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“Suspended Nameless in the Limbo State”:
Neoliberalism and Queer Caribbean Diasporas

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Jessica Marie Best

December 2013

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The Dissertation of Jessica Marie Best is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Suspended Nameless in the Limbo State”:
Neoliberalism and Queer Caribbean Diasporas

by

Jessica Marie Best

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, December 2013
Dr. Weihsin Gui, Chairperson

This project seeks to reveal the heterogeneous cultural histories embedded within queer diasporic Caribbean writing that challenge the United States’ political, economic, and cultural hegemony in the post-9/11 world. The goal is to examine the complicities, challenges, and escape routes created by queer imaginings, both utopic and pragmatic, rather than reconfigure essential characteristics of Caribbean diasporas as key components of nationalist, diasporic, or postcolonial identity. In revealing how different forms of desire, kinship, racial belonging, temporality, and positioning exist within and exceed our current notions of nation and diaspora, this dissertation goes beyond an understanding of the terms “queer” and “diaspora” as identities resistant to the nation-state and sees them as working towards a dismantling of neoliberal discourses and their hegemonic framework within the cultural spaces of North America and the Caribbean.

This project will contextualize the nation to the settler-colonial space of the North American continent. It will not only consider how foreign policy directly relates to domestic concerns, but will take as its central understanding that “the state has *always*

operated through sovereign power exacted through racial and colonial violence” (Smith, “American Studies” 310, original emphasis). This project will use queer diasporic writing to imagine alternative forms of being and belonging, while never presuming that “the United States should or will always continue to exist” (Smith, “American Studies” 312). Thus, it does not affirm nor celebrate state power or governmentality exercised by the U.S. state, even though it will examine authors and texts that exist within its national and cultural borders. Indeed, I will take a theoretically comparative approach by examining the intersections between postcolonial and queer theories, along with feminist, indigenous, and trans theories, to examine contemporary queer North American writing from the Caribbean diaspora. I employ these cultural discourses as tools for critiquing and dismantling dominant heteropatriarchal institutions, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and homonormativity, which are key cultural and political components to United States hegemony.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	pgs. 1-19
<u>Chapter 1</u> “Suspended Nameless in the Limbo State”: Orientalism and The Colonial Closet in Marlon James’s <i>The Book of Night Women</i> and Shani Mootoo’s <i>Cereus Blooms at Night</i>	pgs. 20-78
<u>Chapter 2</u> The Objects of My Affection: Animate Landscapes and Queer Attractions in Postcolonial Writing	pgs. 79-125
<u>Chapter 3</u> “Outside I was one way, Inside I was Another”: The First-Person Queer in Jamaica Kincaid’s <i>Lucy</i> and Junot Díaz’s <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i>	pgs. 126-174
<u>Chapter 4</u> Queer Time in Diaspora: Historicism, Chrononormativity, and New Public Spheres	pgs. 175-218
Conclusion	pgs. 219-222
Notes	pgs. 223-233
Works Cited	pgs. 234-253

Introduction

This project seeks to reveal the heterogeneous cultural histories embedded within queer diasporic Caribbean writing that challenge the United States' political, economic, and cultural hegemony in the post-9/11 world. The goal is to examine the complicities, challenges, and escape routes created by queer imaginings, both utopic and pragmatic, rather than reconfigure essential characteristics of Caribbean diasporas as key components of nationalist, diasporic, or postcolonial identity. In revealing how different forms of desire, kinship, racial belonging, temporality, and positioning exist within and exceed our current notions of nation and diaspora, this dissertation goes beyond an understanding of the terms "queer" and "diaspora" as identities resistant to the nation-state and sees them as working towards a dismantling of neoliberal discourses and their hegemonic framework within the cultural spaces of North America and the Caribbean.

Beginning with Homi K. Bhabha's assertion that the nation is a narration ambivalently constructed by the conflicting discourses of the diasporic, the migrant, the indentured, and the interned, and is thus "internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations," this dissertation will investigate the myriad diasporic discourses that insert themselves within the post-9/11 national ideology in the United States and Canada in order to challenge it from within and from without, thus resisting the "marginalistic integration of the individual in the social totality" and creating queer epistemologies that critique and disrupt dominant neoliberal and neocolonial discourses ("DissemiNation" 299 and 302, respectively). Further, this project will contextualize Bhabha's concept of

the nation to the settler-colonial space of the North American continent. It will not only consider how foreign policy directly relates to domestic concerns, but will take as its central understanding that “the state has *always* operated through sovereign power exacted through racial and colonial violence” (Smith, “American Studies” 310, original emphasis). This project will use queer diasporic writing to imagine alternative forms of being and belonging, while never presuming that “the United States should or will always continue to exist” (Smith, “American Studies” 312). Thus, this dissertation is not trying to affirm or celebrate state power or governmentality exercised by the U.S. state, even though it will discuss authors and texts that exist within its national and cultural borders. Indeed, I will take a theoretically comparative approach by examining the intersections between postcolonial and queer theories, along with feminist, indigenous, and trans theories, to examine contemporary queer North American writing from the Caribbean diaspora. I employ these cultural discourses as tools for critiquing and dismantling dominant heteropatriarchal institutions, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and homonormativity, which are key cultural and political components to United States hegemony.

Recent theoretical work in queer theory has used postcolonial theory and diaspora studies to rethink traditional notions of the nation-state and diaspora in order to imagine what Gayatri Gopinath calls “impossible desires,” which refer not only to nonheteronormative sexual and romantic desires, but also to the varied longings for new ways of knowing, being, and belonging in the world. Scholars such as Gopinath, David Eng, and Jasbir K. Puar have used postcolonial theories to launch a critique of traditional

heteropatriarchal notions of the nation and diaspora, with Eng and Puar specifically focusing on queer diasporas located within the United States. These critics follow Lisa Duggan's contention that "homonormativity" constitutes the "new neoliberal sexual politics" of the gay and lesbian movement, which is "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50). Both Eng, who focuses on Asian and Asian-American artists, and Puar, who theorizes the figure of the Arab, Sikh, or Muslim "terrorist" in U.S. culture, expand Duggan's understanding of homonormativity while using queer diasporas as a methodology to contest such hegemonic neoliberal institutions.

Following the work of these critics, I will use literary texts from the Caribbean diaspora in North America to discuss these issues pertinent in the field of queer theory, thus wresting Caribbean diasporic writing away from its traditional theoretical home within feminist, postcolonial, and Caribbean studies in order to reveal the ways in which writers have creatively imagined new ways of making sense of the world that "work against totalization and homogenization, be it modernization, Westernization or Americanization, capitalism, or nationalism" (Krishnaswamy 3). This project will continue the work initiated by Duggan, Gopinath, Puar, and Eng by exploring the ways in which diasporic Caribbean writers have challenged neoliberal ideology since the 1990s and into the twenty-first century through queer writing—that which dismantles dominant notions of knowledge formation and ways of knowing; couplehood and sexual object

choice; racial belonging; individual identity; linear time, longevity, and historicity; citizenship and national belonging; along with empire and political resistance.

The Neoliberal State

One major goal of this project is to seek out the myriad ways of loving, desiring, knowing, articulating, and being in the world that are represented in the fictional work of queer Caribbean diasporic writers living and publishing in the United States and Canada that do not align with neoliberal ideology. My understanding of neoliberalism comes from David Harvey who states that it consists of “political practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). According to Harvey, the world has taken a dramatic and emphatic turn towards neoliberalism since the 1970s, with the help of key figures such as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Deng Xiaoping, and Paul Volcker solidifying its prominence in the 1980s. The neoliberal state, therefore, guarantees the rights to “individual freedom” only so far as they “reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital” (Harvey 2). Some of the main results have been massive deregulation of the financial markets, increased privatization and the creation of markets where there were none before, and the focus on individual freedoms, with the “individual” being responsible for their own financial success or failure. Redistribute effects have also taken place, resulting in the restoration of power to the economic elite, the “One Percent,” which controls the majority of the

world's wealth. The creation of such a ruling class "drew heavily on surpluses extracted from the rest of the world through international flows and structural adjustment practices" (Harvey 29), thus causing a major result of neoliberalism to be vast uneven geographical developments and continued economic exploitation.

Finally, one major result of the neoliberal state is the discursive focus on key words like "freedom," "rights," "equality," and "multiculturalism," which serve the state by masking the vast economic and social inequalities that pervade U.S. society and the world at large. Indeed, "it has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent mask full of wonderful sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration or reconstitution of naked class power, locally as well as transnationally, but most particularly in the main financial centers of global capitalism" (Harvey 119). In her discussion of neoliberal ideology and its promotion of "tolerance," Wendy Brown states,

"The emergence of tolerance at particular moments and for particular groups...manages the demands of marginal groups in ways that incorporate them without disturbing the hegemony of the norms that marginalize them. This is an impressive feat, and one that is uniquely performed by tolerance within [neo]liberal discourse." (36)

Such discourses of "tolerance" and "freedom" mask the United States' "savagely intolerant history" and have "become a discursive token of Western legitimacy in international affairs," such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Brown 37). Because of this, many critics argue that marginalized groups should not be seeking redress from the

neoliberal state in the form of individual rights and recognition.ⁱ By doing so, we allow the state to co-opt our social movements and political identities, putting them in service of the neoliberal regime and its ideals of personal freedom. Instead, we must articulate ways of being in the world that are different from, and have the potential to be resistant to, harmful neoliberal practices at home and abroad. I argue that by looking at the overlapping and interworking arguments in queer and postcolonial studies, along with queer Caribbean literatures of diaspora, we can begin such a project.

Queer/Postcolonial

Queer theory and postcolonial theory became prominent within the North American academy during the late 1980s and the 1990s, yet it is only recently that there have been critical works that examine the connections between the two fields.ⁱⁱ A foundational conjunction came in 2005 from Gayatri Gopinath in her book, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. In this text, Gopinath makes the invaluable intervention that “discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration” (7). She also examines how diaspora is to the nation the way that queerness is to heteronormativity, in that it is figured as the “abjected and disavowed Other,” and she considers queerness to be “a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora” (11). Further, Gopinath challenges heteropatriarchal notions of diaspora itself, which are often figured as male and heterosexual, by imagining the “impossible” figure of the queer female diasporic subject.

Using “queer” to demarcate non-heteronormative practices and desires, Gopinath focuses on South Asian diasporas in order to contest that queer diasporas can critique heterosexuality and the nation form “while exploding the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy” (11).

Gopinath’s foregrounding of queer diasporic female subjectivity, which serves as a site for the critique of traditional, heteropatriarchal forms of both diaspora and nation, is a starting point for my own project, which will examine how Caribbean literary texts allow for a further critique of heteronormative U.S. nationalisms, along with the heteronormativity of Caribbean diasporic communities. However, I will also put pressure on Gopinath’s focus on the impossibility of queer female subjectivity in the nation and in diaspora in two ways: first, I will examine how scholarship, along with what Dean Spade refers to as “administrative norms,” confines subjectivity within a male/female binary, thus eliminating possibilities for the recognition of transgender, transsexual and gender queer subjectivities (24). My project will dismantle traditional, heteronormative gender formations within queer diasporas and explore the various ways in which desire and sexuality is not defined by gender. Second, I part ways with Gopinath’s understandings of the monolithic nation that is challenged by a complex diasporic identity. In her article, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” Andrea Smith states that “images of nationhood as necessarily simplistic and essentialist rest on the shadow of the primitive Indigenous subject who cannot transcend her nationalistic identifications,” so that Gopinath’s “likening of queerness to diaspora tends to reify the assumption that the (Indigenous) nation cannot be queered on its own” (51-

52). In its focus on the representations of queerness and diaspora within the United States, my project remains sensitive to indigenous critiques of queer theory and postcolonial theory which often align themselves with white, settler colonial ideologies. As Amy Kaplan states in a different context, “Imperialism has been simultaneously formative and disavowed in the foundational discourse of American studies,” and the postcolonial study of imperialism has historically neglected to include the United States (5, 11). My project will adopt a theoretically comparative approach, bridging disciplines of American studies, indigenous studies, trans studies, queer theory and postcolonial theory, to critique the United States as an imperial power and as a settler-colonial power.

Similar to Gopinath, David Eng, in his book *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (2010), conceptualizes the emergence of what he calls “queer liberalism,” which refers to “the narrowly pragmatic gay and lesbian identity and identity politics, the economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness, and liberal political norms of inclusion—including access to marriage, custody, inheritance, and service in the military.” Furthermore, he describes what he calls the “racialization of intimacy,” in which hegemonic U.S. neoliberal culture “isolates and manages the private as a distinct and rarified zone outside of capitalist relations and racial exploitation, as well as dissociated from its domestic and global genealogies,” and thus works through a discourse of colorblindness (10). This project will adopt Eng’s critical methodology, which uses queer diasporas to re-theorize the traditional heteropatriarchal rhetoric of the nation and diaspora that relies upon notions of “racial descent, filiation, and biological traceability.” Instead, queer diasporas allow one to theorize “queerness, affiliation, and

social contingency” and, thus, are the methodological tool that this dissertation will use to investigate queer Caribbean texts (Eng 13). This methodology will allow me to denaturalize discourses of origins, continuities, and commonalities and, instead, focus on breaks, discontinuities, and differences in order to reveal the ways in which queer diasporic Caribbean texts engage with and disrupt hegemonic neoliberal and neocolonial discourses, including those which are part of “queer liberalism.”

However, while Eng rightly critiques current gay, lesbian, and queer politics for being incorporated by the neoliberal state, this project will reveal the ways in which queer formulations of the political found in Caribbean diasporic writing have offered alternative approaches to queer liberalism as Eng defines it. Not all figures who may identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersexed, transgender, or queer profess a queer liberal politics which seeks recognition and acceptance by the neoliberal state. As José Esteban Muñoz suggests in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), perhaps “queer” itself is a utopian ideal of that which is “not yet here,” though it can be imagined in the present through specific ways of queer living (12). In other words, an important goal of this project is to reveal the ways in which Caribbean diasporic writers from the 1990s into the twenty-first century imagine queer utopias and resist, or are prevented from, aligning themselves with queer liberalism, pragmatic politics, and what Jasbir K. Puar refers to as “homonationalism.”

In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Puar argues that there is a “collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects

themselves,” which she refers to as “homonationalism” (39). Puar’s conception of homonationalism is similar to Eng’s “queer liberalism” in that it describes how gay, lesbian, and queer subjects align with the neoliberal state to perpetuate its ideologies through ideas of racial belonging. However, Puar also focuses on the “Orientalist invocation of the terrorist” in U.S. nationalist culture to describe a figure that is so queer that it can avoid recognition by the state. She borrows from Deleuze and Foucault to describe the figure of the terrorist as neither a queer identity nor an anti-identity, but an assemblage that is spatially and temporally contingent. The terrorist assemblage is “a cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity and even queer anti-identity narratives” which, as such, might not collude with the interests of the state (222).

This project will consider Puar’s attempt to describe queer figures that resist state recognition as an essential part of queer politics in the twenty-first century, and will borrow Puar’s methodology of maintaining a subject-driven temporality which encourages “subjects of study to appear in all their queernesses, rather than primarily to queer the subjects of study” (xxiv). In this way, I will critique queer politics that align with the neoliberal state, while revealing the queer possibilities that evade queer liberalisms and homonationalisms within Caribbean diasporas, considering “the forced imposition of conventional time [and space in which] many things escape, becoming invisible and/or unrecognizable within [its] framework” (Keeling 575). However, while this project will remain open to the many possibilities of queer subjects which evade recognition within nation-state-based temporal and spatial conventions, it will

simultaneously consider the moments when queerness develops a recognizable politics within the contemporary United States and will stage a conversation with lesbian-feminism, women of color feminism, and queer of color critiques in order to investigate the ways in which Caribbean diasporic writing situates queerness within the current political realm. In other words, this project will not foreclose political possibilities, but will reveal their multitude and will institute a continuous critique of identity politics and its slippages.

Literature, Politics, and Caribbean Writing

By focusing on the inherent connections between the aesthetic medium of literature and politics, this project will also engage with the work of Jacques Rancière, who claims that a key component of politics is to know who possesses the power of speech and the ability to create discourse. According to Rancière, those subjects once considered to be outside of politics can insert themselves through aesthetics in order to create a new “distribution of the sensible,” or a “distribution and redistribution of places and identities, [an] apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, and of noise and speech” (24-25). Thus, for Rancière, politics and aesthetics are not separate spheres but “two forms of distribution of the sensible” through which subjects may engage with power and intervene in its configuration (26). This project will borrow from Rancière to show how the aesthetic literary works of Caribbean

diasporic writers are inherently political through their redistribution of dominant notions of “the sensible.”

Caribbean diasporic writing has traditionally been received within the political and aesthetic context of the postcolonial, with the focus being on the Caribbean itself as a geographic location populated by African, Indian, and Asian diasporic peoples. Writing from the Caribbean became more recognizable within the North American academy in the 1990s, at the same time that postcolonial studies, African American studies, and women of color feminism asserted itself within academic discourse. Thus, in his 1996 book, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, Edouard Glissant remarks on the uniqueness of Caribbean writing in that it adopts a “cross-cultural poetics” where written language is combined with orality, disrupting notions of essential origins and creating a discourse “in situation,” which is a ceaseless Creolization characterized by fissures and ruptures that is inherently resistant to dominant European Humanism (62, 70). Similar to Glissant's notion of discourse “in situation,” Stuart Hall, in his 1999 article, “Thinking Diaspora: Home-Thoughts From Abroad,” characterizes the Caribbean as a site of diaspora in which “identities become multiple,” and he states that a “diasporic perspective on culture” views diasporas as being “subversive to traditional nation-oriented cultural models” (2, 10). This project will build on the invaluable work done by these postcolonial theorists, along with others such as Edward Said, Simon Gikandi, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and Mary Louise Pratt, and will borrow from theories of diaspora contributed by critics James Clifford and Brent Hayes Edwards, by considering the specificities of the varying diasporas located within and

moving outward from the Caribbean. However, it will diverge from established postcolonial critical practices by focusing on diasporic Caribbean writers located within North America, and by exploring how their texts can be used as tools to challenge neoliberalism, homonationalism, and queer liberalism in the United States. My objective is not to establish essential characteristics of the Caribbean diaspora, as do Gikandi, Hall, and Glissant, but to address each diasporic subject differently, according to its particular circumstances and characteristics. As Brent Hayes Edwards states in another context, “It is exactly [the] haunting gap or discrepancy that allows...diaspora to ‘step’ and ‘move’ in various articulations... It is *only* difference...that allows movement” (66). In other words, while some of the writers and texts I examine are not necessarily of Caribbean background nor do they directly address U.S. hegemony, I will show how such hegemony operates by revealing the ways that these texts engage, confirm, and critique dominant epistemologies and discourses, albeit in an unintentional or indirect way. By doing so, I will show how such writers establish, through the “distribution of the sensible,” new Caribbean public spheres, and I will draw on the work of Ralph Dalleo, in *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial* (2011) to show how aesthetics and politics come together to create spaces where debate, resistance, and creation may thrive.

