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# **“Near enough to smell and far enough to desire”: Archipelagos of Desire in Canisia Lubrin’s *Voodoo Hypothesis* and Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here***

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In her essay memoir *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand reflects on the meaning of desire by describing formative childhood reading experiences that evoked the feeling of desire which would later reverberate in her reading and writing practice. There, desire is framed as something expansive and powerful: “Desire’s province widened to the flying pieces, their occasional collection into a movement or a colour or a sigh, ever shifting, ever reimagined.”<sup>1</sup> Desire, thus, hints at a set of continued possibilities. As Deleuze observes, desire is “a positive force, it is not purely psychic, not a lack as usually understood but productive in nature; like labour, desire is actualised in the course of practice.”<sup>2</sup> Desire as actualized in practice presupposes movement: It is generated through a kind of inward movement and reaches outward, extending a relation to something or someone else. In this essay, we read desire across two books—Dionne Brand’s novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) and Canisia Lubrin’s poetry collection *Voodoo Hypothesis* (2017)—which extend these relations across the archipelago spanning Canada and the Caribbean.

For Brand, though desire does appear as an active force in *Door of No Return*, it is impossible to be grasped as a whole; it remains opaque: “I want to say something else about desire. I really do not know what it is. I experience something which, some-

times, if I pull it apart, I cannot make reason of.”<sup>3</sup> She ultimately links desire to collecting: both to the collection of objects and to “a collection of aesthetic experiences” and “practical experiences,” “which if we are lucky we make a sense of. Making sense may be what desire is. Or, putting the senses back together.”<sup>4</sup> This effort to put sense back together, to bridge what has been separate without compromising its opacity, speaks to a transnational, diasporic quest for meaning and belonging, one that spans land and water, islands and continents and can therefore be framed as archipelagic. Departing from these reflections on desire, this essay carves out what we call an “archipelago of desire,” which draws together a collection of places, experiences, and voices in Brand’s and Lubrin’s texts. The archipelago figures as a useful framework to examine narrated geographical mobilities which are linguistically and metaphorically reflected in the language employed in the texts. The desires we focus on in our essay are archipelagic in that they are fragmented and interwoven; they are part of not a whole but of something which resists being a whole, much like an archipelago resists being subsumed into one category. They are always set in relation to someone or somewhere else, to a kind of fulfillment through one’s relation with the Other. Framing desire as archipelagic is a way of assembling these things together while affirming their fragmentary nature.

### **A (Brief) Literary Genealogy of the Caribbean Archipelago**

The two texts put into conversation in this essay were written more than twenty years apart, yet they speak to one another in multiple and profound ways: not only do they treat similar topics and share a Caribbean-Canadian background, but Lubrin also explicitly refers to Brand’s novel in *Voodoo Hypothesis*. By dedicating her poem “After-shocks” to Dionne Brand, Lubrin enters into a kind of archipelagic dialogue with Brand’s novel, as the two texts, in addition to thinking about islands and their connections, now themselves form a cluster of textual “islands” themselves reminiscent of an archipelago. Still, one could trace the archipelagic quality of the Caribbean diaspora across a multitude of writings. Mobilities have been so striking in Caribbean literature, both for authors based in the Caribbean and for those who have left and migrated elsewhere, that scholars have variously termed these movements “double diaspora,”<sup>5</sup> “migratory subjects,”<sup>6</sup> or “caribglobal,”<sup>7</sup> to name but a few attempts to describe Caribbean mobilities. More recently, in their volume on Caribbean literature from 1970 to 2020, Alison Donnell and Ronald Cummings carve out the notion of “Caribbean Assemblages”<sup>8</sup> to make space for Caribbean literatures’ multiple, varied, everchanging and mobile concerns. These conceptualizations of mobility in the Caribbean resonate with an archipelagic framework. However, the archipelago, here, proves to be particularly useful due to its concrete geographical constellation that forms the Caribbean and that can, in extension, be used to explore not merely one or two forms of mobility, but a plurality of mobilities. Throughout Caribbean literary history, one can observe an archipelagic engagement with mobilities that have shaped

the Caribbean and its people. Derek Walcott's 1992 Nobel Prize acceptance speech uses the image of the broken vase to speak of Caribbean peoples' fragmented history and arrives at the archipelago as a geographical entity which makes space for their scattering: "our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Kamau Brathwaite creates a poetic genealogy of the Caribbean as coming into place like pebbles skipping on the ocean, forming into the archipelagic arc that is the Caribbean in his poem "Calypso."<sup>10</sup> Across Caribbean novels, from Jean Rhys to Jamaica Kincaid and beyond, characters living on one island are always aware of the islands surrounding them. In Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is set in Dominica, Martinique is continually present as the place of origin of Christophine, the protagonist's nurse.<sup>11</sup> In Kincaid's *Annie John*, it is Dominica from which the protagonist's mother has migrated to Antigua.<sup>12</sup> Migration and mobility between the islands thus form the backdrop to many of these characters' experience of their lives, in addition to which they are keenly aware of neighboring islands' trends and specificities. Throughout, these characters are conscious of being situated not just on their respective islands, but within a Caribbean web of islands.

