill’s ‘insistence on contextualization, contact, and the unavoidable concomitance of cultural influences’.<sup>12</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo reflects Gill’s understanding of this Caribbean complexity related to literary texts, describing that

the most perceptible movement that the Caribbean text carries out is, paradoxically, the one that tends to project it outside its generic ambit: a metonymic displacement toward scenic, ritual, and mythological forms.<sup>13</sup>

In this thesis, the ‘most perceptible movement’ of Caribbean writing has been its global queer movement that has involved ‘a metonymic displacement toward scenic, ritual, and mythological forms’.<sup>14</sup> This has meant a queer focus that is anticolonial to resist the discipline and seriousness of conforming to straight world “norms”.

Queerness is a rejection of straight “norms”, and their ability as an outside force to shape a person’s selfhood, meaning that self-determination remains the only queer authority. In this thesis, queer Caribbean writing has been read as

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<sup>10</sup> Gill, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Gill, pp. 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

resisting colonial, postcolonial, and global authorities by rejecting identity categories as tools of policing and control by outside forces. Kwame Anthony Appiah describes the complexities of identity by explaining that 'one's own political preoccupations are just, well, politics' whilst 'identity is what other people do'.<sup>15</sup> The queerness necessary for global relating has been explored in this thesis as a resistance to identity and community, because, although each human knows that an identity and community cannot truly define them, societies continue to believe in multiform versions of identity and community as a way to make sense of 'what other people do'.<sup>16</sup> This thesis has exposed the queer communality created through disidentification, which informs global relations that are contra-community, amid the reality that as much as we may like to believe otherwise, a person cannot be known by any variation identity: no one can know what lies beneath an appearance. The lack of certainty around a person's representation disorients the idea that a person could be encapsulated by an identity or a community. This context has informed my thesis argument that extant structures of identity and community continues to support the global condition of anti-queerness. With this in mind, I have proposed that an individual should not take an extant identity or community too seriously without critical reflection on why they are doing this, because these are concepts that are imagined by the straight world and are thus only one of innumerable possible narratives for being human which should not be treated as either neutral or benign.

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<sup>15</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'The Politics of Identity', *Dædalus*, 135:4 (Fall 2006), 15-22 (p. 15).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



In their own unique ways, and on their own autonomous terms, each of the queer Caribbean writings examined in this thesis have been disorientating, as a protection against straight-forwardness, and have forged a path towards self-empowerment that can create a personal utopia that confronts straight boundaries. This mode for queer literary resistance with a global reach has its impactful peak in the confrontation of straight boundaries, by revealing that however and wherever straight “norms” exist, with their own nuances, they are imagined constructs which can be played with. In this thesis, I have interpreted a queer literary resistance and communality, which has global resonance, throughout contemporary anglophone Caribbean writing. This global queer reach is part of Kei Miller’s ‘something else’, which means that, what in a ‘British context you might call “queer”’ when found ‘in Jamaica we might call something else’.<sup>17</sup> However, crucially, this ‘something else’ remains ‘ridiculous/odd/queer’; both ‘very odd, very queer, and something ripe for rereading’.<sup>18</sup> In this thesis I have interpreted that which, for Miller, remains ‘ridiculous/odd/queer’ in the Caribbean as a global queer resistance that involves disidentifying and being contra-community whilst connecting through these differences.<sup>19</sup> For example, my rereading of traditional storytelling traditions in my fourth chapter and of Audre Lorde’s biomythography as queer Caribbean in my third chapter have foregrounded the global importance of queer Caribbean writing for macrosocial anticolonial theory, by evidencing that

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<sup>17</sup> Kei Miller, *Writing Down the Vision: Essays & Prophecies* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), pp. 106-107.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

anticolonial actions must be 'very odd' and 'very queer' to defy global white supremacy.

I have argued that the apex of anticolonial imaginings is a queer representation which involves an intersectional critique of gender, sexual, and racial "norms". These queer imaginings have been shown to have a global impact because anticolonial thinking at the intersections of queerness, race, gender, and sexuality is capable of engaging with a wider demographic than ideas centred on straight "norms". In this context, understanding the specific localised realities of queerness is of great importance but is also a basis for the global reach of connecting through difference in queer communality.

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