Chapter Synopsis

Each chapter will look at the possibilities for queer desires, but will untie those desires from sexual identities in an attempt to establish what Susan Stryker has referred to

as a “dazzling prospect of a compensatory, utopian reconfiguration of community... an ecstatic leap into a postmodern space of possibility in which the foundational containers of desire could be ruptured to release a raw erotic power that could be harnessed to a radical social agenda” (213). By exploring queer artistic production and resistance, and how these works formulate queer discursive spaces outside of dominant Western ideologies, I hope to establish a sufficient counter narrative to United States hegemonic institutions that can disrupt dominant conceptions of sexuality, object choice, kinship, racial gender embodiment, time and space, death and life, and citizenship and nationhood.

My first chapter will explore the ways in which colonial epistemes have created and perpetuated ignorances concerning queer epistemologies in the postcolonial world. This chapter will follow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s foundational work in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), in which she declares that dominant epistemologies circulate knowledges *and* ignorances, when it comes to nonnormative subjectivities. Sedgwick uses the metaphor of the closet to discuss how queer subjects are relegated to the category of what is not, and should not be, known within dominant, heteronormative knowledge formations. This chapter will focus on the ways in which dominant colonial epistemologies create the closet around queer colonial and postcolonial subjectivities, specifically through the hegemonic epistemology that Edward Said has coined Orientalism. By examining Orientalism as a discourse, which constitutes a worldview and is a conduit of hegemony, Said states that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even

underground self” (3). Orientalism reproduces itself, reproduces inequity, and constitutes both the object and the parameters of knowledge. Said states that texts written about the Orient “can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (94, my emphasis). This chapter will show the fruitfulness of using Orientalism in other geographic locations besides Europe, Asia, and the Middle East in order to fully examine its all-encompassing epistemological work. By examining the novels *The Book of Night Women* by Marlon James (2009) and *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo (1996), I hope to reveal how Orientalism, as a discourse and epistemological framework, creates what Sedgwick refers to as the closet, and thus instructs subjects within postcolonial and neocolonial settings to “not know” queerness in all of its forms. Both James and Mootoo place their texts within the colonial era, in Jamaica and Trinidad, respectively, while writing from their contemporary diasporic location in Canada and the United States, thus establishing methods of queer postcolonial critique which extend simultaneously back into the colonial era and forward into the neocolonial present. Using Sedgwick and Said’s theories, alongside James and Mootoo, I hope to reveal the ways in which white, heterocolonial epistemologies from the colonial era continue to circulate within dominant U.S. culture and thus continue to obscure, or closet, queer subjectivities and epistemologies which have always been present.

My second chapter will use postcolonial and trans theories to unpack the multitude of queer subjectivities within the work of Michelle Cliff, Nice Rodriguez, and Shani Mootoo in order to develop a queer methodology that remains untied to sexual object choice and gender identity. This chapter will begin with Edouard Glissant’s

discussion of Caribbean literature in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1996), in which he argues that the landscape features as a character in Caribbean “national literature” (106). My argument will push Glissant’s claims by focusing on two texts from queer diasporic Caribbean writer, Michelle Cliff: *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) and *Abeng* (1995). I will argue that the landscape, as a character, reveals sexual desire that is not based on the couple form, so that object choice does not automatically entail sexual subjectivity, and gender is removed from the equation. Then, in order to not establish an essential identity of Caribbean literature by strictly adhering to Glissant’s claim that the landscape is a character in all Caribbean writing, I will jump to an examination of Filipino writer, Nice Rodriguez’s, collection of short stories, *Throw it to the River* (1993), in which the fruit of different landscapes becomes the sexual object choice of Rodriguez’s queer diasporic subject. Finally, I will examine how the landscape in Shani Mootoo’s novel, *Valmiki’s Daughter* (2008), interacts as a full character with the human characters in order to create enticing nonnormative desires. By looking at Cliff, Rodriguez, and Mootoo, this chapter will push the boundaries of queer theory to include sexual desire, not for other people, but for objects, which take on a life of their own outside of dominant notions of gender binaries, appropriate sexual object choice, and couplehood.

My third chapter will look at how individual locutions within literary texts represent the personal, while they disrupt neoliberal notions of the private and create new conceptions of the public sphere. In her essay “Queer and Now,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states that, because the word “queer” can take on so many meanings, it may

make sense for it to be used only in the first person. My argument will push this concept by focusing on the first-person locutions, what Sedgwick refers to as “speech acts,” found in Jamaica Kincaid’s rewriting of the Bildungsroman in *Lucy* (1990) and Junot Díaz’s account of a Dominican family living in New Jersey in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Through an examination of these texts, I will show how queerness operates as that which is particular to the individual—as inherently personal and thus juxtaposed to neoliberal notions of privacy, which, as Eng suggests, is always already racially imbued. I will reveal how personal locutions reveal queerness and disrupt neoliberal notions of the private, as they are contextualized within discourses surrounding race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and diaspora. This chapter will draw on recent work in Caribbean studies by Ralph Dalleo, which examines how writing from the Caribbean creates new public spheres, which he refers to as, “actually existing spaces [which] allow writers to imagine where public debate and community building might be located even as political, social, and economic realities circumscribe the range of possibilities available” (2). Through an examination of the personal, set against colonialist notions of the private and the public, I will reveal how queer diasporic Caribbean writers engage in a larger project of producing and bringing into existence new public spheres through personal articulations, or what I refer to as the “first-person queer.”

The fourth chapter will continue the trajectory of the previous chapters by examining the creation of queer diasporic public spheres which are not routed through what Eng refers to as “queer liberalism” and state based rights. Further, this chapter will continue to engage with Rancière’s contention concerning aesthetics and politics, in

which he states that art is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to dominant “messages and sentiment” (23). In order to do this, I will focus on issues of queer historiography and temporality, and will begin by examining postcolonial notions of location and historicity, such as those posited by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who discusses historiography as a European practice that does not necessarily reflect the lived experiences of postcolonial peoples. I will also consider recent work by queer theorists such as Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, and Jasbir K. Puar, who discuss issues of queer time and space. By doing so, this chapter will not establish the diasporic subject as inherently subversive to dominant notions of historical time within the space of the nation-state, but will relocate queer politics from its current place within the neoliberal agenda to a position that eludes state recognition and works to dismantle the kinds of identity politics that seek state-based rights, and thus are prone to state cooptation. Using the work of Caribbean diasporic writers Dionne Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (1997) and Achy Obejas, *Memory Mambo* (1996), this chapter will reveal the ways in which queer texts open up political possibilities within new public spheres, eluding identity politics and legal rights, which, as Dean Spade and Janet Halley state, do not always work for queer politics. Thus, this chapter will consider queer diasporic texts which offer possibilities for the queer assemblage, the non-human, and the non-identitarian, alongside disruptions of what Elizabeth Freeman calls “chrononormativity,” historicism, and cultural memory, in order to figure queer politics as that which eludes, escapes, disrupts, and dismantles dominant culture and state-based identity politics. In this way, I will continue to argue that queer diasporic Caribbean writing is engaged in the

project of establishing different public spheres that are constructed as both material realities and imagined ideals which “imagine alternative arrangements and new ways of thinking that help create new [subjectivities]” (Dalleo 2).

In these chapters, I hope to use a theoretically comparative approach to show the connections between postcolonial and queer theories, but also diaspora theory, feminist theory, critical race theory and indigenous theories in order to institute a queer critique of neoliberalism and neoimperialism, which constitute dominant cultural politics in the United States. In the post-9/11 era characterized by perpetual war, increasing military budgets, the destruction of the welfare state, the decrease in funding for public institutions, corporate bailouts and the stigmatization of labor unions, large-scale deportation, and the criminalization of immigrants, a project which configures a politics that eludes state recognition, and thus state cooptation, is of great importance in order to create a “queerness as horizon,” and to imagine new ways of being in the world.

Chapter 1

“Suspended Nameless in the Limbo State”: Orientalism and The Colonial Closet in Marlon James’s *The Book of Night Women* and Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*

One purpose of this project is to investigate and reveal queer epistemologies and ontologies—ways of being in the world that disrupt, contest, or refigure dominant ideologies that are part of a neoliberal agenda in the United States. To do this, one must examine the unseen relations between theories and literary texts to become what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls a “perverse reader,” one that pushes the boundaries of a text, revealing the possibilities for queerness that might not otherwise be apparent (“Queer” 3-4). This chapter will consider the myriad ways in which dominant colonial epistemologies actively ignore, erase, conceal, and un-know or un-learn queerness in all of its manifestations through an examination of Edward Said’s foundational study in *Orientalism* (1978), alongside Sedgwick’s groundbreaking work from *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), regarding the ways in which dominant knowledges create certain ignorances based upon what “should not” be known. Said’s now-famous analysis of Orientalism as a signifying system for the “non-west” has not yet been read alongside Sedgwick’s work in queer theory, and by doing so, I intend to not only push the boundaries of academic disciplines, but to consider the ways in which colonialist epistemologies actively closet queer ways of knowing, being, and loving. Joining these theorists allows the perverse reader to expand our understanding of what we know, how we know, who we are, and who we can be. As dominant LGBTQ politics in the United

States seek legal recognition and engage in rights discourses, it has become clear that while “inclusion has provided legitimate breathing space for many within the LGBT community, the rights-appealing approach has allowed the state to impose an even stricter regulative hold on its gay citizens” (Wahab 499). The task, thus, becomes to uncover and imagine the possibilities for existing in the world that do not align with dominant discourses and that do not have inclusion as the ultimate goal. Investigating the ways in which Orientalism serves as a lens through which the West, in this case the United States, has created the postcolonial Other, helps us to configure queer ways of knowing and being in the world that are not aligned with Western liberal formations.

My methodology is borrowed from Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in which he examines the ways that culture works alongside imperialism to create an all-encompassing colonial endeavor, as “narrative plays such a remarkable part in the imperial quest” (xxii). In order to illustrate his argument, Said looks at a range of texts, many of which are from the nineteenth century, such as Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and then uses these texts and their relation to European imperialism to draw connections to the neoimperial history of the United States. For Said, once we learn the power that culture, specifically represented through the novel, has in establishing and perpetuating dominant imperial ideology, we can use this knowledge in different historical contexts to critique such imperial power. He writes that “it is culture and cultural effort that presage the course of things to come—well in advance of the cultural politics of the post-colonial period dominated by the United States...” (274). Though U.S. imperialism is vastly different from British or

French colonial rule, as it “has no long-standing tradition of direct rule overseas” and is principally economic in nature, “it is still highly dependent and moves together with...cultural ideas and ideologies about America itself, ceaselessly reiterated in public” (289). Therefore, by knowing the cultural history that went hand-in-hand with eighteenth and nineteenth British and French colonialism, we may understand, recognize, and better challenge twentieth and twenty-first century U.S. dominance and its own cultural influences. Furthermore, we can draw parallels between the vastly different knowledge systems established by earlier Orientalists that were used to create and dominate the “Orient” and the ways in which the U.S. neoliberal regime creates knowledge about the “Other.” As Said states, there is a “depressing sense that one has seen and read about current American policy formulations before,” commenting on the similarities between U.S. and European imperialism (xxiii). Said thus calls on critics to conduct a “contrapuntal reading,” in order to investigate literature’s imbrications with imperial culture. Only a contrapuntal reading, according to Said, “is fully sensitive to the reality of historical experience. Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (*Culture and Imperialism* xxv). Thus, following Said, this chapter will use two novels that offer historical narratives of British colonialism in the Caribbean, yet are written from a diasporic North American position, with the intention that by investigating how colonialism operates in these texts we might gain a

better understanding of the repetitive patterns of power at the cultural level and better learn how to resist contemporary U.S. neoliberal domination.

I will focus on two literary texts in this chapter: Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* (2009) and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) in order to investigate and reveal the queer possibilities closeted by colonial knowledges. Both texts take place within specific historical contexts: within the intimate spaces of an African-Caribbean slave plantation in nineteenth century Jamaica and amongst the Indian coolie laborers in Trinidad during British colonialism, respectively, in order to provide new historical narratives about those who suffered in the chains of Empire. However, while both James and Mootoo represent the confines of British colonialism, this chapter will contextualize the present publication of these texts within the neoliberal moment of U.S. imperialism, in order to underscore the persistence of imperial power structures despite the shift in geopolitical dominance from the United Kingdom to the United States. In other words, by representing historical moments within the British Empire, these contemporary fictional texts written by members of the Caribbean diaspora publishing in North America are able to comment on the contemporary struggles against U.S. hegemony and the lingering effects of colonialism in the postcolonial era.ⁱⁱⁱ Using the past to mediate the present allows for the recognition of parallel moments between British and U.S. hegemony, so that those currently indoctrinated within the new world

order are provided with tools for critique and resistance that might otherwise remain unnoticed because of the quotidian nature of neoliberal domination.

With current free-trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) being promoted by the U.S. government; the long-term neoliberal agenda imposed upon Caribbean nations since the 1980s; and the general hemispheric influence of United States corporations and government, it is clear that since the end of the Spanish American War in 1898, “the United States emerged as the unchallenged power in the Caribbean region” (Randall 70). Using the theoretical tools provided in Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, alongside Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), I argue that James and Mootoo’s texts challenge dominant knowledge formations established through U.S. hegemony by revealing the many possibilities for queer epistemologies within the colonial setting and the neocolonial realm. Both texts reveal that different kinds of queer epistemologies have occurred in each period of colonial domination, and their publication in the present allows for the imagining of different queer epistemologies within the U.S. neoliberal sphere.

The Colonial Closet: An Orientalist Epistemology

To begin the analysis, I must first provide the necessary analytical background which will illustrate the connections between queer theory and postcolonial theory, specifically regarding knowledge formation and its relation to queerness. Since its publication, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* has been a foundational text for scholars engaged

in critiquing colonial and imperial representations of cultures. Said shows how, during the height of Orientalism as an academic discipline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period, ...[so that] no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (3). By examining Orientalism as a discourse, which constitutes a worldview and is a conduit of hegemony, Said states that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). Orientalism reproduces itself, reproduces inequity, and constitutes both the object and the parameters of knowledge. Said states that texts written about the Orient “can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it” (94, original emphasis). Most importantly, Orientalism is a discourse with concrete political, economic, social, and cultural implications. In examining how this discourse functions in England, France, and the United States, all of which were or are imperial powers, Said states that Orientalism is “a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient.” He writes, “During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Orientalists became a more serious quantity...because the Oriental-European relationship was

determined by an unstoppable European expansion in search of markets, resources, and colonies, and finally, because Orientalism had accomplished its self-metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution” (95). Thus, Orientalism as a discourse defines Western interests and the limits of knowledge and creates the reality that knowledge attempts to describe, and it works with imperialism to create and subordinate the colonial/imperial subject.

Most importantly, as Joseph Boone notes in his work on Orientalism, while Said briefly mentions the sexual dynamics involved in such an epistemology of power, he drops the issue and deems it irrelevant to the discussion. Said writes, “Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat) ...is not the province of my analysis here, alas, despite its frequently noted appearance” (*Orientalism* 188). Boone, in his article, “Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism,” takes up Said’s side note and explores how Orientalist epistemologies included the feminization and eroticization of the oriental Other, allowing for perverse desires to be engaged with and acted upon by colonialists. Boone states:

The ‘sexual promise (and threat)’ that Said attributes to the Orient is for countless Western travelers inextricably tied to their exposure abroad to what has come to be known within Western sexual discourse as male homosexual practice. ...The fact remains that the possibility of sexual contact with and between men underwrites and at times even explains the historical appeal of Orientalism as an occidental mode of male perception, appropriation, and control. (44)

Thus, Boone demonstrates that Orientalism cannot be disengaged from erotics and from perverse desires. Rather, whenever power relations are imagined, sexuality and sexual desire are part of the power play, and the feminized, orientalized Other becomes the sex object for the Western imagination. Amar Wahab states that this is the case for all postcolonial nations in the Caribbean region who remain under the influence of U.S. hegemony; these nations are consistently feminized under the guise of Western Orientalism. He writes, “Perhaps, as an always already emasculated figure in the West, Trinidad and Tobago’s postcolonial society shares a curious semblance with its subaltern subject, though fearful of what it might see of itself through this recognition—a reflection of its own queer condition” (497). These nations are consistently feminized under the guise of Western Orientalism, and they produce sexual promise for nonnormative Western desires that, paradoxically, must be contained through erotic conquest.