Dionne Brand, while drawing on this history, was one of the first authors to write about queerness in a Caribbean context.<sup>13</sup> Her 1996 novel *In Another Place, Not Here* is awash in queer desire. It is set both in the Canadian city of Toronto and in Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean, which is mostly referred to as "the island." Narrated from multiple perspectives, it tells the story of two Caribbean women, Elizete and Verlia, focusing both on their longings for "another place" and for each other. Elizete's life is marked by hardship as she works in the cane fields on the island and at night is abused and beaten by the husband she has been "given to."<sup>14</sup> Verlia, on the other hand, is a Black activist living in Toronto and returns to the island of her birth with the aim to unionize the cane workers there and to start a revolution. She later dies in a rebellion evoking the 1983 United States invasion of Grenada. On the island, she meets Elizete, who later moves to Canada in an effort to be closer to Verlia. This takes the form of Elizete collecting memories and traces of her lover, since Verlia has already died. Their stories oscillate between city and island, past and future, and thereby assemble various desires—for places, people, and a sense of belonging—that serve as a way of bridging distances between bodies, continents, and moments in time. These desires are linked to mobilities, encompassing their desire to move away from the island for a better life as well as a desire for radical change, the latter of which includes a return to that very island. Desire here is always multiple, and archipelagic, as it brings together different parts of the characters' lives and contradictory impulses without ever reaching a fixed destination. In Brand's text, this archipelago is decidedly queer, as her novel charts the relationship between two women who, although located in different parts of the archipelago, are drawn to each other in a web of desire that is itself romantic as well as archipelagic.

Canisia Lubrin's poetry, too, navigates desires that are multiple. Her poetry is "[q]ueer in the sense of making disruption to the violence of normative order."<sup>15</sup> Her

debut collection *Voodoo Hypothesis* challenges the colonial constructions of space and of the body which have created binary divisions and rendered Blackness as inferior. She uses subversive cartographies as a poetic structuring device to destabilize dichotomies of center and periphery, island and mainland. The cover as well as the epigraphs dividing the book's sections are set against the background of a topographic map made of contour lines. Maps, in a sense, drive the aesthetic and political objective of the book, drawing attention to the multiple geographic locations of the diaspora. The collection addresses the legacy of slavery in the Caribbean, linked to the plantation and the sea, as well as today's ongoing racial injustices across the Americas. By tackling the im/mobilizations of colonization and its reverberations in memories, landscapes, society, and the body, we argue that both *Voodoo Hypothesis* and *Another Place* map archipelagos of longing, desire, and political possibility.

Throughout the essay, we will read archipelagos of desire across different literary genres in Brand's and Lubrin's texts, which enables us to examine how these archipelagos and mobilities play out within the content, the rhythm, the language and the form, the latter of which also troubles clear, firmly categorized understandings of genres. As Brand's *Another Place* reverberates in Lubrin's more recent book *Voodoo Hypothesis*, this connection bridges both texts and opens up a relational reading practice, showing that neither text is self-contained.

We will be charting archipelagos on several levels: the first, geographical, level explores how the literal archipelago of which Trinidad and Canada form a part are depicted, navigated, and traversed in the texts. We explore this geographical level through the motif of desire, which, as we argue, is described in decidedly archipelagic terms, reflected in the language and imagery employed. These geographic traversals also figure metaphorically in the texts, the analysis of which makes up the second level of our reading, where we add memory as another way of thinking the archipelago. This metaphoricity of the archipelago compels us to ask what the archipelagic may mean as a metaphor not just in literary texts such as those by Brand and Lubrin, but what it may mean for the study of literature—how can theory become enriched by engaging with the archipelagic and making the archipelagic part of its own conception? While these questions are not addressed in a separate section, they inform our analysis as a whole.

### **Archipelagos of Desire**

In the two books chosen, desire is entangled in transnational relations, mainly between Canada and the Caribbean, that can be made particularly productive through the notion of the archipelagic. A transnationally orientated reading of desire not only evokes close communal or sexual bonds but also discloses power imbalances linked to colonial histories. In her influential book *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe examines ties between Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, drawing the geographically vast separate spaces of continents together through their imperial and colonial

histories of slavery, indentureship, and trade. Opting for the plural “intimacies,” Lowe takes this notion from the realm of domesticity and individualization into a more far-reaching global context that takes into consideration lingering ties of colonialism still enduring to this day. Yet her analysis also speaks to diasporic connections between different groups of people, as it “consider[s] the political, sexual, and intellectual connections and relations among slaves, peoples of indigenous descent, and colonized laborers as an emergent ‘intimacies of four continents’ forged out of residual processes, whose presence is often eclipsed.”<sup>16</sup> While, for Lowe, the larger entities of continents draw attention to often hidden but close imperial global connections—intimacies—, this essay moves to the archipelago to conceptualize relations of desire. It thinks about how using the lens of the archipelagic makes possible ways of understanding desire that are not contingent on the continental and colonial, and asks what intimacy and desire mean when they are archipelagized rather than continentalized. The archipelago opens out onto smaller entities and micro-mobilities, such as connections to the ocean or islands, which enables a theorization of desire as moving across and beyond the transnational, beyond nations or continents as the primary reference point.

The archipelago, extending Édouard Glissant’s theory of Relation, serves as both symbolic and spatial illustration of the thought of Relation. Contrary to what Glissant refers to as “continental thought,”<sup>17</sup> which he describes as static and fixed, “archipelagic thought” makes space for multiplicity and for “chaotic” relations without any attempt at pinning them down. As such, the archipelagic framework, as Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel explain, also serves “to conceive human social formations and historical experiences in which irreducible differences become the norm instead of an exception that needs to be processed into synthesis, harmony, and consensus.”<sup>18</sup> By focusing on these archipelagic relations, one can trace what we refer to as “archipelagos of desire” that extend between geographical places to include people’s navigations of these archipelagos as well as their memories.

In training its gaze on ways in which people traverse archipelagos, archipelagic studies opens out onto mobility studies. Since its inception, the latter field has had an expansive reach, one that includes “the spatial mobility of humans, non-humans, and objects; the circulation of information, images, and capital; critical theories of the affective and psychosocial implications of such mobility; as well as the study of the physical means for movement [...] that enable travel and communication to take place.”<sup>19</sup> Particularly relevant for our work here are a few key insights from mobility studies: That mobilities and immobilities are not a dichotomy but always entangled; that im/mobilities can be physical and geographical but also imaginative; and that a focus on im/mobilities makes visible intersections of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and other markers of identity. In bringing together mobility studies and archipelagic studies, we see the archipelagic Americas as places constituted by mobilities within and between them. This includes physical movement across the Americas as well as imaginative, emotional, felt mobilities, like Elizete and Verlia

traversing the archipelago in their feelings, their memories, and their desires; as well as aesthetic, poetic mobilities made visible through form and rhythm on the poetic page.

Archipelagos of desire carved out in this essay can be read as queer not only because our primary texts depict a desire for romantic communion between women, but also because these desires hold the potential to transgress the normative orders of both heteronormativity and the nation state. That feelings linked to desire and the erotic can be immensely powerful is outlined by Audre Lorde in her 1978 essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,”<sup>20</sup> suggesting that the erotic, though often suppressed and abused, holds the power to unsettle oppressive structures when allowed to unfold. Queer desire thus disrupts established orders of coloniality and imperialism, such as the ones mapped out by Lowe when she speaks of “intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and family [which] are inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor, and government.” Yet it is through communion and connections among formerly colonized and oppressed people that “emergent ‘intimacies of four continents’ [are] forged out of residual processes.”<sup>21</sup> The residual is that which persists and might reemerge, such as in queer archipelagic relations. David L. Eng describes “queer diaspora” as “a concept providing new methods of contesting traditional family and kinship structures—of reorganizing national and transnational communities based not on origin, filiation, and genetics but on destination, affiliation, and the assumption of a common set of social practices or political commitments.”<sup>22</sup> Gayatri Gopinath further explains how “a queer regional imaginary in its supranational sense instantiates alternative cartographies and spatial logics that allow for other histories of global affiliation and affinity to emerge,”<sup>23</sup> alternative cartographies which we argue our two works of primary literature make visible and which we have aimed to bring further to the fore. And finally, Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley goes so far as to claim: “You see, the black Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic.”<sup>24</sup> The queer potential of these texts and our reading of them lies in the ways they rethink affiliation. In this thinking together of the queer and the archipelagic, our essay directly responds to Cummings’ call to investigate “how the archipelagic turn in recent critical scholarship might further reorient our thinking and writing about and across queer sites of relation.”<sup>25</sup>

In this essay, we explore such archipelagic connections. While they oscillate between the Caribbean and Canada in Brand’s and Lubrin’s texts, circumscribed but not bounded by nation-states and political constraints, these texts, we suggest, imagine more expansive and inclusive forms of connection and affiliation beyond national belonging through an archipelago of desire. This desire not only functions as a way to bridge and span the archipelago but is itself rendered in archipelagic terms.

### Archipelagos of Desire and Language

Brand speaks to the capacity of language to “put senses back together,”<sup>26</sup> a capacity to stretch language in order to traverse the archipelagic. Archipelagos of desire are thus strikingly expressed through language. Many Caribbean scholars and writers have drawn attention to the capacity of language to shape reality and to create a sense of belonging, as well as the ways in which it can be used both as a means of domination and a means of resistance. In the context of the Caribbean, where the colonizers’ language has been imposed, the subversion of this very language has been a central means of rebellion. As Brathwaite writes: “It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled.”<sup>27</sup> For Brathwaite, this (mis-)use of the English language is expressed through what he terms “Nation Language,” which points to the multiplicity of Englishes, rather than one standard English version; more specifically, he is referring to the language spoken in the Anglophone Caribbean. Similarly, for Glissant, the Creole language functions as a generative language, one “born of a reality of relation.”<sup>28</sup> In the context of brutal displacement and violent assimilation, this refracting, dislocating, and disrupting of an imposed imperial language creates new forms of expression, which Bill Ashcroft refers to as an “archipelagic’ transformation of the language; archipelagic in the way the fractured islands of language constitute a new whole.”<sup>29</sup> Conceiving of languages as archipelagic troubles any understanding of pure monolingualism and points to the mobile qualities of language.<sup>30</sup>

The possibilities of an archipelagic reading of poetry have already been noted by Craig Santos Perez, who writes, “I see each word as an island with its own deep history and meanings. I understand phrases, sentences, and stanzas as textual archipelagos. I view the blank spaces of the page as watery spaces of silence and contemplation. The reader, then, is invited to navigate the island, archipelagic, and oceanic spaces of the poem.”<sup>31</sup> Such a reading can be useful for Lubrin’s poetry collection as well, particularly for “Unofficial Biography of the Sea,” which guides the reader through these watery spaces of silence and loss, while filling them with new meaning through islands of words and establishing relations through textual archipelagos linking histories, islands, seas, and continents.

In a similar vein, Brand’s *Another Place* invites an archipelagic reading on various levels. Narrated through free indirect discourse and focalized through two different characters, the text becomes fragmented and multiple. The story has several narrators and is told in no chronological order; it thereby, at times, dissolves linear understandings of time. This becomes clear, for example, in scenes depicting the cutting of sugarcane, which evoke times of slavery. The layered quality of *Another Place* adds to the multiple desires articulated in the text. Most importantly, Brand’s use of poetic language makes these desires graspable, multifaceted, and relational. Using Santos Perez’s description of poetry as archipelagic, one can see the textual fragments in



Brand's prose as islands with their own meanings, each word set into a new, at times unexpected context and opening up multiple associations.