Regarding space, Orientalism participates in the workings of an imaginative or mythical geography, where the myth of the Orient is necessary for the formation of Europe as a geographical entity (63). This mythology, which is an inherent part of Orientalism, thus creates ignorance about the actual colonized geography, culture, government, economy, and peoples. Just as dominant heteronormative culture creates ignorance about queerness, as Sedgwick suggests, Orientalism creates a mythology which constructs the Other, generating the reality it purports to describe concerning the lived existence of the colonized peoples. It is dependent on distance and the skilled framing of

multiple discursive representations of different cultures and subjectivities. Said writes:

[Orientalism] shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter. ...Underlying all the different units of Orientalist discourse...is a set of figures or tropes... We need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. (70-71, original emphasis)

Thus Orientalism comes to signify four major pursuits: what can be said and known about a specific geographical region referred to as “The East” or “The Orient;” a style of thought based on ontological differences between the West and the East; the construction of European self-identity through the corresponding construction of the Orient; and colonial/imperial institutions that are used to define and dominate the West’s Other. In other words, to have knowledge about the Other is to dominate them and to construct them as objects of knowledge, so that the Other exists “*as we know it*” (32, original emphasis).^{iv}

This “knowledge” of the Other relates to Sedgwick’s notion of the closet, in that it allows for the creation of ignorance about queerness. Both Orientalism and heteronormativity are dominant discourses that contain the colonial queer subjectivity through a set of divergent representations, thereby disallowing any knowledge of the other. In her essay, “Queer and Now” (1993), Sedgwick uses the word “queer,” instead

of gay or lesbian, to denote a much broader range of meaning than just men or women who desire and have sex with other men and women. The word “queer,” as Sedgwick uses it, and as it will be used throughout this analysis, is essentially ambiguous; its meaning is so broad as to purposefully defy definition, though its intention is to ultimately challenge, critique, and resist dominant heteropatriarchy in all of its forms. Thus, in her essay, Sedgwick states that queer refers to things that do not even include sexuality, such as various filial relations and ways of living that resist dominant, oppressive forms. She states, “...A lot of the most exciting...work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example” (8-9, original emphasis). Thus, while “queer” may often seem to eclipse the very important political work that lesbian feminists and gay theorists have created by offering an umbrella term, its use lies in offering the ability to denote the multiple and very complicated ways that people can be different, so that not everything has to add up to a monolithic way of loving, relating, feeling and living (Sedgwick, “Queer” 8).

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick looks at the larger workings of heteronormativity and homophobia in Western culture at large. According to Sedgwick, what psychologists label “homosexual panic,” which occurs when a single person violently reacts to what they perceive as a gay man coming on to them, is misunderstood as an individual, contained, pathologizing moment that reveals that individual’s homophobia. Instead, Sedgwick states that “homosexual panic” should be understood as

something that is an inherent part of heteronormative society, in that homophobia is not an individual phenomenon but something that dominant culture uses to construct itself. In this way, Sedgwick shows the arbitrariness of the homo/heterosexual divide, and the inherent cultural homophobia that is necessary for dominant heterosexuality. In other words, heterosexuality needs to be understood as a term that is entirely dependent upon homosexuality for its meaning.

Thus, Sedgwick calls for people to become “perverse readers” who can push the boundaries of a text, revealing the possibilities for queerness that might not otherwise be apparent. Queer readers can open up a text to reveal what dominant culture tells us is not there, and they can ask about queer possibilities, when heteronormative culture tells us, “Don’t ask.” In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick uses the metaphor of the closet to refer to ways that dominant knowledges create ignorances around queer desires, and she calls on the readers of literary texts to know the closet and find out what it is revealing.

This chapter will examine Said’s work alongside Sedgwick’s, to begin to know what I will refer to as the “colonial closet,” that which is constructed through dominant heterocolonial cultures as represented by the United States, which view the colonial Other through a heteropatriarchal lens and which constructs forms of knowledge and ignorance simultaneously.^v The “colonial closet” is a queer term without a fixed referent. It gestures towards the vast structures of knowledge both within the postcolonial nation and the United States, whether in the past or the present, along with the dominant structures of knowledge that are created by neocolonialism and neoliberalism. A “perverse,” or “contrapuntal reading,” allows the reader to recognize the open secret of

non-normative subjectivities and epistemologies that are denied within oppressive Western regimes. The “colonial closet,” like the “gay closet,” is not continuous throughout historical time, but constantly changing, adapting, and working in and through power. It can be used within dominant ideologies to repress queerness in all of its forms, but it can also be appropriated by queer peoples, as a “resilient and productive structure of narrative” imbued with social meaning (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 67). Thus, although it is a space created by colonial and neoliberal heteronormativity to contain or negate queerness, it can also be appropriated and refurbished by queer postcolonial writers in a contrapuntal and critical fashion in order to open up a site for critique and new possibilities for resistance. Furthermore, it allows us to view queerness as different ways of living that existed before Western colonial and imperial occupation of the Caribbean territories and as that which persisted despite attempts at containment and assimilation into heteronormative dominance.

Investigating the “colonial closet” allows us, as perverse readers, to seek out the queerness that hides itself in order to wreak havoc within dominant epistemologies, and it allows us to imagine new connections between those who remain unrecognized by neoliberal knowledge structures. As Arnaldo Cruz- Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan state in their collection, *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (2002), within a neoliberal global order dominated by the United States, “Queerness has become both an object of consumption, an object in which nonqueers invest their passions and purchasing power, and an object through which queers constitute their identities in our contemporary consumer-oriented globalized world” (1).

The authors attest that anyone who resists dominant heteronormativity must label themselves according to Western notions of gay identity, thus suppressing other ways of being queer that do not align with U.S. gay politics, which currently creates the dominant way of knowing queerness (4-6). Thus, they state that “it is our ethical refusal to provide a grammar that could make the complexity and density of the cross-cultural interactions generated by our present global condition immediately transparent and universally legible. It is our refusal to fix the term ‘gay,’ and the powerful legacies of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movements, as a prerequisite for global interaction and coalition” (4). Cruz- Malavé and Manalansan refer to the ways in which dominant gay and lesbian politics in the United States has lead to the closeting of queerness that does not align itself with such political identities. This chapter will show how colonial and imperial ideologies have always closeted queer figures, albeit in different ways. Thus, by becoming a perverse reader and by conducting a contrapuntal reading, one may begin to know the colonial closet and open up the possibilities for queerness as a site of critique and resistance to neoliberalism as promoted by the United States, which has the potential to disrupt dominant knowledge formations, including those which adhere to U.S. LGBT identity politics and the neoliberal agenda.

Night Women and Jamaican Slavery

In Marlon James’s novel about African slavery in Jamaica during the early 19th century, *The Book of Night Women* (2009), he often repeats the following line: “Every negro walk in a circle. Take that and make of it what you will” (223). While at first the

line appears to connote a kind of Sisyphean challenge, or even plain defeat, I argue that it sets the tone for the novel as one that challenges traditional Western epistemologies of teleological progress, and it allows the reader to think of the narrative as a circle instead of a linear progression in time. Through the historical novel, James focuses on a moment in the past and shows how this moment is never ending, it is cyclical, as its themes of racialized oppression, resistance, and competing epistemologies continue into the present neoliberal context. James uses historical fiction to strategically debunk Western historicism, which Dipesh Chakrabarty declares is the narrative of progress which “made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*,” originating in Europe and then spreading elsewhere. Chakrabarty states that historicism “posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance...that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West. In the colonies, it legitimated the idea of civilization,” and positioned the colonial subject as that which is “not yet” part of modernity (7, 8). Thus, Chakrabarty suggests that a key motivating factor of postcolonial nationalist movements was leaders’ “rejection of the ‘waiting-room’ version of history when faced with the Europeans’ use of it as a justification for denial of ‘self-government’ to the colonized” (9). In other words, nationalist leaders were successful because they inverted European-centered historicist ideology and projected themselves as full participants in modernity. So too does James establish his subaltern characters as full participants in global politics, asserting their epistemologies as equally valid in the face of Western historicism, which works to closet non-linear, non-Western notions of historical time. Like Mootoo, James riffs on the historical archive to show how current

black identities in diaspora are formed partly in response to the brutal violence and oppression of colonialism, while disrupting contemporary Orientalist epistemologies that have used the historical archive to stake their claims (Keiser 10). Just as Mootoo illustrates Orientalist and queer knowledge structures as they pertain to the Trinidadian diaspora, James, a member of the Jamaican diaspora living and publishing in the United States, represents the power-knowledge systems within the Jamaican slave plantation along with the colonial closet which obscures queer knowledge formations in such heterocolonial ideological systems, while creating room for challenging such systems within the 21st century.^{vi}

James presents the life at Montpelier, a sugar plantation in east Jamaica, and the different kinds of knowledges that circulate and construct racialized and gendered subjectivities amongst the brutal violence of slavery. While there is a distinct Orientalist system of knowledge that creates Africans and African Americans as inferior, animalistic, irrational, unintelligent, hypersexual, stubborn, and slow, James also provides counter knowledge systems within the text which establishes certain characters as queer in that their subjectivities remain within the shadows of heterocolonialist knowledge systems, such as Orientalism, unrecognized for what they are. Therefore, in this section of the argument, I will refer to the dominant power-knowledge system, and the discourse which carries such a system, as Orientalist, in order to show that, through his historical portrayal of the harsh system of slavery in Jamaica, James allows his readers to consider the multitude of different ways of knowing, thinking, and being

within the plantation that resist heterocolonialism and allow us to further know the colonial closet.

Orientalism and Jamaica

Slavery was instituted in Jamaica in 1517, when the first Africans were reported to have been brought as slaves by Spanish landowners. When the sugar plantation took root in the 1670s, under British colonialism, there was an increase in labor demand, and the slave trade burgeoned, so that “between 1673 and 1703 the population of African slaves grew from ten thousand to forty-five thousand. A century later, around 1807, ‘Africans comprised roughly 45 per cent of the slave population,’ with full emancipation instituted in 1838” (Warner 89). After independence from Britain in 1962, Jamaica was included in the sphere of influence of the United States. “[After WWII], European hegemony gradually gave way to U.S. hegemony, completing the transfer of this ‘backyard Mediterranean Sea’ region to the external domination of the United States” (Conway 29). As Jamaica and its diasporas are still heavily influenced by U.S. neoliberal hegemony, this section will explore how dominant epistemologies from the West, specifically Orientalism, can be challenged, through James’s representation of a Jamaican sugar plantation and the “colonial closet” that Western knowledge systems create.^{vii}

Orientalism is mainly portrayed through the white masters of the Montpelier sugar plantation: Massa Humphrey, Massa Quinn, and Isobel Roget, the Creole daughter of a neighboring plantation master and Humphrey’s intended. While Humphrey asserts his sexual and racial dominance on the island, and Isobel attempts to adhere to the Cult of

True Womanhood while living a secret life, they all continue to espouse Enlightenment modes of thinking and knowing, especially concerning their role in the colony and their Orientalist objects of knowledge, the African slaves. Humphrey is quick to dismiss African religions and cultural beliefs, proclaiming that they belong to “the darkness,” while he claims to represent the age of reason, which has arrived everywhere except the colonies (112). This kind of Orientalist thinking is reinforced by the other white people on the plantation. Upon being informed by the former Montpelier overseer, Jack Wilkins, that in order to manage the plantation, one must have “an intimate knowledge of [the slaves’] every move” and know their systems of beliefs, including Obeah, Humphrey declares his ignorance and is thus instructed that “this is the West Indies, Master Humphrey. We do things differently here” (116). Indeed, plantation overseer Robert Quinn confirms this Orientalist mindset by reminding Humphrey, “We’re men of science, men of reason,” and not men who [have learned] about slave culture and beliefs (115). Even Isobel asks the men, after learning that the slaves practice Obeah, “How do you suppose we deal with it? Book learning? Science? That’s lost to the negro. Might as well be the Dark Ages in the colonies, and you’d do well to think as such!” (115). Thus, in an effort to control the African slaves on the plantation, Humphrey, Quinn, and Isobel decide that they must know the slaves, know Obeah, and thus gain power through this knowledge. They construct the African slaves as objects of knowledge who do not have the same power to know the white plantation owners, as reason and true knowledge are lost on them. Unsurprisingly, Humphrey, Quinn, and Isobel’s attempts to know the slave culture is ultimately a failure, as their Orientalist mindset creates a colonial closet

that prevents them from truly knowing the slaves who succeed in rising up against the few white owners and destroying Montpelier.^{viii} While Isobel attempts to know the slaves, she succeeds in only imitating their pain and subordination, succumbing to a drug-induced life of isolation on the plantation. Meanwhile, Humphrey and Quinn cannot rid themselves of Orientalist knowledge structures and are thus blind to the lives, the cultures, and the general goings on of the slave plantation, to their ultimate detriment.

Massa Humphrey returns from being educated in England, in order to succeed his father, Patrick Wilson, as the owner and manager of the largest sugar plantation in Jamaica. Humphrey brings his best friend, the Irishman, Robert Quinn, with him to take over as overseer and to live in “the great house” (43). A self-described “gentleman,” Humphrey takes a while to adjust to Montpelier’s schedule and to the hot West Indian sun, but quickly learns his role as a white man in a colonial plantation, which is expressed through his sexuality. Never shying from addressing the issues of race and sex which pervade plantation life in the novel, James remarks in his pidgin prose, “White man body in bondage in the mother country and when they come to the West Indies, the cocky be the first thing they set free...As for the white woman, she can only turn her eye and sip tea” (44-45). Immediately upon Humphrey’s arriving at Montpelier, he resorts to carousing with Quinn by drinking and having sex with the women of color on the island, both free and enslaved, asserting his gender and racial dominance. In this way, Humphrey is presented as the colonialist who, through an Orientalist lens, views the colonized as exotic sex objects for his taking. For this reason, the colony is a place where

“there be things he can do here that he can’t do nowhere else.” James writes, “Regard this, coming to a land where a man can seduce, rape or sodomise any niggerwoman or boy or girl he wish and there be nothing that nobody goin’ do, for every other white man be doing the same” (44). Everyone on the island is subject to Humphrey and Quinn’s sexual appetites within the Orientalist system of knowledge that constructs African peoples as sexual objects always available to white men.

Saidiya V. Hartman comments on the ways in which black female slaves were denied sexuality and personal will, in that their bodies belonged to their white male owners, making it difficult to discuss matters of rape. She writes, “The disavowal of rape most obviously involves issues of consent, agency, and will that are ensnared in a larger dilemma concerning the construction of person and the calculation of black humanity in slave law since this repression of violence constitutes female gender as the locus of both unredressed and negligible injury” (80). Under slave law, black female slaves were not seen as having agency, will, or even ownership of their body with which to give sexual consent in the first place. Thus, as Hartman suggests, the black female slave’s gender was constructed through “unredressed injury,” as that which is always already violated without the means to persecute, by definition. It is through Hartman’s lens that we must view Humphrey and Quinn’s sexual philandering in Jamaica, as that which is inherently part of a larger network of racialized power dynamics, in which the black female, as property, was, within the dominant epistemology that denied slave humanity, denied the will to consent. As Susan Straight remarks, in the text, “sex is a weapon, a method, a shackle. An act of violence and power” (1). This ties Humphrey and Quinn to what I am

referring to as the Orientalist knowledge systems that exist in the novel which consistently reinforce white male power.

The reader sees how these power relations affect the black female slave on a personal level when Robert Quinn decides to have Lilith, a teenaged houseslave and the protagonist of the novel, live with him as his mistress. Quinn repeatedly rapes her, though neither Lilith nor James himself use the word “rape” to describe their sex, in accordance with Hartman’s argument that black female slaves were not able to deny consent for sex, and thus could not literally be raped in accordance with dominant ideology (269-272). To complicate matters, Lilith begins to have feelings for Quinn, though they are inherently entangled within the race relations of the culture at large, which permeate their small domestic space. For example, when Quinn is kind to her during sex, Lilith feels like a white woman. However, it isn’t long before her “mulatto” skin reminds them both of the impossibility of love, as Lilith is Quinn’s property and is living with him at his command. James writes, “Sexing sweet the Irishman so much that he take to cuddling her in the bed like she be white woman. She lie on top of him and let Quinn wrap him arm round her back. But then him skin touch her scars and they both realize what they touching. He flinch and she flinch too. Suddenly they turn back into slave and master and they both know” (276). As Ann Laura Stoler suggests, the larger racial politics of colonialism and imperialism was played out in the small, intimate spaces of domestic life, so that “racial vigilance and virility were domestic and household affairs” (1). Stoler refers to “the education of desire,” where the “colonial state’s investment in knowledge about the carnal” is played out “in the disarray of unwanted,

sought after, and troubled intimacies of domestic space that colonial relations were refurbished and their distinctions made” (7, 6, respectively). In other words, colonial knowledge structures were reinforced and negotiated more in private than in public, showing how personal relationships were key to the colonial claim to power. Lilith is chosen by Quinn because she is a light-skinned slave, a “mulatto,” which was more sexually desirable on the plantation, as this made her the “exotic other” that Orientalism describes, yet not a stereotypical African slave that is thought of as animal-like. Her light skin color makes Lilith feel that she is caught between the white world and the slave world, and allows her to toy with the idea of loving Robert Quinn (286). However, though she does save his life, along with her white father, Jack Wilkins’s, Lilith understands that her relationship with Quinn is inherently part of the racialized power structure and that “no woman can afford to feel anything for a man in 1801. That be the source of eternal misery” (411). As Stoler states, the colonial relations are acted out in the personal domestic space, where a slave and a white man are unable to live together outside of the dominant power structures.

While Humphrey and Quinn take advantage of their privilege in the colony through sexual practices in which the violence of rape and sexual dominance are perpetuated, Isobel uses racial boundaries in an attempt to construct herself as the proper English lady. While the black female slave was subjected to sexual violence, white women in plantation life had to live up to what Hazel V. Carby calls the Cult of True Womanhood, which was defined by chastity, virtue, motherhood, and domesticity. As these traits were available only to the mistress of the plantation, black female slaves were defined in

juxtaposition as sexually lascivious and morally bereft, and were consistently denied motherhood as their children were regularly bought and sold (Carby 20). These characteristics of the proper white lady and the black female slave are in keeping with an Orientalist style of thought which constructs the subjectivities of the slave outside of any grounding in reality. Thus, in order to construct her white female identity on the slave plantation, Isobel seems aware that she must behave in a certain way, according to the demands of the Cult of True Womanhood. Upon first arriving at Montpelier after Humphrey's return, in order to take up the domestic affair of planning a ball at the great house, Isobel arrives in a horse-drawn carriage with an escort and rebukes the gentlemen about not appearing in proper dress in front of a lady (88). She also remarks that it is "a little improper" that Humphrey and Quinn, two unmarried men, are so close (94). Along with regulating the behavior of the white men in the house and instituting heteronormative order, Isobel takes a firm hand with the houseslaves and believes that she knows them better than they know themselves. This kind of Orientalist knowledge has been handed down to Isobel from her father, Massa Roget, who proclaims his knowledge about the African slaves, stating that they are "beasts that kill their own... They are nothing like us, they have no interest in the finer arts, knowledge, literature and science, nothing that man has put in place for his own advancement," thus expressing the Orientalist system of knowledge that pervades the island colony (206-207). This system

of knowledge is perpetuated by all of the white plantation owners, including Isobel.