In both of the texts discussed, islands are not just metaphorical textual fragments but actual locations through which diasporic relations are forged. The archipelagic framework proves especially fruitful when thinking about belonging in a Caribbean context, where belonging has long been intimately connected to the sea. The archipelago not only draws attention to connections between islands but also between the terrestrial and the oceanic. The archipelagic allows us to map a desire for belonging to places alongside a desire for connection, a desire to belong *together*. As Santos Perez explains, the archipelago "opens space to express solidarity with other peoples, places, and species who have similar struggles and experiences" and the "ocean and oceanic represent the fluid connections [...] between all spaces and beings."<sup>32</sup> This speaks to Glissant's "Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other."<sup>33</sup> Conceptualizing desire as archipelagic offers ways to think of notions like belonging or memory not in terms of fixity and stasis but, instead, in terms of mobility, fluidity, and opacity. It enables us to think about these categories as processual, as moving *toward* something that is itself moving outward. As Jonathan Alexander writes, "desire might be, more generally, the move outward—the self, the subject, the actor and agent, reaching out to sense how oneself is always already in the world."<sup>34</sup> In the case of the chosen primary texts, the world the poems and the characters are reaching out to is one that is varied, interconnected, and archipelagic.

### Archipelagic Desire for Belonging

There are two main ways in which the archipelago figures as a metaphor in Lubrin's and Brand's texts: firstly, in the characters' desire for belonging, both the desire itself and the belonging to which it strives must be thought of as fragmented and archipelagic; secondly, it is memories which are archipelagic. Belonging, desire, and memories are thus seen as consisting of fragments; what makes them archipelagic is both that the fragments cannot be gathered into one whole and that it is the connections *between* the different fragments—such as between one memory and another—in which meaning is seen to reside.

In *Door of No Return*, Brand writes about how the Black diaspora came to be in the Americas through the idea of "a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being."<sup>35</sup> This rupture also essentially marks any sense of belonging connected to the Black diaspora and troubles any fixed understandings of preordained belonging to a nation. As the author notes: "Too much has been made of origins. All origins are arbitrary [...]. Country, nation, these concepts are of course deeply indebted to origins, family, tradition, home. Nation-states are configurations of origins as exclusionary power structures which have legitimacy based solely on conquest and acquisition."<sup>36</sup> Theorizing belonging as archipelagic thus frees one from imperial,

colonial, or national fixations and, instead, allows for capacious relations that need not always be transparent or linear.

In *Another Place*, the quest for belonging is central to the two very mobile protagonists, Verlia and Elizete. Belonging is connected to an unknown origin and the impossibility of return; it is connected to an elsewhere, to “another place.” Elizete’s life is first defined by the immobility of having to work under harsh conditions on a sugarcane plantation in the Caribbean, and, later, by mobility, as she moves to Toronto after Verlia dies in a rebellion, embarking on a quest for traces of Verlia’s life in Canada in an attempt to supplant the loss by memories of her former lover. Verlia, meanwhile, moves to Canada as a young woman to finish her education. Faced with racism, homophobia, and capitalist exploitation, she commits herself to political activism and becomes part of the Black Power movement. She works with immigration assistance programs and, eventually, returns to the Caribbean to unionize sugarcane laborers, which is also where she meets Elizete. Both narrators are concerned with questions of belonging that are linked to loss, desire, mobilization, and immobilization. Their desire for belonging is intimately connected to the impossibility of return to a lost, or rather undetermined and distant, place of origin; it is also connected to the loss of a beloved person and the feeling of estrangement evoked by the city. It is then, archipelagic in the sense that it is not only connected to someone else, somewhere else, as desire arguably always is, but also deeply entangled with various other desires, including that for revolution.

That belonging, in this case, can only be figured as archipelagic becomes clear through its crossing of national borders in the text, as belonging is described as multiple, relational, and as not contained by national borders. Focalized through Elizete, the text says: “No, no, belonging was not singular. They were after belonging. Long past.”<sup>37</sup> Thinking about belonging, Elizete muses: “Here, there was no belonging that was singular, no need to store up lineage or count it; all this blood was washed thick and thin, rinsed and rinsed and rubbed and licked and stained [...]. No belonging squared off by a fence, a post, or a gate. Not in blood, not here, here blood was long and not anything that ran only in the vein.”<sup>38</sup> Brand’s writing, through repetition and accumulation of words that are at times synonymous but not quite, with each word opening up new forms of meaning, makes this feeling of longing and belonging palpable. Repetition points to continuous movement, defying any fixed location, oscillating between here and there. As Glissant writes, “it is through repeating things that one begins to glimpse the emergence of something new.”<sup>39</sup> Much like Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s concept of the repeating island, repeating patterns point to relations, relations which move back and forth across time and space, like a “meta-archipelago” that “has neither a boundary nor a center.”<sup>40</sup> Repetition as movement is thus not teleological, but may dissolve notions of center and periphery. In this vein, Brand’s articulations of belonging in the text are not strictly contained and defined but allow for more complex relations that mine meanings of kinship and expand through geographical spaces and bodily relations. By repeating the word “rinsed,” Brand includes the reader in the temporality of washing, as the repetition of the word not

only points to the repetitive movement, but also takes additional time to read, just as rinsing takes time to do. There is thus a link created between the body reading the text and the body rinsing itself within the text.