Speaking to Lilith, Isobel remarks,

I dare say you blackies could survive Armageddon with no loss of life or limb.

[...] You tried to use the mind, the brain, but you silly girl, those things are lost to the negro. What you have is a back that won't break, a skin that won't crack, legs like an ox and teeth like a horse. How fortunate you are that we found each other, Lilith! (197-198)

Like her father, Isobel believes that she knows the true character of the slaves, even as she constructs them as animal-like through her words. Further, she reveals her paternalistic sentiments by stating that Lilith is lucky to have her around to supply the intellect to Lilith's brutish ways. It is also by distancing Lilith from herself that Isobel attempts to create her own space within the Cult of True Womanhood, defining herself in relation to the African Caribbean female slave.

However, though Isobel tries to act the part of the proper English lady, and to set about order in the domestic space, her façade is unraveled after she loses her entire family in a house fire and becomes morose and moribund, which manifests in her adopting a sexuality that, in dominant ideology, exists outside of her race. In other words, Isobel's downfall occurs when she loses her façade of belonging to the (white) Cult of True Womanhood and begins having sex out of wedlock with various partners, casting off the role of mother and domestic angel. Immediately after the fire, Isobel becomes depressed and takes to drinking, causing Lilith to observe, "Miss Isobel look like she falling apart and pulling together at the same time...Days pass, months pass, yet Lilith couldn't tell if

she getting better or worse or what better or worse supposed to look like” (274). It is after this reflection that Isobel declares, “I’m without a future,” aligning herself with Jack Halberstam’s notion of “queer time,” which refers to “those specific models of temporality that...leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (*In a Queer Time and Place* 6). Indeed, Isobel loses her inheritance, her family, and her ambitions for marriage and reproduction, and she abandons her health and safety in the pursuit of sex and drugs. Thus, after serving as Isobel’s handmaid for a time, Lilith realizes that “Miss Isobel lie. Massa Humphrey don’t ask for nobody hand in marriage yet” (214), and rumors start to circulate amongst the houseslaves that Isobel seduced Humphrey and is sleeping with him out of wedlock (215). The women are surprised by this news, as, according to the Cult of True Womanhood, “White lady suppose to lock it up till wedding ring come to open it” (216). Thus, Isobel is perceived as adopting the sexuality of a black female slave. Furthermore, Isobel takes to riding her horse away from the plantation at night, becoming one of the many “night women” of the narrative—the queer figures in the novel who reside within the colonial closet. Removing herself from the domestic space during the middle of the night, Isobel rejects her proper gender and racial identity and instead becomes a queer figure in her search for consolation after her family’s death. When Robert Quinn follows Isobel after seeing her leave the plantation several nights in a row, he discovers her in bed with an “octoroon,” drinking and taking laudanum (355-356).^{ix} Quinn reflects, “Mayhaps she done with crying and take to doing this, but something stop him from going over to her. She be a lady after all. Or no. He don’t know. [...] Quinn never hear

her speak like a negro before. She and the man who might be white or octoroon” (355-356). At this point, Quinn cannot comprehend Isobel’s behavior, as she is supposed to be “a lady.” Because he is a representative of colonial Orientalist ideology, he cannot know the contents of the colonial closet, that which colonial knowledge creates ignorances around, and he remains perplexed about her behavior: “He don’t know.” In fact, Isobel’s questionable status as a lady removes her from her proper domestic, racialized sphere of the Cult of True Womanhood and presents her as a queer subject in a queer time and place; she exists outside of proper gender, racial, and sexual identities.

However, Isobel is unable to completely divest herself of Orientalist ideology and epistemology and come to terms with her queerness within the plantation system. She attempts to continue to adopt the façade of the virtuous, chaste, white woman of the house, which fails so miserably that it becomes a running joke within the text, one that reveals the inherent impossibility and constructedness of the Cult of True Womanhood concerning race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, after being sexually assaulted by male slaves on the plantation who have rebelled against their white overseers, Isobel “grab her dress and pull it down and bawl that she is lady of good means and superior birth” (411). And after the assault, as Lilith takes care of her, Isobel “jump, screaming that she is a lady, she is a lady, she is a lady” (416). Thus, even after the plantation is in ruins and Isobel has destroyed her hopes of marriage through her drinking, drug use, depression, and sexual endeavors, she attempts to reassert her moral superiority over the slaves by declaring herself to be “a lady” within the proper confines of the Cult of True Womanhood. Ironically, she becomes pregnant at the end of the novel (the father is

unknown), and she entreats Mass Humphrey, in vain, to stay with her to raise the child on the plantation—still attempting to establish and maintain her racialized social status. In this way, though Isobel becomes a queer figure in the text, she cannot escape the Orientalist ways of knowing that constitute dominant colonial ideology, which includes the Cult of True Womanhood and the inherent need for the white female to define herself against the black female slaves.

The Colonial Closet and the League of Night Women

What remains unknown by the three plantation rulers—Humphrey, Quinn, and Isobel—is the League of Night Women which has been meeting in secret for years, plotting to overthrow the plantation and, according to Homer, the leader of the group, “kill them...every single white son of a bitch within a hundred mile. We goin’ kill them all” (281). Because of their “knowledge” that slaves are dim-witted, slow, animalistic, irrational, and subservient by nature, the colonial rulers in Jamaica never believe that slaves, especially *female* slaves, would rise up against them. Indeed, critic Kaiama L. Glover aligns the reader with the white plantation owners, in that most readers would also be surprised to learn that the League exists. She writes, “While the gruesome history of slavery in the Americas is a story we may dare to think we already know, [the League] reminds us that we don’t know nearly enough,” thus gesturing towards the project of opening up the colonial closet and revealing what lies within (7).

In a colony where “there be thirty-three negro for every white,” and where many run-away slaves live in the mountains as Maroons and yield power over white settlers,

the white plantation owners are constantly in fear of a slave rebellion and revolution, like the one that occurred in Haiti from 1791-1804 (260-261).^x Thus, James depicts the horrific violence and fear that went into white colonial rule on the sugar plantations, all to prevent and to keep in check the uprisings that were a constant occurrence. However, instead of allowing the white rulers to gain knowledge about their African slaves, the Orientalist system of knowledge creates the colonial closet, which creates ignorance about different epistemologies, especially, in this case, regarding kinship structures and methods of disseminating information—all of which assist the League of Night Women to incite a slave uprising at Montpelier.

The League of Night Women, lead by the top houseslave, Homer, creates queer knowledge formations which disrupt dominant Orientalist epistemologies on the island. For example, they establish queer kinship systems outside of the normative structure of the colonial slave plantation through their recognition and acknowledgement of the sexual relations that occur between white overseers and black female slaves. All of the women, except for Homer, are half sisters with green eyes that they inherited from former Montpelier overseer, Jack Wilkins.^{xi} As Hortense B. Spillers astutely remarks, kinship systems within slavery were inherently severed, thus undoing what might be considered the normative signifying chain. She writes, “I would call this enforced state of breach another instance of vestibular cultural formation where ‘kinship’ loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*” (74, original emphasis). As all slaves born on the plantation followed the condition of the mother, and could be sold or traded at any moment, it is almost impossible to speak of

kinship claims when addressing slavery. Thus, Spillers concludes that “‘family,’ as we practice and understand it ‘in the West’—the *vertical* transfer of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of ‘cold cash,’ from *fathers* to *sons* and in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of *his* choice—becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community” (74, original emphasis). While Spillers remarks that African slaves did indeed create family in new ways, she concludes that the traditional, Western, meaning of kinship is normally reserved specifically for free peoples and not for the enslaved. The reader sees this traditional meaning of kinship, however, being translated into slavery through the intelligent awareness of the League of Night Women, regarding who their biological father is and who their genetic relations are, despite having such knowledge closeted within the confines of colonial epistemes. The Night Women acknowledge that they all share the same green eyes with Jack Wilkins, and this unique understanding of their genetic commonalities allows them to recognize their relatives and create a queer system of kinship that is between women and does not emphasize its patrilineal roots. After meeting for several years, the League comes upon a new houseslave, Lilith, who also shares their eyes, and they immediately endeavor to bring her into their kinship system, using their genetic similarities as proof of their connection. Thus, Homer reproaches the wary Lilith by saying, “You didn’t think it queer-like that you eye green? [...] Me say Jack Wilkins be you papa... Every woman you see in this room come from Jack Wilkins seed. Every woman and you. [...] Time to know what true and what lie” (70-71). In this way, the League uses the knowledge of their genetic

relations to create a kinship system which allows them the power to develop their plot to destroy the plantation. This knowledge shared among them empowers the women and connects them, allowing them to create a queer kinship of “woman secret and . . . woman loving” that would otherwise be unheard of within plantation life (75). Thus, these women exist within a closet space—one that is not necessarily constricting, but enabling in the sense that colonialism’s unequal sexual domination provides the possibility for their personal relationships.

Along with new kinship formations, the League of Night Women establishes new methods of knowing and disseminating information that is part of the colonial closet and that remains unknown to Humphrey, Quinn, and Isobel. The League’s motto for disseminating information and spreading knowledge about their planned slave rebellion is “six tell six tell six”—a repetitive oral formula or mnemonic and exponential multiplication which reverses the system of racial classification that produces quadroons and octoroons, which are based on fractions of blood (74). Literally, this phrase means that the six Night Women tell six other women about their plan, and those six women tell six more, etc. More importantly, this knowledge belongs to the slave women only, as Homer tells Lilith. She explains that men are “strong in arm and strong in leg, but they head weak. They don’t have the bearing for planning and thinking and waiting, ‘specially waiting. That be woman work” (360). Instead of letting the male slaves in on the plot to rebel, the women plan to “just tell one woman to whisper to one man and send it down the field” at the time of the revolt (360). The desire to keep the knowledge of the revolt a secret from male slaves comments not only on the oppressive power of white

plantation authorities, but also on the possible oppressive power belonging to the male slaves, though it is not mentioned directly.

Finally, the knowledge about the League women themselves is spread orally throughout slave culture after the revolt, through song, instead of through the written word that carries the most authority in an Orientalist epistemology. After the rebellion, James states that each of the League women has a song that describes what happened to them: “Hippolyta song quick and harsh. A song rise up against Hippolyta, a chant to keep her spirit away from the living and grant her peace. [...] The song about Gorgon was short and had no word, since all that need to sing she sing already. [...] [Pallas] song long and mournful but when the song reach the end, it dance and the spirits jump” (423-425). Each song is unique to the woman’s story it describes and is spread among the slaves to tell the tale of the League and the violent revolt. In this way, James allows his readers to see how knowledge about the League was spread throughout slave culture as part of the colonial closet that was contained but not controlled by dominant culture, thus allowing readers to understand and imagine subversive methods for creating and disseminating knowledge outside of the Orientalist archive.

Despite Humphrey, Quinn and Isobel’s attempts to manage the plantation and to know the slaves and slave culture, it is made clear throughout the text that the one in charge of Montpelier is actually Homer, the lead houseslave and a decidedly queer figure. Though she is subjected to countless acts of violence during her lifetime, which are intended to make her submissive to white power, “Homer was not one for people telling her what to do,” whether they are black or white (47). Even Quinn and Humphrey

recognize that “the old hag thinks she runs this estate,” and that, in actuality, “she probably does” (45). In accordance with Carby’s description of the Cult of True Womanhood and its opposite, the black female slave, Homer is denied the status of being a true “woman” in the text. Her female monstrosity is consistently invoked by her fellow female slaves, who comment on the fact that her vagina “no got no hole” and that “no man no born yet that could handle her” (55). The scars that Homer has received from brutal whippings have also disfigured her, so that she no longer has fully formed breasts. While watching Homer bathe, Lilith is shocked to see that “the scars continue from [Homer’s] back to her front, so much that she don’t have titty no more, just two stump that mark off in scar marks. Her belly have marks too but they be smaller. Mayhaps she was pregnant when they whip her” (26). Thus, Homer is a female, but not a biological woman, as she no longer bares the physical features of one. Furthermore, denied the status of motherhood, as her son and daughter were sold from the plantation at a young age, Homer takes on a larger than life form within the novel, almost like a god. She exclaims that “no nigger dead on this estate unless me say so, you hear me? And no nigger live either” (18). Indeed, her practice of Myal, the counter practice to the dark Obeah, renders her with powers beyond that of an average slave, which makes her the leader of the League of Women and also the carrier of a different knowledge system than that which dominates the Jamaican plantation.^{xii} Through Lilith’s interactions with Homer, the reader becomes aware of a different way of thinking and knowing that includes the belief in the spirit world, the use of spiritual power and spells, and the ability to gain spiritual control over life and death. These powers allow Homer to continue her

clandestine plotting, to punish slaves who betray their own kind, and to help those slaves in need. James writes, “One day a young [slave]... grab Homer by the hair when she walk past. She point two finger at him eye and by nightfall he got the consumption” (46-47). Homer exists between the spirit and human worlds, and is thus a queer figure who is able to render power in the text, despite being a slave. Indeed, even after the revolt when she is shot down from the roof of the Montpelier house in a hail of bullets, Homer’s body cannot be found (416). While critic Arifa Akbar reads James’s ending as “tragic,” in that the slave rebellion ultimately fails, and Warren J. Carson states that James presents the women as “true heroines of the struggle and celebrates their ingenuity, strong will, and the setting aside of differences for the common good,” I argue that the ways in which the League of Night Women perpetuate their own queer knowledge formations is their ultimate triumph (2 and 232, respectively). Thus, the reader eventually finds that it is Homer who has told the narrator of the novel (Lilith’s future progeny) about the rebellion. Homer is, aptly, the “blind woman in the bush,” the immortal female poet who orally recounts the tale for future generations about the group of women who rose up to defy their oppressors. Thus, the “circle of subversive black women begins anew,” and Western epistemologies of teleological progress are disrupted (Buckley 2). When all that is left is to tell the story, Homer persists in spreading knowledge about the colonial closet: those figures who lived within the spaces of colonial epistemologies, who created their own knowledge and ways of knowing despite the incredible violence used to silence them. As James’s narrator states, “What can me do but tell the story?” (426). James

shows his readers that only by knowing the story, by knowing the colonial closet, can dominant heterocolonial Orientalist epistemes be disrupted and new knowledges unfold.

Nameless in the Limbo State

Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), also exemplifies how Orientalist forms of knowledge can describe and construct subjectivities and geographical locations not limited to what is conventionally known as the Orient or the Arab world as we know it today. Regarding this novel, I am specifically interested in the representation of Indian indentured laborers in Trinidad under British colonialism.^{xiii} Though Mootoo addresses a geographical region that is not technically the "Orient," as it is employed in traditional Orientalist discourses outlined in Said's book, Trinidad and its Indian population are treated as the "Orient" by Orientalists, colonialists and imperialists in the novel. Thus, Mootoo provides a literary representation of how Orientalism operates within the colony itself, through knowledge production and corporate institutions that are used to define and dominate the Indian colonial subject in Trinidad. Three main features of Said's theory are found in Mootoo's representation: the pursuit of the construction of knowledge and discourse (what can be said and known) about Trinidad and its Indian inhabitants; the hegemonic style of thought that is based on the ontological differences between the colonial power and Trinidad; and the employment of colonial institutions that are used to define and dominate the Other. Furthermore, the Other in the text will be revealed as a multitude of queer figures which resist dominant heteronormative colonial

culture, as Mootoo reveals the many queer lives that existed within colonial Trinidad, thus expanding our understanding of the many possibilities for queerness today.^{xiv}

Mootoo's characters struggle within the networks of power on the island, which are a direct result of heteronormative colonial and imperial discourses and knowledge structures. Such networks of power construct the characters as objects to be known by those educated in the colonial metropole, forcing their true selves to remain forever silenced. Thus, I argue that Mootoo offers a critique of a discourse that exists in the present time and operates according to the logic of an earlier, Orientalism, in which the Eurocentric discourse maintains hegemony over what can be said and known, and constructs colonial/imperial institutions that are used to define and dominate the West's Other. Like James, Mootoo shows how vital parts of Said's theory can be brought to the Caribbean, where the same distance, systems of knowledge and power, and discourses represent non-white laborers. Said presents Orientalism as a totalizing discourse in which the "East" cannot speak, opening his theory to critiques of absolutism and denial of the "eastern" voice itself (Ahmad 172). In the novel, such discourse is specifically felt in the areas of religion, communion with nature, gender and sexuality, and human connectivity. However, Mootoo counteracts the assumption that Orientalist discourse silences the colonial subject, by portraying characters who refuse to participate in the knowledge structures instituted by such discourses. A perverse, or contrapuntal reading, reveals how Mootoo investigates the colonial closet in which queer characters displace dominant knowledge structures, allowing for new subjectivities to emerge beyond the totalizing Orientalist discourse that pervades the island. In this way, Mootoo shows how dominant

heterocolonial discourses and knowledge structures may be disrupted in the present, and have been challenged in the past, thus opening up spaces for queer subjectivities, epistememes, and methods of resistance in the global age.

Orientalism and the Caribbean

The novel takes place on the imaginary island of Lantanacamara, a colony of the Shivering Northern Wetlands, sometime between 1900 and the 1930s, according to historical referents (Forbes 113). While much critical attention has been paid to the imaginary geographical setting as a common trope in Caribbean women's writing (See Hong, May, and Smyth), the unspecified geography reinforces, for this argument, that such knowledge/power formations are ubiquitous in the colonial/imperial realm and are not simply confined to the "East."^{xv} The novel takes the epistolary form in which a nurse at the Paradise Alms House (a retirement home), Tyler, writes to Asha Ramchandin, the sister of the protagonist, Mala Ramchandin. Tyler asks Asha to make her whereabouts known and informs her about events taking place on the island. Mala and Asha were separated when Asha runs away from the girls' sexually abusive father, Chandin Ramchandin, who repeatedly rapes Asha and Mala after their mother, Sarah, runs off with her lover, Lavinia Thoroughly. Mala protects her younger sister Asha throughout the sexual abuse by willingly submitting herself to the rape so that Asha can be spared. As the years pass, Mala remains with her father until she kills him after an incident where he severely beats and rapes her and scares away her suitor, Ambrose Mohanty. After her father's death, which the novel never morally condemns as "murder," Mala exhibits what

critic Ann Cvetkovich recognizes as severe forms of trauma (141). After her house burns down, Mala is brought to the Paradise Alms House, where she befriends the genderqueer nurse, Tyler, who writes down her story in the form of a letter to her long lost, and much beloved, sister.

Mootoo constructs the island of Lantanacamara as a depository for Orientalist knowledge and heterocolonial/imperial institutions that define and dominate the colonial Other, not only in the era of slavery, but in the era of “indentureship and ‘free’ labor.” After the British abolished the slave trade in 1807 and abolished slavery in 1834, “British planters needed new sources of labor competition to lower wages and reassert their control over the newly freed Afro-Trinidadians” (Hong 82). Planters turned to India, another British colony; thus, as 149,939 East Indian indentured laborers arrived in Trinidad between 1845 and 1917, so too did colonial systems of knowledge which constructed these subjects, mainly through legislation. As Rhoda E. Reddock explains, various legislation regulating Indian men’s violent behavior and Indian women’s reproduction and marriage were instated in Trinidad, as part of a concern that the Indians who arrived as laborers were “the right kind” (28). Reddock states that from the beginning of the Indian indentureships in Trinidad, “the question of the ‘Indian woman’ was a major point of contention and policy,” resulting in various legislations regulating the amount of women, their behavior, and most importantly, their sexuality, from the 1840s on (27).^{xvi} This legislation coincided with colonial/imperial knowledge about the Indian woman in Trinidad, which constituted her as morally bereft, loose, and weak, and, most importantly, reinforced European, heteronormative behaviors and lifestyles through

legal regulation. Reddock stresses the intersections between colonial power and knowledge formation with heteronormativity, both of which are articulated through colonial legislation and enacted upon colonized and indentured bodies.^{xvii} In this we see a signature move of Orientalist knowledge production: both the knowledge about the Indo-Trinidadian and governing colonial institutions constructed the Indian laborers as loose and morally bereft according to the colonizer's point of view, and this went hand-in-hand with the authoring of an archive of knowledge about the laborers and their socio-cultural deficiencies.

The dominant colonial/imperial epistemology and ideology on the island can be understood by examining the experiences of characters who represent dominant colonial ideology. In the novel, the island has been settled by colonizing missionaries lead by the Reverend Thoroughly, "a white man who set up school and church for Indians" (28). Thoroughly is on the island not only to convert Indian laborers, but to help set up a European system of planting, farming, and education. It is clear that the imperial power, represented by the Reverend, believes it knows what is best for the Indians (and Africans) on the island, and presents preconceived knowledge about the colonial subjects living in the extremities of Empire.^{xviii} Indeed, Mrs. Thoroughly, the Reverend's wife, tells Chandin, after he has agreed to convert, "Our family has very strong ties in the Wetlands...*And they all know everything about you.* You were the subject of many wonderful conversations, and people who have never met you have sent their greetings and blessings!" (43, my emphasis). In this instance, it is clear that Chandin is a "good" colonial subject only because he intends to mimic the colonizer through conversion,

along with dressing and behaving like a European. Furthermore, Mrs. Thoroughly unwittingly concedes that the colonial power already thinks it knows everything about Chandin, though they have never met him and have never even traveled to the island themselves. In this way, Mootoo reveals how knowledge and power function together in Orientalist discourse, where the colonial subject is constructed through the colonizer's knowledge claims.

However, although Chandin tries to look and behave like the colonizers from the Shivering Northern Wetlands, he will always remain their Other, what they define themselves against. Once he decides to marry the Thoroughly's daughter, Lavinia, he is quickly castigated and reminded of his subjugated status. Chris L. Fox reads Chandin as exhibiting a failure of cultural hybridity, in that "the pain wrought through his interpellation into the Wetlandish church and culture cruelly mocks [the] optimism [of hybridity]" (4). Likewise, Isabel Hoving reads him as a tragic person, "meant to be part of the Caribbean colonial elite, a mimic man who found at a crucial moment that he was not quite white and British" (217). It is this tragedy, which, I argue, results from Orientalist hegemony on the island as represented by the Thoroughlys, that these critics state leads to Chandin's downfall, his "alienation that allows him to become a drunken, violet, and incestuous father" (Fox 4 and Smyth).

However, the assessments of other critics have not considered the important functioning of what I call the "colonial closet," even though May mentions the "moral homosexual panic" that ensues after Chandin's wife, Sarah, and his boyhood love, Lavinia, run away together (115). This form of panic is a result of the colonial closet

created by heterocolonial Orientalist knowledge structures, heteronormativity, and homophobia. While May uses the label “willful ignorance” to describe the way that knowledge functions in the novel, as ‘an agreement to *mis*interpret the world’ that is accompanied by the full knowledge that this misinterpretation will be validated and rewarded,” the “colonial closet” addresses such knowledge structures, and allows us to consider the ways in which dominant knowledge formations are constructed on the back of closeted queer knowledges (“Trauma in Paradise” 114).^{xix} While Orientalism does not always imply a *conscious* attempt to “other” the colonial subject, Said’s discussion of knowledge and power shows how those who do not conform to the archive of knowledge are closeted by dominant colonial culture. Thus, the postman in the novel, who is complicit with colonial institutions, refuses to deliver Asha’s letters to Mala for years, because he declares “the Ramchandin house to be a place of sin and moral corruption” (243). This condemnation is combined with inaction, as the community is aware that Chandin is raping and otherwise abusing Mala, but does nothing about it. For them, it is understandable that Chandin acts violently, because he has been the victim of a type of homosexual attack against dominant heteropatriarchal ideology. Mootoo writes, “While many shunned him there were those who took pity, for he was once the much respected teacher of Gospel, and such a man would take to the bottle and to his own child, they reasoned, only if he suffered some madness. And, they further reasoned, what man would not suffer a rage akin to insanity if his own wife, with a devilish mind of her own, left her husband and children [for another woman]” (195). While Chandin, like Mala, is also proclaimed insane because he practices incest, his actions are excused because of the

“homosexual panic” invoked after his wife leaves him; his heteropatriarchal role in the community was challenged by the colonial closet and its queer inhabitants. On the other hand, Mala must be contained within the colonial closet, as her behavior increasingly becomes unwanted by dominant knowledge structures. Thus, in order to contain her within the colonial closet, Mala is declared insane by the community, as she has no “legitimate” reason for her strange behavior. Her insanity is proclaimed by the colonial institutions, the police, the judiciary, and even the church, as the Sunday school teachers state that Mala is “madder than a naked chicken at midnight and wilder than a leatherback in laying season” (119). Those who exist within the dominant Orientalist discourse, which constitutes a hegemonic heteronormative knowledge structure, objectify Mala as another thing for them to know, though her true nature lies outside of their epistemology.

In this way, Mootoo offers the possibility for a contemporary Orientalism perpetuated by U.S. hegemony, in that she situates her characters on an unspecified island, in an unknown historical time, suggesting the future possibilities for the discourse to maintain its dominance, along with its devastating effects. For example, M. Jacqui Alexander elaborates on the laws regulating Indian subjects in Trinidad, focusing specifically on state regulation of non-heteronormative sexuality. She writes, regarding legislation regulating women’s sexuality:

Criminalization functions as a technology of control and...becomes an important site for the production and reproduction of state power...Not just (any)body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-

procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain....Thus...as the state moves to reconfigure the nation it simultaneously resuscitates the nation as heterosexual. (6)

Alexander states that the laws regulating Indian laborers' sexuality during colonialism are still relevant today, where the postcolonial nation uses the same discourse to regulate those seen as existing outside of the nation, specifically subjects identified by the dominant power as homosexual and nonheteronormative. Thus, it is clear that the kind of Orientalist discourse used to "know," to define and control, the Indian population in Trinidad during British colonialism has a strong residue in contemporary nationalist discourses.^{xx} Today, it is the United States' political and economic influence in the Caribbean region which maintains unequal power relations and continues to economically and culturally dominate nations such as Trinidad and Tobago, imposing heteronormative institutions and reinforcing the colonial closet.^{xxi} Thus, it is crucial to examine how heteronormativity and homophobia are complicit in the kind of Orientalism occurring on the island, in the creation of the colonial closet, and how they influence

Chandin and also lead to his destructive behaviors, specifically his alcoholism and the rape and abuse of his daughters, Mala and Asha.

The two male characters most closely associated with Mala—her father and her childhood suitor, Ambrose—are themselves representations of colonial power/knowledge and the colonial closet and its ways of knowing. Ambrose (Boyie), like James's Massa Humphrey, was educated in the Shivering Northern Wetlands and conforms to colonial

ideology, as he also believes that Mala is insane. Ambrose states, “Mala is mad. She is as mad as a brainless bird. Crazy. From whence would she obtain the essentials of life? We are entrusted with her care” (107). In this way, he is part of the Orientalism that constitutes the island’s structures of knowledge, as he categorizes Mala as an object for which he must show responsibility and from whom he derives his own self-identity as an educated colonial subject. Furthermore, Ambrose conforms to the dominant ideology as he uses his colonial education to dominate nature. By classifying plants, animals, and eventually different races of human beings, the language of natural history “made violent and exploitative colonial ventures palatable, as the image of the gentle, knowledge-seeking naturalist replaced that of the cruel and profit-driven planter” (Hong 81). It is this discursive knowledge that Ambrose obtains in his studies in the colonial metropole. Once he returns to the island, Ambrose informs Mala that he has dismissed studying theology, because he does not believe that human beings are, or should be, the center of the universe. While this thought conforms to Mala’s own way of knowing the world, Ambrose is distanced from Mala, in that he wants to use his new field of study, entomology, for commercial gain. Though Ambrose dismisses a human centered worldview, he still conforms to the colonial ideology of classifying living creatures according to a hierarchy. Indeed, he plans on employing his European education by harvesting spider silk and operating as a nature guide for foreign tourists, which aligns

him with colonial (and neoliberal) capitalism (200). This worldview is antithetical to Mala's, who is described as not being one "to manacle nature" (77).^{xxii}

Furthermore, the reader sees how Orientalist discourse hardens into colonial institutions in the way that the characters who are members of these institutions attempt to regulate non-normative subjectivities in the novel. The reader perceives the staff of nurses at the Paradise Alms House, the local police, and the head judge on the island policing socio-political identities and regulating queer figures. In this way, Mootoo shows how Orientalism, as a system of knowledge and power that defines and thus contains the colonized, can be perpetuated outside of the colonial metropole and amongst the colonial elite, themselves.^{xxiii} At the beginning of the novel, members of these institutions introduce Mala Ramchandin to the reader. To them, Mala is the Other, the object to be known by the colonial system in which she is forever an outsider. Abandoned by her mother at a young age and left to continuous verbal, physical, and sexual abuse by her alcoholic father, Chandin, Mala is subjected to extreme forms of trauma. When she is unwillingly admitted into the Paradise Alms House, Mala does not eat, speak, or otherwise communicate with those who are part of the colonial institutions. Because of this, Mala is objectified through medical discourses and proclaimed insane. Indeed, "The community's reading of Mala entails no understanding at all; they place Mala within socially acceptable cognitive frameworks so that the community can move on. Madness has no meaning other than as a repository for the abject" (May, "Dislocation" 109). These "cognitive frameworks" are the knowledge systems produced by heteronormative Orientalist discourse, in which the colonial subject is defined and

controlled. Mala is proclaimed to be insane because she does not conform to dominant colonial ideologies, and her madness is a way of defining the sanity of the community that ostracizes her.

Thus, Mala is accused in court of being responsible for her father's death; however, her mannerisms and behavior immediately mark her as existing outside of the court system, so that the judge, Walter Bissey, initially cannot make sense of her. Mootoo writes, "He was not about to let an old woman, a crazy old woman, tried in his court" (7). Instead, Bissey sends Mala to an elderly care center, where she is once again seen as insane: "On hearing that hers was the chosen home for Miss Ramchandin, Sister went to Judge Bissey in protest" (8). The Sister, who is in charge at the Paradise Alms House, proclaims, "This is not the place for psychiatrics" (9), and the policemen who strap Mala down to a stretcher proclaim her freakishness: "She don't eat, in truth" (9). One policeman states, 'Don't 'fraid she. Unless, of course, you used to go and pelt her house and tief she mango!'" (10). The policemen testify to Mala's danger to the heterocolonial structure, by implying that she has the power to take vengeance on those who have tormented her, although she is clearly in a catatonic state. In this way, Mala is proclaimed insane by the official institutions of the island, though it later becomes clear to the reader that by calling Mala insane, the court, the police, and the Alms House are containing her within their systems of knowledge; they are defining her in order to

control her and in order to define themselves, in juxtaposition to Mala, as sane.^{xxiv}

Mala's Queer Ways of Knowing

Mala is Mootoo's protagonist, though she rarely speaks throughout the novel. Instead, her story is narrated through her nurse, Tyler. According to the authorities, part of Mala's madness lies in the fact that she doesn't speak, and that she doesn't seem to comprehend the world around her. Tyler writes, "To everyone else, Miss Ramchandin appeared to have a limited vocabulary or at least to have become too simple-minded to do more than imitate [sounds]" (99). It is for these reasons that Mala is proclaimed insane by the authorities who attempt to define, know, and control her. However, Mootoo disrupts this authoritarianism by reveling in the disintegration of the need for language, as Mala creates her own way of relating to the world that relies less on language and more on sensation. After her break with Ambrose, her sister's departure, and her father's death, Mala is left in her home alone, where she quickly leaves the physical house and resides in the garden, outside of the place of trauma (Cvetkovich 151). It is here that her use of language disappears, as Mootoo writes:

In the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalizations... A flock of seagulls squawking overhead might elicit a single word, pretty. That

verbalization, she came to understand, was not the feeling itself but a name given to the feeling: pretty, an unnecessary translation of the delight she experienced seeing the soaring birds. Eventually Mala all but rid herself of words. The wings of a gull flapping through the air titillated her soul... (126)

To rid herself of her father's sexual abuse, her community's neglect, and the system of knowledge that sanctions both of these things, Mala consciously rids herself of the discursive tool, language, and creates the world anew, using her senses to experience events. Furthermore, once she is rid of language, she is able to shed the "Western" conception of linear time by "not ascrib[ing] activities to specific times" and by reliving scenes from her past as though they take place in the present (127, 132). Thus, similar to Isobel in *The Book of Night Women*, Mala inhabits queer time and space—her way of life defies dominant notions of progressive linear time that is based around the heteronormative family, health, longevity, and reproduction (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 6). Instead, Mala lives within the past-in-present, removing herself from the space of domesticity and, instead, keeping company with the garden's birds, insects, snails, reptiles, and plants. It is the same past-in-present that Mootoo and James use to rewrite heterocolonial epistemologies, using the past to open up the aspects of the colonial closet that persist into the present day. Describing Mala, Mootoo writes, "She knelt on the ground and whispered to the grass and other young plants, encouraging them to grow, and then she listened as they stretched up to her. She did not intervene in nature's business. When it came time for one creature to succumb to another, she retreated. Flora and fauna left her to her own devices and in return she left them to

theirs” (127-128). In this way, Mootoo shows how Mala is only mad in relation to dominant Orientalist discourse, which objectifies and “others” the colonial subject in order to know, define, and control it. Mala’s “madness” is really her ability to strip herself of this same discourse and to create a relationship with the world around her that is not based on hegemony, knowledge, objectification, and control, but on understanding things as they exist in nature, along with peaceful coexisting. It is this ability that makes Mala an inherently queer character. Further, her queerness is unlinked from sexual identity or sexual object choice, as it resides in her capacity to produce an epistemology outside of the dominant heterocolonial ideology which attempts to closet her way of living. In this way, Mootoo reveals the enabling nature of the colonial closet. The closet can be used by the force of colonial authority to contain and close-up, but in the hands of postcolonial writers, such as Mootoo and James, the same power-knowledge mechanisms can be appropriated to store, cherish, and protect—and to open up what was once closed off to the world.

Mala’s garden is not Mootoo’s version of utopia, as Mala continuously relives the trauma she experienced as a young girl, even splitting herself into two subjectivities, her mature self, Mala, and her child self, Pohpoh, in order to become her own mother figure (Cvetkovich 149).^{xxv} Nor is the garden what Fox refers to as a “literary thirdspace,” as this also serves as a literary utopia. Instead, it is a queer space which “provides a...frame within which cultural meanings are reworked so that characters may perform self-coherent versions of themselves and be appreciated as themselves by others,” outside of what I have referred to as the colonial closet (Fox 2). The theoretical

framework of the colonial closet refrains from a celebration of hybridity, or what Rey Chow calls “the euphoric valorization of difference,” but rather employs a “relational use of language... [that] facilitates social change” (qtd. in Fox 62). Thus, Mala does not “empty herself of language,” as Fox suggests, but rather realizes its ineffectiveness in her new life in her garden, along with its association with her traumatic history. Just as she must literally leave her father’s house, so too must she leave her father’s language, the heterocolonial Orientalist discourse that is linked to the traumatic history, not only of Mala, Asha, and Chandin, but “other histories of violence, including the colonial migrations and exploitations that brought the Ramchandin family from India to this Caribbean island in the first place” (Cvetkovich 141). But this language remains with Mala, proving her to *not* be “mad,” but to be purposefully existing outside language, in a queer time and place. This is shown when Mala speaks to Ambrose’s son, Otoh, after decades of not speaking, as well as when the Constable and his subordinates enter Mala’s garden to search for Chandin’s body and, eventually, to arrest her (136 and 179, respectively). When the Constable tells Mala that they are searching her house out of concern for her safety, she is quick to retort, “You never had business with my safety before...Why now for? You taking advantage of a ol’ lady... Besides, yuh think I stupid or what? I know you can’t search people house without search papers” (179). Although she hasn’t spoken in years, Mala is not “mad,” according to the dominant ideology of the

island, but she is defined as such as part of the Orientalist discourse that attempts to know and thus control its objects of knowledge.