The desire for belonging is so central in the book that Elizete repeatedly reflects on what belonging means to her. Belonging, then, is never fulfilled. The quest for belonging, at times, seems cumbersome, deeply embedded in long histories of displacement:

They had had enough of [belonging] anyway, their bellies were runny with it. Enough of love too [...]. They had not come here willingly looking for food or water or liking the way the place set off against the sky or even for hunger [...]. They had been taken. Plain. Hard. Rough. Swept up from thinking of the corn to be shucked [...] they had been plucked, or, caught in the misfortune of a wedding or a war, sold.<sup>41</sup>

As this paragraph makes clear, belonging is connected to past forced mobilities, complicated by “the rupture in history, the rupture in the quality of being,”<sup>42</sup> to recall Brand’s reference to the Middle Passage in *Door of No Return*. These mobilities of the past are rendered in violent terms: they were involuntary, forced, and stripped the women of their agency. To make sense of this unspeakable violence, Elizete, again, finds various ways to describe these forced mobilities and draws on the language of plants to emphasize the brutality with which they were taken to another part of the world. As she continues her reflections on belonging, she draws on images of the island and the ocean and connects the impossibility of belonging to legacies of slavery as she evokes scenes of lynching and colonization. The reader becomes immersed in her train of thought, which is marked by short sentences and repetition. As in Brathwaite’s notion of tidalectics—an alternative framework to Hegel’s dialectic which, influenced by the ocean, evokes movement that is plural and nonlinear<sup>43</sup>—words are repeating and retreating, only to repeat again at a later point:

And belonging? They were past it. It was not wide enough, not gap enough, not distance enough. Not rip enough, belonging. Belonging was too small, too small for their magnificent rage. They had surpassed the pettiness of their oppressors who measured origins speaking of a great patriarch and property marked out by violence, a rope, some iron; who measured time in the future only and who discarded memory like useless news. They owned the sublime territory of rage. Such rage it would hawk and spit out a grass-throated ocean, islands choking; so much it would long for a continent to wash up on and to chastise.

They were not interested in belonging. It could not suffice.  
Not now.<sup>44</sup>

Brand's swift writing allows words to be placed in one context before hopping to another and thereby bridging temporalities and spatialities, seemingly creating an archipelago in the writing itself. Belonging, here, is measured against distance and depicted as never being fully attainable. The island is linked to the finite and portrayed as a place mapped by the oppressors, whose violence remains inscribed in the landscape; belonging, then, can never be enough as long as it is embedded in oppressive colonial and patriarchal contexts. Elizete is fueled by rage accumulated through injustices of the past that still reverberate within the present. The metaphor of the ocean serves to express the smallness of belonging, which "could not stanch the gushing ocean, it could not bandage the streaming land."<sup>45</sup> The ocean thus symbolizes that which defies being mapped and tamed, just like the narrators' burgeoning rage. The ocean is central in much writing by poets like Derek Walcott (in "The Sea is History"),<sup>46</sup> Kamau Brathwaite ("tidalectics"),<sup>47</sup> and Dionne Brand in *The Map to the Door of No Return*, often linked to a desire for belonging, for origin, return, renewal, and possibility. Glissant has theorized the ocean through "the abyss,"<sup>48</sup> evoking the unknown instead of what is known and traceable. And yet, despite the ocean's fraught relationship to belonging, this quest for belonging is never abandoned but runs through the novel like a thread. Together with the feeling of rage evoked here, it can serve to draw new lines of connection, to reimagine collaboration, and to fuel the women's pursuit of change and liberation.

Belonging is linked to the image of the stone, a metaphor in *Another Place* which recurs in Lubrin's "Aftershocks." When Elizete feels deserted by Verlia, she muses: "Well, who'd given her a glimpse just enough to haunt her. Haunt her into dropping here like a stone. Stone. She tried to mash her own face in with a stone when Verlia went. [...] Over and over the stone in her hand moved to the pulp of her mouth, hoping."<sup>49</sup> This passage, as so many parts of Brand's novel, is highly fragmentary, almost alluding to a stone skipping the surface of water, in a refraction of an image used by Brathwaite.<sup>50</sup> A skipping stone is able to touch different places, to forge new connections: The stone here seems brutal and destructive, but is linked not just to haunting but also to hope. Similarly, in Lubrin's "Aftershocks," the speaker holds a stone in her hand which points to the possibility of a new place: "No rescue. Escape was / the farthest she could come, / away from that island – that chance / she would take on that stone / in her hand, on a place / with no one she knew."<sup>51</sup> In Lubrin's poem, the reversed syntax underlines the role of the stone even further; the demonstrative pronoun links "island," "chance," and "stone," thus heightening their significance. Belonging, here, is also tied to a gap, as the stone in her hand functions almost like a gap: It points to a place where she does not know anyone, a place she has not yet filled and which has not been filled for her. But this gap, too, points to a "chance." This productive use of the idea of gaps reverberates in Tinsley's observation that "in queer

diasporic imagining, the gap—the material difference—*always matters* and must be part of any figuration that makes meaningful connection possible.”<sup>52</sup> This might explain why, in Brand’s novel, belonging is not just a gap, but “not gap enough,”<sup>53</sup> as it does not fully deliver on its promises. Belonging and gaps are therefore linked in a complex, counterintuitive way, in which belonging is not meant to fill or answer to a gap, but in which it seems to need to *be* a gap in order to qualify as belonging. This finds its echo in Lubrin’s poem “Aftershocks,” which ends with a stanza consisting of three lines: “There rots a rescue – / rescue is too much to ask / of anywhere –.”<sup>54</sup> The dashes after the first and third line, after “rescue” and “anywhere,” too, are gaps. Only two other lines in Lubrin’s poem end in dashes, meaning that these dashes stand out. They are the last impression Lubrin leaves us with. This poem on belonging ends on a gap, and this gap, read together with Brand, is multivalent: To the reader not thinking of Brand’s line, it might be read as a gap which takes the place of belonging. But when this line of Lubrin’s is read together with Brand, this gap is, or becomes, belonging.