The Productive Space of the Colonial Closet

All of the queer subjects in the novel are located within various physical and cultural closet spaces, but are not necessarily constrained by them, beginning with Mala. Though the head nurse at the Paradise Alms House wants nothing to do with Mala, and is upset that a crazy woman is admitted into a place for the elderly (18-19), it becomes clear from Tyler's keen perception that Mala is not crazy, but has experienced trauma and neglect (11, 13). Tyler is able to care for, communicate with, and, most importantly, understand Mala, because he attempts to know her as she is, and does not approach her through the dominant discourse which objectifies and ostracizes those who are different. This presents a queer way of knowing that disrupts the hegemonic heterocolonial epistemologies previously discussed. In order to exist outside of hegemonic knowledge formations, constructed through Orientalist discourses, as Mala does, Tyler's queer way of knowing consists of abandoning language and experiencing things with all of his senses. When he is first assigned to care for Mala, Tyler states, "I needed to know the woman who lay hidden beneath the white sheet" (11). He then proceeds to get to know his patient in unique ways, using all of his senses in order to push beyond dominant epistemologies. He peers at Mala, seeing "her skeletal structure was clearly visible, her thin skin draped over protruding bones and sagged into crevices that musculature had once filled;" he touches her, and exclaims that "her hair, though oily from lack of care,

was soft and silken. This one touch turned her from the incarnation of fearful tales into a living human being, an elderly person such as those I had dedicated my life to serving.” Finally, he smells her, and proclaims that “she did not have the sweet yet sour smell I had come to expect whenever close to an old person. Instead, an aroma resembling rich vegetable compost escaped from under the sheet” (11). After this experience of getting to know Mala outside of language, and outside of dominant ways of knowing, Tyler is able to conclude what the other characters cannot: He states, “I felt as though I were witnessing a case of neglect” (11). By taking the time to understand Mala in queer ways, outside of discourse and through sight, touch, and smell, Tyler is able to recognize her for who she truly is, a person who is suffering from the disabling effects of trauma.

Perhaps it is Tyler’s own queerness that allows him to understand Mala and get to know her outside of the Orientalist discourse that pervades the island, as he states, “I knew it was no accident that she chose to chatter only in my presence” (99).^{xxvi} Like Mala, who the community sees only as the victim of incest, and thus ostracizes accordingly, Tyler, a self-described “outsider,” also breaks from heteronormative social structures (6). He describes himself as “not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and nonexistence,” showing how he already lives outside of dominant discourse (77). When he arrives at the Paradise Alms House, the nurses mock his feminine style of dress, and give him construction work to do, instead of the nursing he was trained for (6, 10, and 14). A member of diaspora who has returned to his homeland, Tyler traveled to the Shivering Northern Wetlands to escape discrimination for his “perversity” on the island, and to train as a nurse (22). Mala

becomes his first patient only because he is able to connect with her in a way that no other character can. May suggests that because Tyler is “used to being a ‘curiosity’...He understands what it means to be placed within an already-made...framework built upon the epistemological and ontological values of the dominant social order, an understanding that simply places one as outside of logic, perverse. This is not only a matter of being misunderstood or even dismissed but a case of being ‘understood in a way that disallows recognition that there is still something that needs to be understood’ (“Dislocation” 109). Through a “shared queerness” then, Tyler is able to use the space of the colonial closet, in which both he and Mala are placed by dominant culture, to enter her world outside of Orientalist discourse in a way that the other characters who are imbedded in this discourse, along with the colonial institutions, cannot (72).^{xxvii} In this way, Mootoo demonstrates how subjectivities can be understood outside of Orientalist knowledge structures which create the colonial closet around queer ways of knowing, being, and loving. She reveals how the colonial closet can be a productive space, as, while closets may shut off and contain, they can also store and protect until things open up to the world.

Gayatri Gopinath elaborates on Alexander’s claim that Indian indentureship in Trinidad “was marked from its inception by a discourse of sexual morality,” by stating that “both the British colonial state and immigrant Indian men labeled single Indian women (who were the majority of those women who migrated) as outcasts, immoral, and prostitutes,” and that “a variety of competing discourses and interests intersected in the need to control and legislate Indian female sexuality” (*Impossible Desires* 179). As a

result, “the colonial state, in conjunction with Indian immigrant male interests, [sought] to legislate and naturalize hierarchical [patriarchal, heterosexual] nuclear family arrangements...as necessary for peasant farming...*both producing and keeping intact* the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies necessary for the continuance of a cheap and stable workforce” (Gopinath 180-181, my emphasis). Thus, the colonial legislation, which is representative of colonial discourse and the colonial archive, both constructed the Indian woman’s subjectivity and enforced and regulated it through legislation. Therefore, while the citizens who are part of colonial institutions define and categorize Mala and Tyler as “mad,” or “perverted,” respectively, Mootoo naturalizes their queerness, showing how it is an inherent part of the island, thus disrupting the hegemony of Orientalist discourse.^{xxviii} Thus, Mootoo challenges Gopinath’s portrayal of the queer diasporic subject which remains forever outside of hetero-nationalist narratives. Likewise, Native American scholar, Andrea Smith critiques Gopinath’s use of the simplistic nation that is challenged by a complex diasporic identity. Smith states that “images of nationhood as necessarily simplistic and essentialist rest on the shadow of the primitive Indigenous subject who cannot transcend her nationalistic identifications,” so that Gopinath’s “likening of queerness to diaspora tends to reify the assumption that the (Indigenous) nation cannot be queered on its own” (“Queer Theory and Native Studies” 51-52). Following Smith’s critique, as the native queer figure in the text, Tyler disrupts

Gopinath's notion that diaspora is to the nation the way that queerness is to heteronormativity (*Impossible Desires* 11).

Another example of a queer character is Ambrose's daughter-turned-son, Otoh. Born a biological female and named Ambrosia, Otoh adopts the male gender when he is five years old. His new name, Otoh, means "'on the one hand' with 'but on the other'" (110). While Otoh's mother and father forget that he was ever a girl, Mootoo writes, "So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse and doctor who attended the birth, on seeing him later, marveled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl" (110). Thus, instead of seeing Otoh as a queer character, the other characters in the novel who are aligned with colonial institutions fit Otoh into an either/or category; he's either a boy or a girl. However, Otoh is clearly both in the novel, as he cannot let his girlfriend, Mavis, remove his pants and discover his female genitals. Mootoo writes, "He was grateful for such small breasts. As long as his tightly belted trousers were never removed he had nothing to worry about" (141). Thus, Otoh remains a queer character who does not fit easily into established identity categories, as his new name intimates. Further, by writing this queer character who is born, raised, and "transformed" on the island, Mootoo shows how queerness abounds on the island for the person who can discern the colonial closet. Indeed, Elysie, Otoh's mother, tells him, "Now the fact of the matter is that you are not the first or the only one of your kind in this place. You grow up here and you don't realize almost everybody in this place wish they could be somebody or something else? That is the story of life here in Lantanacamara" (237-238). In this way, Mootoo challenges the dominant discourse which defines sexuality and gender on the island as

heteronormative and instead presents queerness as an inherent part of the island. This is a tactic for Caribbean writers who seek to disrupt heteronational discourses which valorize the male, heteronormative subject while criminalizing nonnormative subjectivities.^{xxix} For example, writers such as Michelle Cliff, Thomas Glave, Dionne Brand, and Jamaica Kincaid all represent nonnormative sexualities within the Caribbean setting, thus representing them not as a “Western” import, but as vital piece of the nation, the community, and the home.

When his father, Ambrose, returns to the Paradise Alms House to continue his courtship with Mala, albeit several decades later, Otoh meets Tyler, and they are immediately attracted (101). Like Tyler, Otoh has the ability to try to understand Mala as she is, instead of knowing her through dominant epistemological constructions. However, because he hasn’t had much opportunity to interact with her, Otoh struggles in his understanding and needs Tyler’s help. Otoh remarks, “I never cared what anybody else thought or said about me, but somehow I cared so much about what Mala Ramchandin thought. ...I felt as though she and I had things in common. She had secrets and I had secrets. Somehow I wanted to go there and take all my clothes off and say, ‘Look! See? See all this? *I am different!* You can trust me...” (124, original emphasis). Mootoo shows that Otoh can recognize Mala’s queerness when most others cannot, because of his own queerness. Likewise, Fox states that Otoh is a model for “the importance of a kind attention to life, in all its forms” who is an example of “the ‘grounded’ kindness and respectful attention” that each character demonstrates (10). More than being a witness, Otoh is a catalyst, who causes events in the novel to occur.

By bringing his father back in touch with Mala, and rousing him after years of being in a catatonic state, Otoh is responsible for helping his father break out of the cowardliness that is a result of his Orientalist education and his alignment with Orientalist knowledge. Thus, Otoh works to change and open the colonial closet as he attempts to “redeem” and recruit his father, who has been suffering within the knowledge structure of the colonial power, and has thus been prevented from understanding and engaging with Mala on her own terms (125).

Thus, by the end of the novel, Mala, Tyler, Otoh, and Ambrose open up the colonial closet and invert its Orientalist and heteronormative power-knowledge systems to create a shared space where the other, or non-identical, can be treated with respect and compassion, as they spend time with each other in the Paradise Alms House. In this context, Tyler is free to defy the hostile condemnation of the nurses by wearing lip color, face powder, a flowered scarf, and “enough scent to make a Puritan cross his legs and swoon” (247). Opening up the colonial closet allows him to exist naturally, as he is, outside of how he is constructed in dominant culture, as his feminine style is celebrated and encouraged amongst these four characters. Further, Tyler’s sexuality is revealed as queer, as outside of categorization, as he and Otoh are courting each other, with the promise of the consummation of their desire (248). Along with Tyler and Otoh, Ambrose and Mala have rekindled their lost spark, and Mala is able to “tremble with joy” and speak her first public words (249). In this way, the characters are able to relate to each other, and find joy, love and desire amongst each other, not by confining themselves to the archive of knowledge that has been constructed by Orientalist and dominant

heterocolonial discourses, but by creating a space out of the colonial closet in which they find mutual affirmation and understanding in each other's presence, without definition and without control. That this possibility exists within the Paradise Alms House, which is part of the colonial institutions, is even more subversive, and works to create what Heather Smyth calls a project of "imaginative decolonization" (147). Though the connections between Orientalism and colonialism are much more complex than a simple cause and effect, this understanding and "imaginative decolonization" works to undo the hegemony of Orientalist discourse and knowledge that is perpetuated through colonial institutions by creating different ways of knowing the world through the colonial closet, rather than through the dominant episteme. However, it does not create a "queer utopia" or a utopic vision at all, as this mode of affiliation is forged through "disidentification, alienation, and contradiction, rather than through resolution" (Hong 97). The dominant forms of knowledge that define and control these characters still permeate the island; but at the same time, Mootoo is suggesting other ways of knowing and relating to the world, where subjectivities do not have to be completely defined.^{xxx} Rather they can exist in a "shared queerness," outside of the epistemology that Orientalism constructs and reinforces. Hong states that the novel, "reminds us that even the most pernicious and powerful modes of control have within them contradictions from which new modes of living and knowing emerge to contest, explain, and unsettle" (98). Thus, in addition to Mala, Tyler, Otoh and Ambrose, Mootoo adds the cereus plant itself into this space, as each character has experienced a relationship with this plant in their own way.^{xxxi} By the end of the novel, the human characters' lives are dependant not only on each other, but on

the cereus clipping, as Tyler and Otoh wait for it to bloom before consummating their love. Tyler writes,

With practiced elegance I moistened my lips and continued to stare at him. “The cereus plant will bloom in just another few nights. Can you wait,” I whispered to him.

“Yes, yes. Just barely, but I will wait.” (248)

By the end of the novel, the cereus plant is a queer character—one that is not personified, but that still influences the human characters. The cereus plant is gradually endowed with meaning and significance by the characters until it becomes a symbol of queer desire and sociality, just as the novel itself, (which has the name of the flower in the title), gradually unfolds and opens up a larger meaning of the colonial closet beyond the confined power-knowledge structures of colonial and Orientalist epistemologies. According to May, the cereus plant “invokes diaspora—of seeds and plants, collected, transplanted, studied, and categorized—that alludes to human migration and exile, both chosen and forced” (“Trauma” 123). Thus, the human characters have much in common with the cereus plant, whose unattractiveness has caused it to be ignored by dominant culture in Lantanacalara, yet studied and “known” in the Shivering Northern Wetlands (22). So too have the human characters been studied and known, while their true selves are ignored by Orientalist discourse and structures of knowledge. Yet by showing how these same characters are able to shed the dominant discourse through the utilization of all their senses, the abandonment of language, and through the embracing of their queerness, Mootoo reveals a new episteme within the colonial closet that creates new

ways to challenge the power structures inherent in hegemonic neoliberal discourses in today's global age.

Conclusion

In the post-9/11 context where neoliberalism reigns, it is vital to consider alternative ways of knowing, being, and belonging in the world. Both Mootoo and James tackle this great task from their subject positions as members of the Caribbean diaspora living and publishing in North America. From a contemporary perspective, both writers look to the colonial past in order to know what I have referred to as the colonial closet, the ignorance created by dominant colonial knowledge, specifically those which can be described as Orientalist modes of thought. Knowing the colonial closet allows us to consider not only the myriad ways of living, loving, and knowing the world that existed in the colonial past, but, most importantly, invites us to imagine and understand the existence of alternative knowledge systems within hegemonic neoliberalism as perpetuated by the United States today. This kind of knowing, in Sedgwick's words, "allows us to keep faith with vividly remembered promises... promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and... to challenge queer-eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged" ("Queer and Now" 3). Both Mootoo and James present the reader with these important opportunities by placing their texts within the colonial era, in Trinidad and Jamaica, respectively, while writing from their contemporary diasporic location in Canada and the United States, thus establishing methods of queer postcolonial critique

which extend simultaneously back into the colonial era and forward into the neocolonial present. Using Sedgwick and Said's theories, alongside Mootoo and James, the reader can see the ways in which heterocolonial epistemologies from the colonial era continue to circulate within dominant U.S. culture and thus continue to obscure, or closet, queer subjectivities and epistemologies which have always been present.

Chapter 2
The Objects of My Affection: Animate Landscapes and Queer Attractions
in Postcolonial Writing

This chapter takes as its starting point recent work done in new materialisms and biopolitics, where scholars are reevaluating the history of matter and theorizing a posthumanist understanding of things.^{xxxii} Particularly, I build on Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics, Jasbir K. Puar's work in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), and Mel Y. Chen's recent book, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012), which set the ground for queer theory's thorough engagement with new materialisms—a union which promises the exploration of new intimacies, sexualities, relationships, and various “biopolitical realizations of animacy in the contemporary culture of the United States” (Chen 5). This chapter looks at how queer diasporic writers publishing in the U.S. and Canada today express new forms of intimacy through their recognition of the land's animacy.^{xxxiii} Specifically, I will look at how the land once served as a legitimizing tool for colonial exploitation, as European travel writers established it as a slightly animate, feminine object to be conquered. After reflecting on how the land was traditionally conceptualized through heteronormative masculine writing, I then examine how the land is portrayed in contemporary fiction written by Shani Mootoo, Nice Rodriguez, and Michelle Cliff. I argue that these writers rhetorically change the entire notion of the land from being a conquered object to an animate being which interacts with and affects humans. The land, for Cliff and Mootoo, is a fully animate character that erotically entices human characters, and, for Rodriguez,

is the human character's sexual object choice. In this way, the theoretical background of biopolitics and new materialisms, combined with the representation of the land in the work of diasporic writers, serves as the basis for theorizing new kinds of queer intimacies and desires.

Biopolitics and Animacy

In his later lectures and writings, Michel Foucault discusses a change in the techniques of power that began in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during times of demographic explosion and industrialization, where disciplinary mechanisms used by institutions which train, use, punish, and place under surveillance individual bodies, are replaced with regulatory State mechanisms which direct the human species collectively according to life regulating mechanisms (*Society Must be Defended* 245). These regulatory mechanisms he calls a "biopolitics" of the human race, and they include monitoring birth rates, mortality rates, longevity, endemics (the form, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population), various biological disabilities, reproduction, accidents, insurance, safety measures, medical care and information, and the effects of the environment. He states that "the phenomena addressed by biopolitics are aleatory events" which occur within a population that exists over a period of time, and they are a "matter of taking control over life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized, or normalized" (*Society Must be Defended* 246). Biopower, thus, is the regularization of life, instead of "sovereignty over death" (*Society Must be Defended* 249). Foucault also discusses how

these regulations over life processes combine with the old forms of power, consisting of disciplinary controls over the body, so that sex becomes a crucial target of power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death (*The History of Sexuality* 146-147).^{xxxiv} Thus, the two forms of power, disciplinary control and biopolitical regulatory mechanisms, are articulated with each other in sexuality. Foucault states that sexuality is a matter for individualizing disciplinary controls that take the form of permanent surveillance, and it also takes effect in broad biological processes that concern the population, as “sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet. And so it is a matter for discipline but also a matter for regularization” (*Society Must be Defended* 251). It is this point—that non-normative sexualities are disciplined but also folded into regulatory mechanisms—that Jasbir K. Puar ardently responds to in her recent work.

Puar reads Foucault with a new lens regarding queerness as well as, what she claims, is the intractable nature of queerness from the biopolitical arrangements of life and death. Puar states that the queer subject in the United States is part of what she calls “sexual exceptionalism” under biopower, and her goal is to expose the convivial relationship between power and what she refers to as “homonationalism,” where the white, male, upper class queer functions as a regulatory agent.^{xxxv} Biopolitics delineates not only which queers live and which queers die, but also how queers live and die. She states that there is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e. gay marriage and

families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the “measures of benevolence” that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity. This benevolence toward sexual others is contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity. The contemporary emergence of homosexual, gay, and queer subjects—normativized through their deviance (as it becomes surveilled, managed, and studied), rather than despite it—is integral to the interplay of perversion and normativity necessary to sustain the biopolitical management of life.

At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism—the emergence of national homosexuality, what she terms “homonationalism”—that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire, where some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. Thus, for Puar, dominant queer secularity in the U.S. demands a particular transgression of norms, which include religious norms, and “queer secularity is constitutive of and constituted by the queer autonomous liberal subject against and through the reification of the very pathological irrational sexualities” (13). So in this way

homonationalism works as a biopolitical regulatory power alongside dominant heteronormative culture.^{xxxvi}

Building off of Foucault and Puar's work on biopolitics, and recent work regarding sexuality, race, environment, and affect, Chen considers how critical work on biopolitics maintains a "lingering Eurocentrism," as it implicitly addresses national bodies and privileges human citizens (6-7). Chen thus expands on Puar by considering "how matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways [within biopolitics]...[and] how the fragile division between animate and inanimate—that is, beyond human and animal—is relentlessly produced and policed and maps important political consequences of that distinction" (2). Without pinning down a precise definition of "animacy," and thus allowing it to remain a queer term, Chen contextualizes it within specific cosmologies, and challenges contemporary U.S. culture to consider animate nonhumans and humans stereotyped as passive, in order to "rewrite conditions of intimacy, engendering different communalisms and revising biopolitical spheres, or, at least, how we might theorize them" (3). In other words, Chen suggests that objects traditionally considered inanimate in Western culture, and thus are perceived as lacking the ability to affect humans and animals, such as stones or plants, should not be excluded from the "animacy hierarchy" and should certainly not be treated as "animacy's binary opposite." Instead, the object's receptivity to other affects and "its ability to affect outside of itself, as well as its own animating principle, its capacity to animate itself, [should] become viable considerations" (4 and 5). These considerations allow Chen to ponder how animacy is related to power

and the recognition of different subjects. She makes her intervention into theories of biopolitics when she questions, “What if nonhuman[s] or humans stereotyped as passive...enter the calculus of animacy: what happens then?” (3). Chen states that we need to examine how new notions of animacy create “challenges to the normativity of sex (sexing) that are sometimes biopolitically authorized” in order to suggest that “queering is imminent to animate transgressions, violating proper intimacies (including between humans and nonhuman things)” (11). This chapter builds on Chen’s work on biopolitics and animacy to consider the following questions: How do we develop our understanding of queer animacy and disrupt traditional Western/Enlightenment notions of who and what is animate? How might the biopolitical management of life processes, which includes those who participate in “homonationalism,” as Puar describes it, be affected through a recognition of queer animacies? And, how might the redefinition of animacy “rewrite conditions of intimacy” beyond that of the human life forces managed through biopolitical power formations?

(Post)Colonial Understandings of Animacy

In this chapter, I will investigate how animacy was rhetorically produced and policed during colonialism through discussions of the land and the colonized peoples. I will argue that who or what is animate, and to what degree, provided the roadmap for colonial conquest, specifically through the discourse of natural history and the colonizer’s rhetorical production of the land as a personified, semi-animate feminine object that Europeans sexually conquered. Further, while the New World was portrayed as a female

object used to provide sexual gratification to white male colonialists, the nonwhite bodies of the colonized were often rhetorically constructed as inanimate, or lesser animate, objects and commodities for trade. After establishing this Western notion of animacy constructed through the complex colonial endeavors in the New World, I will investigate how queer diasporic writers today reimagine animacy and the land as a site for queer critique where new intimacies may be formed. I will explore how traditional Western notions of animacy, specifically regarding the animate landscape and the inanimate colonized body, are denied, contorted, and reappropriated in contemporary writing from members of the Caribbean and Filipino diaspora living in the United States and Canada. Through a discussion of the works of Shani Mootoo, Nice Rodriguez, and Michelle Cliff, I will show how animacy becomes a queer term that refers to more than human life and that ultimately disrupts biopolitical notions of who or what can live and how. Thus, I will relate this discussion to contemporary notions of biopolitics, which, as Chen states, is restricted to national human bodies, thus leaving “productive openings for transnational race, animal and sexuality scholarship” (6 and 7). Alongside the work of theorists who have greatly contributed to the fields of sexuality studies, queer studies, biopolitics, and new materialisms, I will use the foundational work of postcolonial and Caribbean scholar Edouard Glissant in order to formulate my argument that the land, in current diasporic writing, becomes a character which affects human characters, forming queer relationships that may help us articulate new forms of intimacy and desire.

In his work on Caribbean discourse, Glissant is interested in how colonial history impacts current cultural production, specifically language and literature. As he states,

both History and Literature “form part of the same problematic: the account, or the frame of reference, of the collective relationships of [humans] with their environment” (69-70). He states that the Western mind maintained that culture should control nature through what he refers to as an “ordering-knowledge” which separates human beings from the natural world and, most importantly, makes them masters of it (73). This worldview is perpetuated through the Western humanist tradition and celebrated in the literary style known as realism which dominated most of Western literature during colonial expansion. However, literature, as Glissant describes it, is not the unified force that Western History and Literature sought to expand the world over. Instead it is fragmented, and it contains the many histories and voices of the people, establishing a “cross-cultural imagination” (77 and 87). For Glissant, it is important to celebrate the role of national literature, which he defines as “the urge for each group to assert itself: that is, the need not to disappear from the world scene and on the contrary to share in its diversification” (99). Caribbean literature, for him, asserts itself through the use of myth and folktale, the mixing of orality and the written word, and the use of the land as an inherent part of culture. Thus, Caribbean discourse “finds its expression as much in the explosion of the original cry, as in the patience of the landscape when it is recognized, as in the imposition of lived rhythms” (109).

Glissant states that Caribbean literature builds off of Western realism’s attempts to perpetuate a single History and Literature throughout the varied cultures of the world, in its theory of “marvelous realism,” such as that portrayed in the work of Haitian writer,

Jacques Stephen Alexis, and Colombian novelist, Gabriel García Márquez.^{xxxvii} In this marvelous realism, Glissant states,

Landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive [as it is in the Western realism tradition], and emerges *as a full character*.

Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. *Landscape is a character in this process. Its deepest meanings need to be understood.*

(105-106, my emphasis)

Glissant states that Caribbean narratives “have been unable to articulate a relationship to the landscape that is disentangled from forced agricultural labor,” so that “nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people’s consciousness” (Deloughrey 299 and Glissant 63, respectively). Thus, as a key characteristic in Caribbean literature, that works to disrupt traditional Western notions of a single History and Literature, marvelous realism challenges the Western humanist tradition and imposes its own version of what Chen refers to as animacy, in order to bridge the nature/culture divide.^{xxxviii} This chapter will continue this project by exploring the “deepest meanings” of the landscape as a fully animate character within Caribbean and Filipina diasporic writings in order to further challenge the Western humanist tradition along with

Eurocentric and human-centric biopolitics in order to explore queer sexualities, intimacies, and animacies.^{xxxix}

Colonial Landscapes

Initial records of the New World, what is now the Caribbean, Central America, and North America, were largely provided through explorers' travelogues. The European gaze became the lens through which a colonial rhetoric was formulated, as, frequently, what was recorded as fact regarding these unknown landscapes was often derived from the recorder's own imagination, worldview, and biases. Thus, travel writing, which took the form of stories, novels, diaries, and government documents, reflects the Western subject's positioning himself or herself in the world and "how they position the foreign within this framework," rather than an accurate account of a place, a landscape, or a people. Indeed, travel writing engaged in previous colonial discourses, such as Orientalism, in order to "frame the way authors positioned their view of the landscape" (Johnson 511).

In her foundational work on travel writing and European expansion, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt argues that European travel writing "produced the rest of the world" through "signifying practices [that] encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire" (5). Pratt argues that travel books "gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized" (3).^{xl} She states that it was eighteenth

century travel writing that produced and expanded the project of natural history as a “knowledge-building project that created a new kind of Eurocentered planetary consciousness” (37). Through its rigid identification and classification, along with its strict hierarchical ordering, natural history instituted “an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; it elaborated a rationalizing, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants, and animals” (37). In this classification system, it became possible only to speak of life, or animacy, in the taxonomic sense of the world, as “life [did] not constitute an obvious threshold beyond which entirely new forms of knowledge are required. It [was] a category of classification, relative, like all the other categories, to the criteria one adopts” (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 160 and 161). This kind of classificatory paradigm was spread globally to European readerships and was practically applied through colonial and imperial institutions.

However, unlike colonial rhetoric and the written claims of Empire, conquest, and war, Pratt states that natural history disguised itself as untransformative and benign. Indeed she refers to natural history as an “anti-conquest,” a strategy of representation “whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (9). In juxtaposition to the violent rhetoric of colonial expansion, slavery, and conquest, natural history asserted its “utopian, innocent vision of European authority” to do the same kind of harm, albeit in the ideological realm (38). Thus, through the colonial rhetoric of the land, the paradigm of natural history staked its claim in the global imaginary, separating humans from the

plants and animals they lived amongst, and establishing those humans as animate subjects, and the landscape as an inanimate object to be broken down into parts and hierarchically classified according to the rational rules of science.

Not only did Enlightenment knowledge establish this vast system of classification, but, as Anne McClintock states, it also created a “metaphysics of gender violence,” whereby knowledge and power became masculine, while nature and submission became feminine. McClintock describes the gendered system of classification in which the male traveler ranks the unexplored, “virgin” territories as feminine in what she defines as a “pornotropics for the European imagination—a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears” (22). McClintock states that travel writing is packed full of imagery of the colonial land as female, waiting for male exploration, penetration, and control, which serves to validate the “Enlightenment logic of private property and possessive individualism” (23). By feminizing the land, European travelers established a double move of power. They rhetorically removed the land from the lower levels of animacy as previously established by the Enlightenment division of nature and culture. However, at the same time, they inscribed the land and the feminine as inanimate objects to be consumed by animate European men. As McClintock states, the “feminizing of terra incognita was, from the outset, a strategy of violent containment” prompted not only by male megalomania, but of “acute paranoia and profound...male anxiety” surrounding their precariously balanced power in the “new world” (24). By rhetorically creating a gendered, empty land through travel writing, mapping, and naming, European explorers

instituted a “gender and racial dispossession” which simultaneously established the colonized land and the feminine as just animate enough to conquer. Furthermore, the trope of the female land helped reinforce heteronormativity, in that the (hetero) white male is meant to sexually conquer the (hetero) female and to reap all of the benefits from such a union. Thus, not only were plants and animals regulated and classified through natural history, but so too were human beings put on a scale of animacy which specified which humans were more animate, and thus were given more living rights as subjects, and which humans were less animate, and were thus denied living rights and treated as objects. Thus, we see how biopolitical regulatory mechanisms established by colonialism determined who had more rights to life processes and who were deemed less animate and were thus denied such rights.

Not only were female human beings deigned less animate, as explained above, but, as Pratt states, by 1758, *homo sapiens* had been classified into six categories, which explicitly favored the European (32-33).^{xii} This “natural” classificatory system was used to support African slavery in the Caribbean and in the United States, so that those peoples who were more “European” by way of the amount of white blood contained in their bodies, were perceived as innately having more animacy and thus more right to subject status.^{xiii} This kind of biopolitical regulation mandated who could be perceived as a full human being, and who was less than human and thus given less rights under the law. In its extreme, it mandated which humans could be considered inanimate and could thus assume object and commodity status. Therefore, through the Enlightenment systems of classification that constituted human beings as animate and nature and objects as

inanimate, and thus of lesser status; through the feminization and objectification of the terra novena in travel narratives; and through the hierarchical organization of human beings as more or less animate and thus more or less human and deserving of natural rights, we can see the Western biopolitical interplay of perversion and normativity which sustained the management of life in Europe and in the colonies.

Having established what the land meant to European colonizers in the “new world,” what is now the Caribbean and the United States, I will turn to look at how contemporary Caribbean novelists rhetorically overturn such rigid hierarchical classification systems from the remnants of colonialist Enlightenment thought. Indeed I will show that by a queer reading of the work of Shani Mootoo, Nice Rodriguez, and Michelle Cliff, we may see how these systems of classifying animacy are overturned and how queer intimacies are created by including the land of Trinidad, the global market, and Jamaica, respectively, as a full character within the text, according to Glissant’s description—not one that is personified to mimic the “more advanced” human, but one that has its own complete being, equal in animacy. The land, for these writers, is an animate object that queerly affects the human characters, causing new desires, new sexualities, and new relations to burgeon, unencumbered by heteronormative prescriptions regarding who can love who, and how. Because of this, these writers force us to reconsider who or what might erotically affect us outside of heteronormative,

gendered, colonialist rhetoric, and, thus, who or what has the potential for animacy and the ability to become the object(s) of our affections.

Into the Forest

Shani Mootoo's novel, *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), portrays the development of an attraction between the "mannish" Viveka Krishnu, descendent of a long line of Indians living in Trinidad, and Anick, the young, French wife of a family friend. Though the Krishnu family attempts to maintain a façade of heteronormativity and uphold its regulatory mechanisms, such as heterosexual marriage and strict gender codes, their secret sexual undertakings, relationships, and desires illuminate the heterosexual norm as that which is ultimately illusory. While the mother of the Krishnu family, Devika, appears the perfect housewife in the perfect marriage, her doctor husband, Valmiki, has multiple affairs with his white female patients, though his heart belongs to his life-long male lover, Saul Joseph, who is also married to a woman. Further, though Viveka is written as a gender queer character, her parents deny her true gender expression, as they prevent her from playing sports, and discourage her becoming too close to Anick.^{xliii} And finally, Anick herself has marriage troubles, as her husband tries to "save" her from her perverse sexuality, exemplified by her past history of sleeping with both men and women. Once Anick settles down in Trinidad, where gender codes are strictly enforced, her husband becomes disgusted with her sexual past, and he tries to show her what "real" sex is (233). In this way, Mootoo represents the heteronormative regulatory social

mechanisms that prescribe gender and sexual manifestations, and how these regulations become synonymous with the nation of Trinidad through cultural reinforcement.

The Indian residents on the island have strict gender codes which prescribe how men and women should behave, and anything that exists outside of this normative ordering is seen as “other” and morally corrupt. For example, Anick’s husband, Nayan, loves to cook, but will not partake of the activity because it does not conform to his prescribed gender role. Further, his independent wife is seen by the community as “getting away with a lot,” as she will not conform to her role on the island (221). Thus, Nayan, begins to hate her “European ways” and the “sexual deviance” of worldly peoples (252).

Not only does Nayan represent the extreme heteronormativity that permeates the island, but he also represents neoliberal ideology in his exploitative financial endeavors. Nayan’s goal upon returning to Trinidad from Canada is to prove to the Western world that the Caribbean is as good as the West—not through indigenous culture or a post-colonial critique—but through mimicking Western imperialism. Nayan thus “wrote to companies in Europe and had their catalogues and sales pitches sent to him and taught himself what European standards of quality and class looked like” in order to become “as good as them” (241). Nayan sincerely believes that by gaining equal footing in the world market through the production and sale of Trinidadian gourmet chocolate, he can prove to France, and to the white, Western world, that he is worthy of belonging. Mootoo writes, “He would show white France and the immigrant populations there. He would show Canadians. He would show other Trinidadians. He would show Anick” (241). A mimic

man with something to prove, Nayan does not set out to contest, critique, or resist neoliberal global capitalism, but to unquestioningly become a part of it—and a huge success at that—allowing him to gain masculine and monetary power over the white West and his fellow Trinidadians. Further, his capitalist pursuits parallel the heteronormative couple's interest in the reproduction of capital and offspring.

It is this cultural environment that causes Mootoo's protagonist, Viveka, to feel like an outsider and to long to live abroad where "she could find out who she's really interested in" (210). Brought up in the heteronormative culture, Viveka knows that something is wrong when, at a young age, she is attracted to her best friend Helen instead of her male friend, Elliot (149). Furthermore, Viveka does not conform to gender roles, as she appears physically masculine and enjoys activities, such as sports, that are traditionally reserved for boys. Mootoo writes that Viveka "had stepped into a crack where there was no gender name for what she was," referring to her gender queer status along with the inability of dominant culture to recognize her for who she is (263). Though Viveka wishes she were a boy, her family prevents her from fully expressing her gender (164). For example, her father, Valmiki, encourages her to befriend the very feminine and chic Anick in order to dissuade his masculine daughter from playing volleyball (184). However, instead of forming a friendship, Anick and Viveka begin to sexually desire each other, though they are prevented from outwardly acting on their desire due to the heteronormative cultural constraints (296).

It is not until Viveka visits Anick at her new home in the middle of Nayan's cacao estate, while Nayan is away, that their attraction finds expression amongst the lush

landscape. The estate is Nayan's nest egg, as it is meant to provide all of his financial success. Indeed, not unlike a colonial plantation, Nayan employs laborers who populate the plantation and are, symbolically, denied a voice within the novel. Mootoo ironically casts these laborers as men of color who work on the imperial agent's plantation, though in this case the "master" is a man of color, Nayan, an Indo-Trinidadian. In this way, Viveka and Anick's desire and attraction, and their eventual meeting on the plantation, is portrayed as being inherently connected to the history of colonialism and the future of neoliberalism. As the two women leave the plantation house for the wilderness, where Anick has a small cottage to herself, one laborer, Mr. Lal, "lit cigarette in his mouth, nodded to the two women as they headed onto the dirt path between a scattering of grapefruit trees" (316). Later, when they are alone, Viveka imagines that the laborer's eyes are constantly on them, and thus keeps her "eyes wide open as possible, turning back often to make sure that Mr. Lal or some unknown forest dweller was not approaching or following them" (321).^{xliv} While the two women are caught up in the history of colonial relations, Viveka ponders whether or not she is attracted to Anick simply because she is a white European, and if she is mirroring her father in this way, as he only sleeps with foreign female patients (309). The complexity of the encounter engages Nayan's neoimperial endeavors, the strict heteronormative social order, and the biopolitical regulatory mechanisms on the island (such as marriage, birth, and labor), which all come to a head as the two women interact with the Trinidadian landscape.

Like the Jamaican land in the work of Michelle Cliff, the forest in Mootoo's novel stands as a fully animate character, yet is not personified or modeled after the human

characters. Instead, the forest interacts with Viveka and Anick as they set off away from the plantation house, the symbol of heteronormative domesticity and imperial domination, and into the woods. After Anick asks Viveka if she should stop playing her (Western) classical music and, instead, listen to the voice of the forest, Mootoo writes,

With each deep breath [Viveka] drew in the cloying odour of ripened forest fruit, not the sort of fruit found in the grocery or in the market, but fruit that gave off scent as if it were a pheromone, sickeningly sweet, *insistent*. [...] Anick...moved to face Viveka. Viveka's heart stilled. She could barely breathe. The sounds of the forest seemed to thunder—a cacophony of monkeys howling, of the trees trembling in the light breeze, the creaking of the branches of the silk cottons, the pulsing drone of a thousand cicadas, and frogs, frogs right outside the door croaking. Anick stepped forward. (319, my emphasis)

By turning off Western cultural influence as symbolized by the classical music, the Trinidadian forest is able to step in as a fully animate being consisting of trees, cicadas, frogs, silk cottons, and monkeys—all of which join to guide the two lovers together. Indeed, the harmony of the classical music is replaced by the “cacophony,” “creaking,” and “pulsing drone” of the Trinidadian flora and fauna. The forest here is not feminized, nor does it adopt any gender. Instead, it is an animate being that encourages the renegotiation of gender and sexuality outside of biopolitical regulatory mechanisms. Under the influence of the forest, Viveka is able to explore gender in its infinite

variations, and is thus comfortable feeling masculine as she makes love to Anick.