Arguably the main contrast the poem formulates is that between rescue and escape. Brand’s narrator describes how:

She [Elizete] had no one here, no blood turned thick and cut into edible slabs. This was a place she had no feeling for except the feeling of escape. And not rescue but escape. Rescue would be too much to ask of anywhere. This was the furthest that she could come away from that island and the stone in her hand that wouldn’t take in all of her face but dripped and dripped and melted it. She didn’t need rescue. She would take a chance on a place with no one she knew. All the places with someone, some relative, some known stranger, all those places had chewed her up [...]. She couldn’t help looking up and wanting to see water.<sup>55</sup>

“Aftershocks” takes up this distinction between rescue and escape. In the first stanza, escape is linked to the stone: to unbelonging, to a gap, to distance. It is, and has to be, highly ambivalent. But it is nonetheless preferable to “rescue,” which, in being “too much to ask / of anywhere –” is portrayed not as something that is desired though unlikely, but as something better avoided, a notion better not indulged. “What we long for / is hard to explain,”<sup>56</sup> the speaker notes and thereby points to ungraspable possibilities rather than fixed endings.

“Aftershocks,” then, engages with *Another Place*, introducing escape to Lubrin’s verse and inviting an archipelagic reading of both texts. Escape necessitates mobility and demands a right to a belonging figured not in terms of monolithic notions of territory and heteronormativity, but a belonging that, in its shifting nature, makes room for queer desire. As Brand writes in *Door of No Return*, the Black diaspora in the Americas has “no such immediate sense of belonging, only of drift”; thus rescue, evoking a kind of finality and stable arrival, could never suffice.<sup>57</sup> Instead, it is through

moving within and across an archipelago that belonging can be forged, figured in terms not of fixity but openness, which, to go back to Brand's words, "if we are lucky we make a sense of. Making sense may be what desire is."<sup>58</sup> In that way, the senses which Brand speaks of are put together, and the way they are put together is through openness to a fragmentary constitution of the archipelago; this in turn reverberates in the fragmentary nature of memory in these texts.

### **Archipelagos of Memory**

Memory is ever-present in Brand's novel; much of the first part of the novel consists of Elizete's memories of Verlia. It is not only that the characters remember each other, or that they remember being in other places within the American archipelago. Rather, the archipelago comes into being through memory, while memory, and the act of remembering, themselves figure as a kind of archipelago. This connection between memory and the archipelago plays out in two main ways in the text: Firstly, in the way memory connects different spatial nodes of the remembered archipelago, and secondly, in the way memory and archipelagicity come together in the text's form and fragmentation.

One sentence in which memory becomes almost spatial is when Brand's narrator describes how "[i]n the middle of remembering they forget and alight where they are."<sup>59</sup> While the phrase "In the middle of remembering" frames remembering as a landscape both spatial and temporal, mentioning the act of "alighting" underlines the spatial dimension. Usually, a bus is alighted from, or a train is, but here alighting is a more far-reaching term: it points to the characters arriving a little more definitively in the place where they are, and it is through the complex ways in which remembering and forgetting jangle up against each other that they do so.

In Brand's text, islands and continents each carry a different valence when linked to memory. The term "continent" is employed metaphorically; it expresses vastness and immensity, as in "Elizete, flat against the immense white wall, the continent."<sup>60</sup> However, any clear and fixed understandings are immediately defied. Here, the voices in a "continent of voices" become "fragmented ones" in the very same sentence: "She had deserted herself she knew, given up a continent of voices she knew then for fragmented ones."<sup>61</sup> Islands more than continents seem to be linked to memories of the past, to the lush landscape of a distant place:

And enough of distance too, distance without cover, Jesus, without sky, without a hiding place, finite distance, God, islands, islands that came to an end, distance that ran out. [...] No hiding for the flatness, no hiding for the end. There was a valley and hillsides and crops, and crops of children, crops enough to bury and plant and grow again because really there is no ending, ending is only something we hope for like darkness.<sup>62</sup>

The repetitive use of “ending” and “end” in different grammatical contexts exposes ambiguity: while endings suggest something finite, infinite possibilities reemerge through the word’s repeated occurrence in the text. Ending is ultimately denied as “there is no ending,” making a claim for continuity. This excerpt also serves as an apt example of the overall archipelagic quality of the text. Much of the book’s writing is made up of repetition, words repeated and placed in new contexts to create alternate meaning, of short and fragmented sentences and strings of words building to a longer sentence. This way of writing reflects both the thoughts of the narrator and simultaneously sets various smaller units, such as memories, into relation to other, seemingly unconnected, parts.

Much like the narrators in *Another Place* collect fragments of memories, desire figures as a form of collecting. Remembering some people who died, Elizete relays: “Away, not necessarily this earth but away; eyes that favored a dead soul, ears; messages from the dead in the way a thumb was sucked, the way a head inclined, braid hanging; there was the way a baby leaned or turned her head, the way a newborn’s eyes looked as if she’d been here already.”<sup>63</sup> This paragraph shows how desire and memory are interconnected for Brand; not only are both tied to belonging, but accumulating memories can be a way of making desire palpable. Additionally, the way Brand lists impressions can be read as being archipelagic.<sup>64</sup> Much like the archipelago cannot be gathered up into one whole, these impressions cannot be subsumed into one whole either. Instead of being told who these people were and what distinguished them from one another, we are given glimpses—“the way a head [was] inclined,” “the way a newborn’s eyes looked.”<sup>65</sup> It is unclear which of these glimpses refer to the same person and which refer to someone else. It is also unclear how these people are connected to one another, but it is clear that they are connected. Brand, then, creates a kind of archipelago of memory: Remembered glimpses between which there are manifold connections and movement back and forth, glimpses which are not discrete or separate from one another but where one glimpse leads to another one coming to the fore—glimpses fragmented but stitched together. This makes an archipelago out of the text, since the reader glides from one glimpse to another, with only a comma between them like the sea—a comma, a distance, that nonetheless needs to be traversed.

The second stanza of Lubrin’s “Aftershocks” also performs memory as a list:

Bloodlines, anyplace  
 recalled, memory had etched  
 the tunnels of, a nameful hundred  
 rivers gulling the roads, before  
 the miracle of driftwood  
 malls and factories, the greying  
 walls of rooms cramped with all  
 familiar, the ranking plumes that vanish –<sup>66</sup>

Here, Lubrin's speaker lists impressions—driftwood malls, graying walls, ranking plumes—that, as in Brand's novel, do not quite come together to form a whole but instead offer glimpses of a whole at which the reader can only guess. The line ending "a nameful hundred" segues into the next line, which starts with "rivers," but the "nameful" seems to point to people, too—to the people whose reality this was or continues to be. In Brand, people furthermore seem to be archipelagic and spatial. Her text is not only filled with memory but with the memory of people. These different impressions of people from their past—not only their physical attributes, but the way they inhabited those attributes, the way they made them singular—form a landscape of characters who are both unique and deeply entangled. This is linked to other passages in the text where Brand sees people and bodies as connected to spatiality. "If this was enough to crack a world it was sufficient to close one, to make a passage of me."<sup>67</sup> The body, here, in being made a passage, is not only spatial but crosses distance, crosses space.

Desire is what binds together this spatiality of people with the archipelagicity of memory. The novel is suffused with the desire to bring together, to cross, to bridge, to reach. To reach that which is being remembered, to reach from one person to another, to reach another island or to more fully arrive at the island one inhabits. Desire is an attempt at movement: a movement to another person, an attempt at belonging.

Lubrin's poem "Unofficial Biography of the Sea" both ponders and evokes memory by depicting the sea as a fragmented archive, one which holds memories that are themselves fragmented. The first stanza, filled with rich imagery, creates a genesis of the sea and its islands, combining the natural landscape with myths and positing both myth and the land as integral to the Caribbean:

with fires turned to mountains in the sea  
 last children cuddled in the cold,  
 with hummingbirds cresting walls of volcanoes  
 with geese still breathless and astray  
 with the albatross humped down to seabed and core,  
 so the mermaids enact melodramas;  
 islands rocking gently  
 at the bottom of the Atlantic –<sup>68</sup>

The last line opens out onto both a dash and a line break. While the dashes in "Aftershocks" point to a gap that is at times hopeful, the dash of this first stanza points to the vastness of that which is unknowable, which cannot be retrieved, although the stanza that comes before the dash enacts a commemoration of children, hummingbirds, geese, an albatross, and mermaids, gesturing to a richness of the sea and its histories. Whether one remembers that which has come to pass or paints alternate histories, the speaker seems to be saying, it ultimately ends in the same place: a lacuna.



But the poem does not end there. In the last stanza, it speaks of the sea as a place “where we’ll be still, awake to speak, here, the love we know is there. / Elemental fantasist dressed in black, / here is your one, parched, ravaged world”<sup>69</sup> Though the speaker paints the parched, ravaged world as one, as unified, the speaker also differentiates between here and there, placing the self—who is here—at a remove from the love they know—there. This dichotomy between here and there figures prominently in *Another Place*, too. In the right light, this dichotomy sounds hopeful. Though they are not where love is, the love does exist, and even if they cannot reach it, they can imagine it. They can know love intimately despite the distance, an act which makes both the love and the elsewhere tangible.

### Conclusion

In both Brand’s and Lubrin’s texts, desire is a powerful poetic force that spans transnational places and people in its queer, diasporic quest for belonging and memories. It does not aspire to be subsumed or attained but is in line with what Brand, in *Door of No Return* describes as a “widen[ing] to the flying pieces,”<sup>70</sup> ever moving, ever reimagining, flowing into an archipelago of desire. Not only does desire play out through a quest for belonging and the accumulating nature of memory; it is also in their very desire that characters and speakers find a sense of belonging. This points to how desire can be understood in an archipelagic, rather than continental way, as the very fact of fragmentation becomes not only tenable but in itself productive and meaningful. Both the novel and the poems convey a sense of desire that needs no clear national affiliation or fixed endpoint; through their poetics they gift us with an alternative queer desiring that can, or needs to, stay open, fragmented, archipelagic. In the same way that these desires always move between places and people in the narrative and poems, they also move between the two literary works. When Lubrin puts “Aftershocks” in conversation with Brand’s novel, she stretches the 1996 novel into contemporary times, while offering an archipelagic way of writing and reading poetry. Both Brand’s and Lubrin’s texts deal with the question of how belonging can be found within a gap; through a relational and archipelagic reading practice, we have drawn the contours of an additional gap—the archipelagic space extending between Brand to Lubrin and beyond—in which scraps of belonging can be formed and found.

### Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002), 192.
- <sup>2</sup> Jihai Gao, “Deleuze’s Conception of Desire,” in *Deleuze Studies* 7, no. 3 (2013): 406–07, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45331557>.
- <sup>3</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 195.
- <sup>4</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 195.
- <sup>5</sup> Robin Cohen, “The Diaspora of a Diaspora: The Case of the Caribbean,” in *Social Science Information* 31, no. 1 (1992): 159–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901892031001011>.
- <sup>6</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 36–7.
- <sup>7</sup> Rosamond S. King, *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 2–4.
- <sup>8</sup> Ronald Cummings and Alison Donnell, eds., “Introduction: Caribbean Assemblages, 1970s–2020,” in *Caribbean Literature in Transition, 1970–2020*, ed. Ronald Cummings and Alison Donnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Derek Walcott, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,” Nobel Lecture, Dec. 7, 1992, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/lecture/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 48–50.
- <sup>11</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1966).
- <sup>12</sup> Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (London: Vintage Books, 1997).
- <sup>13</sup> Other queer Caribbean literature from the 1980s and 1990s includes Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987); Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996); Patricia Powell, *A Small Gathering of Bones* (1994) and *The Pagoda* (1999); Dionne Brand, *No Language is Neutral* (1998); Dionne Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999). Monographs with related scholarship includes King, *Island Bodies*; Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Thomas Glave, *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Andil Gosine, *Nature’s Wild: Love, Sex, and Law in the Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).
- <sup>14</sup> Dionne Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 10.

- <sup>15</sup> Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2–3 (2008): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2007-030>. Emphasis original.
- <sup>16</sup> Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 19–20.
- <sup>17</sup> Édouard Glissant, "Languages and langages," in *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, ed. and trans. Celia Britton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12pntsm.5>
- <sup>18</sup> Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez San-Miguel, eds., *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Towards New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Mimi Sheller, "The New Mobilities Paradigm for a Live Sociology," *Current Sociology Review* 62, no. 6 (2014): 791, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392114533211>
- <sup>20</sup> Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (1978; New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 53–9.
- <sup>21</sup> Lowe, *Intimacies*, 19–20.
- <sup>22</sup> David L. Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," *Social Text* 21, no. 3 (2003): 4.
- <sup>23</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 6.
- <sup>24</sup> Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," 191.
- <sup>25</sup> Ronald Cummings and Njelle Hamilton, "Dialogues: Reviewing the Queer Caribbean," *Anthurium* 17, no. 1 (2021): 4–5, <http://doi.org/10.33596/anth.465>
- <sup>26</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 195.
- <sup>27</sup> Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (1971; Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005), 237.
- <sup>28</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 93.
- <sup>29</sup> Bill Ashcroft, "Archipelago of Dreams: Utopianism in Caribbean Literature," *Textual Practice* 30, no. 1 (2016): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2015.1059587>
- <sup>30</sup> For an exploration of multilingualism and the archipelago, see Brian Russell Roberts's contribution to this volume.

- <sup>31</sup> Craig Santos Perez, "Archipelagic Poetics: A Foreword," in *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Towards New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations*, ed. Michelle Stephens and Yolanda Martínez San-Miguel (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), xvi.
- <sup>32</sup> Santos Perez, "Archipelagic Poetics," xv.
- <sup>33</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.
- <sup>34</sup> Jonathan Alexander, "Materiality, Queerness, and a Theory of Desire for Writing Studies," *College English* 83, no. 1 (2020): 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43501622>
- <sup>35</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 5.
- <sup>36</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 64.
- <sup>37</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 40.
- <sup>38</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 39.
- <sup>39</sup> Glissant, "Languages," 19.
- <sup>40</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.
- <sup>41</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 40–1.
- <sup>42</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 5.
- <sup>43</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, *Conversations with Nathaniel Mackey* (Staten Island, NY: We Press, 1999), 34.
- <sup>44</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 42–3.
- <sup>45</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 43.
- <sup>46</sup> Derek Walcott, "The Sea Is History," in *Collected Poems, 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), 364-67.
- <sup>47</sup> Brathwaite, *Conversations*, 34.
- <sup>48</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5-9.
- <sup>49</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 50.
- <sup>50</sup> Brathwaite conjures up the image of a stone skipping the water's surface in his poem "Caribbean Theme: A Calypso," imagining the skipping stone as the formation of the Caribbean archipelago, jumping from one island to another. E. L. Brathwaite, "Caribbean Theme: A Calypso," *Carnival of Trinidad*, Special Issue of *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, nos. 3–4 (1956): 246–49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40652638>

- <sup>51</sup> Canisia Lubrin, “Aftershocks,” in *Voodoo Hypothesis* (Hamilton, ON: Buckrider Books, 2017), 10.
- <sup>52</sup> Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic,” 202.
- <sup>53</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 42.
- <sup>54</sup> Lubrin, “Aftershocks,” 11.
- <sup>55</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 70–1.
- <sup>56</sup> Lubrin, “Aftershocks,” 10.
- <sup>57</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 118.
- <sup>58</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 195.
- <sup>59</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 38.
- <sup>60</sup> Dionne Brand, *Another Place*, 89.
- <sup>61</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 95.
- <sup>62</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 42.
- <sup>63</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 39.
- <sup>64</sup> Tinsley similarly writes about the significance of lists, reading them archipelagically in the context of the Black Atlantic. See Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic,” 209.
- <sup>65</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 39.
- <sup>66</sup> Lubrin, “Aftershocks,” 10.
- <sup>67</sup> Brand, *Another Place*, 36.
- <sup>68</sup> Canisia Lubrin, “Unofficial Biography of the Sea,” in *Voodoo Hypothesis* (Hamilton, ON: Buckrider Books, 2017), 67.
- <sup>69</sup> Lubrin, “Unofficial Biography of the Sea,” 67.
- <sup>70</sup> Brand, *Door of No Return*, 192.

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