Mootoo writes,

She had felt, during the initial moments of their lovemaking, a sense of having taken on the form of a young man's body. Her body had become, albeit briefly, Vince's body, and in other moment's Anand's. These two were suddenly young men, sturdy, muscled, handsome. [...] This was the strongest sensation of that sort Viveka had ever had—of not being what she looked like, female. And yet she knew now more than ever that her feelings and her way with Anick were hers and hers alone. Not a boy's. Not a man's. Whatever she was, these feelings were hers. (322-323)

The indefinite relative pronoun, “whatever,” importantly reflects Viveka's queerness, as, within the influence of the forest, she is able to finally come to terms with her gender queer status and shrug off the embodied gender that has been forced upon her. By representing the forest as a fully animate character within the text which encourages Viveka and Anick to defy heteronormative neoliberal culture, Mootoo renegotiates what matter is and what it can do. She investigates questions of embodied difference and analyzes “how such differences are transformed into social hierarchies,” specifically gendered and racialized hierarchies, as they are presented within the novel, and portrays the forest as a character that does not conform or adapt to such hierarchies but immanently transforms gender and racial embodiment and heteronormativity (Stryker 3). Thus it is only when the characters leave the plantation house, turn off the classical music, and fully engage with the forest as it exists as a fully animate being that they are

able to shrug off their cultural baggage and explore their gender and sexuality. In this way, Mootoo, like Cliff, uses the land as a character in the text in order to explore new ways of being, new ways of loving, and new ways of negotiating prescribed socio-economic and cultural roles.

However, unlike Cliff and Rodriguez, Mootoo's characters—Viveka, Anick, and the forest—do not remain in a queer state. Later in the novel Anick announces that she is pregnant, breaking Viveka's heart and reinstating herself into a heteronormative lifestyle. Valmiki, Viveka's father, recognizes his daughter's heartbreak, as he too had non-heterosexual love affair that he lost to heteronormativity, and he wishes that his daughter did not have to suffer, like he has. Mootoo writes, "He wanted to tell her to leave this place, to go far away" (354), and, eventually, that is exactly what Viveka does. At the end of the book, Viveka marries a man, Trevor, in order to move to Toronto. Mootoo makes it clear that this is a marriage of convenience, as Viveka tells Trevor that their relationship will only last two years because "You know what I am" (369). Thus, Mootoo shows how her protagonist cannot remain on the island of Trinidad, but instead must leave to find the life that she wants.^{xiv} The foreclosed queer intimacies and relationships are thus inherently connected to the entrenched position of the characters within colonial and neo-colonial structures, as the queer forest scene is contained within Nayan's plantation, so that Anick and Viveka's intimacy is framed by neocolonial capital. Indeed, the possibilities for queer relationships travel with Viveka, as we

imagine her experience with Anick and the land, along with her gender queer status, forcing her to renegotiate the boundaries of who and what can be loved.

Forbidden Fruit

It is these such boundaries that Filipina writer Nice Rodriguez investigates in her collection of short stories, *Throw it to the River* (1993). Rodriguez takes off writing where Mootoo ends, describing a queer protagonist who has just made the journey from the Philippines to Toronto, Canada, while candidly describing the sexual styles, sex objects, and the fun, pain, and love in the lives of working class Filipina queers. Her collection of short stories addresses the social oppression and personal struggles that Filipina butches, femmes, and all those in between, encounter in The Philippines and as diasporic subjects in Toronto. Rodriguez's narrative differs from Cliff and Mootoo's, in that she does not present the interaction of the Philippine landscape with human characters, but instead represents her protagonist's erotic encounter with produce purchased from the world market. Rodriguez's short story, "Dyke with Two Wives," details a masculine lesbian's struggle to find community, home, and sexual pleasure once she leaves The Philippines to find a better life in Canada. This struggle is humorously and erotically depicted through the narrator's retelling of her multiple sexual activities with fruit—bananas, grapes, plums, etc.—and it brings to light issues of the queer female diasporic subject negotiating sexuality and gender identity, global and economic positioning, loneliness, and belonging. I argue that by portraying sexual acts with various kinds of fruit, alongside queer human sex acts, Rodriguez is illustrating the many possibilities for erotic attachment outside of the human; the ability for objects to establish

animacy by causing desire in a human being; and the ways in which sexual acts and sexual pleasure are always already embedded in geopolitics, culturally-specific notions of sexual and gender identity, and neoliberal economies.^{xlvi}

In “Dyke with Two Wives,” Rodriguez presents a fictionalized oral account of a young butch lesbian’s experience leaving her wife, Amelia, behind in the Philippines, as she could not obtain a visa, and moving to live in Canada, where she meets a different wife, Lorna. The story is told by an unnamed narrator, the “dyke,” if you will, with interjections from the narrator’s wives, in present time, and it recounts the past experiences of the three women. Thus, the tale depicts the real life struggles of same-sex immigrant couples who are forced to separate due to federal laws that do not recognize their unions. As Amelia proclaims, the entire story happens because she is denied entry alongside her life partner; “*It wasn’t my fault that I couldn’t follow her*” (116, original emphasis). At the same time that it details such serious and life-altering problems forced upon the queer diasporic subject, even if it is for the purpose of getting rich, as the narrator states, the story is told with a humorous tone that immediately invites the reader into the small, queer circle of these women’s lives while making the reader accepting towards whatever the story relates. Thus, the narrator opens by stating that she currently has two wives, and “there are times when I think that only a lesbian is anatomically predisposed to bigamy—being born with two hands” (109). Such raunchy humor both invites the reader into these characters’ personal and sexual lives while preparing the reader for similar kinds of humor to come. Furthermore, the humorous tone of the story may be viewed as a survival tactic, as the narrator recounts the painful story of her

struggle as a queer Filipina immigrant trying to adapt to a foreign and unaccepting culture in Canada, made worse by the loss of her wife who was denied entry—“not that I blame the bureaucrats”—she jokes (109). In this way, the humor highlights the irony of the story, as it makes the reader appreciate the painful slippage between raunchy humor and lightheartedness, on the one hand, and painful separation and loss, on the other.

Upon arriving in Toronto, the narrator feels immediately displaced and fractured. She states, “I arrived here with half of me,” commenting on the fact that her wife was denied entry. Thus, while Puar states that homonationalism is occurring in the United States, as white, gay male homosexual subjects are becoming aligned with the neoliberal state, Rodriguez portrays the opposite side of the coin, as the narrator and her wife, as lesbian immigrants, cannot obtain the recognition by the neoliberal state that they desire. The narrator laments, “I came to Canada to be rich [...] I kissed the queen’s picture on the paper bill. [...] But she could not come to Canada. Straight people could sponsor their pen-pals, but me? I couldn’t get my wyfe!” (110 and 113).^{xlvii} Not only that, but lesbian life in Canada is entirely different from that where she came from, as the narrator claims, “I didn’t even know where the lesbians were in Toronto. So many lesbian-looking women and my radar was malfunctioning” (110). Brought up in a Filipina culture of butch/femme, where lesbians needed to be easily recognizable by their physical appearance, the narrator is lost once she arrives in Toronto where lesbians do not necessarily abide by the butch/femme dichotomy. She remarks, “When I found [lesbians], what a disappointment! Many of them had been with men. It shattered my mind. You didn’t make those mistakes back home. You couldn’t be a butch with a past.

It could ruin your reputation, especially with the women” (110). In this way, Rodriguez narrates the stark differences between lesbian culture in the Philippines and in Toronto, as the narrator is shocked that women purporting to be lesbians in Toronto would even admit to have slept with men.^{xlviii} Thus, because the sexual cultures are so different that the narrator is put-off by Toronto lesbians, she states, “Since I arrived, I had not had sex” (110). The difference between the two sexual cultures is so vast that the narrator cannot participate enough to find a (human) sexual partner, which opens the space for a queer sexuality and subjectivity to develop.

“Some Days it Would be Zucchini’s”

Rodriguez’s narrator describes herself as so sexually starved due to her inability to connect with lesbians in Canada, that she is unable to distract herself with work or sleep. Her solution to this is to find a new sexual object, one outside of the human realm, as her position as a diasporic lesbian in Canada prevents her from connecting with other people who could be potential sexual partners. Thus, she eventually begins satisfying herself with objects in her apartment, the fruit and vegetables that are laying in the refrigerator, and then those that she buys from the store. She states,

I just found myself, one day, playing with a dill cucumber and pressing it against my cunt. Some days it would be zucchinis. I used them straight from the stores and just removed the tops until their juicy insides were exposed. Sometimes I’d use grapes. I skinned one and held the tiny grape against me. Carrots were too stiff. Crunchy apples crumbled easily.

Kiwis were okay. Green bananas gave me some control; the ripe ones just sort of melted. (110-111)

Ostracized from the world of human animacy due to her immigrant status, the narrator chooses a different sexual object: the fruit from the store. It is important to note that she does not state that she *purchased* the fruit straight from the store, but that she “*used* them straight from the store,” showing how the fruit functions as affective objects rather than commodities. Furthermore, unlike Cliff’s portrayal of Clare being sexually satisfied from the feminized Jamaican land, Rodriguez’s narrator does not describe the fruit and vegetables as being gendered in any way. Instead, she describes each object as a potential sexual object, and defines its sexual abilities through its shape, density, size, malleability and wetness only. In this way, she is able to remove herself from the conflicting cultural norms of what it means to identify as a lesbian—how butch or femme someone is, whether or not they have slept with a man, and whether or not they are easily identifiable as a lesbian—and enjoy her bounties as they exist in nature, outside of human beings’ social hierarchies, including gender dichotomies. By focusing the narrator’s sexual appetite on the fruit of the land, as objects rather than purchased produce, Rodriguez highlights the “operations of systems and institutions that simultaneously produce various possibilities of viable personhood and eliminate others,” while investigating “questions of embodied difference, and analyz[ing] how such differences are transformed into social hierarchies” (Stryker 3). Removing the narrator from the realm of human sexual object choice, as she cannot choose a human partner, Rodriguez conceives of “something like the ‘affect’ of a vegetable, wherein both the vegetable’s

receptivity to other affects and its ability to affect outside of itself, as well as its own animating principle, its capacity to animate itself, becomes viable considerations” (Chen 4). The narrator’s corporality becomes affectively charged by her sexual engagements with the fruit. Furthermore, the fruit itself becomes animated in its ability to affect the narrator and to cause her subjective boundaries to dissolve into sheer physical sensation, as the green bananas give her “some control,” but the ripe ones melt inside of her. In this way, Rodriguez presents the reader with entirely new considerations for animacy that challenge biopolitical notions regarding what is animate and what is “merely” object.

Through these sexual descriptions with the produce, the narrator shows how her racialized difference as a butch Filipina immigrant in Canada directly impacts her ability to connect with other human beings and feel satisfied, sexually and emotionally, in “the West.” Colonization rendered certain racialized bodies as less animate, as previously discussed, and the narrator’s own racialized body, transplanted into a white Western metropolis, is not perceived as having equal animacy. As Eleanor Ty discusses, the Canadian government, in its official policy, categorizes non-white citizens as “visible minorities,” which differentiates racial minorities such as “blacks from various parts of Africa, West Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Koreans, Vietnamese, and so on—from ethnic minorities, such as Italians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Russians, Serbo-Croatians, and so on” (5). This official label as a “visible minority” based upon skin color ultimately results in minority groups being perceived as politically unimportant and creates what Ty refers to as “the politics of the visible.” She states that while Asians in both Canada and the United States are legally, socially, and

culturally marked as highly visible through particular physical and cultural characteristics, at the same time they are rendered invisible by dominant history and culture. She writes,

As Asian Americans and Asian Canadians, these hieroglyphs, along with our yellow and brown color, mark us indelibly as other, as Oriental, as exotic, subservient, mysterious, deviant, or threatening. [...] [At the same time], Our economic contributions and labour have not been made evident; our stories do not make prime time TV shows, and the distinctions between us are often effaced and overlooked. [...] We have lived in and been part of the North America for centuries, but have remained in the shadows. (4)

Thus, the task for Asian American and Asian Canadian writers is to “recreate selves that have been effaced by the screen of the visible,” and it is such a task with which Rodriguez’s narrator struggles, specifically regarding matters of race and sexuality, after moving from the Philippines to Toronto. As a “visible minority” in Canada, she is unable to form community with the (white) lesbians there who do not ascribe to the butch/femme roles that are part of the narrator’s culture.

Thus, the narrator can only connect with other members of the Filipina diaspora, such as her second wife, Lorna. Rodriguez writes, “The leaves fell and the white landscape and freezing weather brought nothing but thoughts of death and desolation,” describing the inanimate winter landscape in Canada, which mirrors her own social death upon arriving. The narrator thus proclaims, “Only when I looked into [Lorna’s] eyes was I transported to a veranda where I could see coconut trees dancing to the warm afternoon

winds” (110). While in Canada, it is only amongst members of her own ethnicity that the narrator feels completely animate, and this, again, is reflected in a description of the land. In the post-colonial context, an immigrant lesbian of color who marks herself as such in different ways than what is acceptable in the West cannot be perceived by Canadian lesbians as having the same level of animacy as a native, and she is invisible, passed over, and sexually rejected.^{xlix} It is because of these racialized and “humanized” notions that the narrator explores other animacies that do not distinguish between human and inhuman, live and dead (Chen 7). However, she uses humor to cover the emotional pain of such societal and cultural rejection, as the reader is meant to be entertained by reading about her sexual endeavors with the fruit. Thus, the narrator states, “I ran out of fruits and when I checked the fridge drawer, I saw only that pepper. Wow, was it hot! It sent me scampering naked into the washroom. I’d had it. I needed a real woman” (111). In this passage the narrator amuses and entertains the reader while describing her personal desperation and her inability to find a human sexual partner. She states that she “cried a lot. [...] And during winter in sunless Toronto, I’d be yearning for [a woman] as soon as I had lunch” (111-112). It is clear that though the fruit may satisfy her sexually, she believes that it is only a substitute until she can find a human woman to love.

Furthermore, Rodriguez portrays the narrator’s unique sexual object choice as being inherently connected to larger socio-economic phenomena, specifically the relation

between the neoliberal Western state and the diasporic homeland. Describing the fruit that she buys, the narrator states,

I never used familiar fruits and veggies from home. There had to be some reverence for the food one grew up on, such as mangos and guavas. I was sure glad the varieties of bananas and carrots I found here were different. Just different. Bigger maybe. [...] Canada is the land of plenty. So many fruits and vegetables from all over the world at my disposal. Like plums, which we didn't have back home. (111)

Here we find that it is only foreign produce that the narrator can perceive as sexual objects, as produce from her home in the Philippines is too close to her, too directly related, so to speak. In this passage, the diasporic homeland is held up and proclaimed better than Western produce and imported produce, through the narrator's sentimental attachments. However, the importance of this passage is that it reiterates the narrator's subject position as a diasporic subject that is nevertheless a global consumer who is part of the neoliberal capitalist enterprise in her ability to purchase produce from around the world in "the land of plenty." In this way, Rodriguez illustrates that even though the narrator displays queer sexual intimacies with the produce, she is still inextricably intertwined with the neoliberal culture of consumption. Indeed, she utilizes such a culture for her own benefit, thus showing how different sexual object choices and

different intimacies can be established inside of the neoliberal state, though without state approval or recognition.

“Maybe This is Sex”

Indeed, though the narrator originally claims that the fruit is only a substitute for a human female body, she leaves clues for the reader that show how once she is sexually active with her wives, she is unhappy, thus implying that the fruit did satisfy her in a way that the women cannot. She states at one point that she is so fed up with the women’s fighting over her that “I didn’t sleep at either woman’s place. [...] I slept at a bed-and-breakfast place, hoping to find peace,” at which point her narrative is interrupted by a wife who accuses her, “*Is there a third woman?*” This accusation implies that the wife does not trust the narrator and that their relationship is strained (115). The narrator describes the two women “suffocating me with their weight” while in bed, and she clearly states, “Let me tell you, I never asked for this” (109). By the end of the narrative, the wives have repeatedly interrupted the story in a manner that creates tension. At one point, a wife interjects accusatorily, “*It wasn’t my fault that I couldn’t follow her*” (116). The accusatory tone, along with the fact that the person speaking is not identified, shows how the two wives are interchangeably difficult, frustrating, and annoying to the narrator. Indeed, the narrator states, “Having two wyves is not easy,” as she gives examples of how the wives constantly compete with each other. Most importantly, when the narrator describes their sexual encounters she states, “maybe this is sex,” doubting the wives’ ability to bring her sexual pleasure and fulfillment (116 and 117, respectively). All of

these doubts, conflicts, and tensions suggest that the narrator was more satisfied with her sexual encounters with the fruit, as it did not have the ability to question, irritate, or fight with her. Indeed, the only sensual descriptions found in the story is during the narrator's sexual encounters with the fruit as sex objects, as only the fruit broke down the boundaries of her subjectivity, melting inside her, until she became pure pleasure. Thus, I argue that this representation of the diasporic subject who emigrates to the West and begins sexually consuming global produce because her wife did not receive immigration papers from the state, shows how a subject may be embedded within the ideological and biopolitical system, yet create a small window of resistance, as her sexual experiences and sexual object choice remains outside of biopolitical regulation.¹ Rodriguez thus shows how new notions of animacy have “the capacity to rewrite conditions of intimacy, engendering different communalisms and revising biopolitical spheres, or, at least, how we might theorize them” (Chen 3). Such intimacy may be created by a new understanding of objects and their affective potential.

Queerness at the Crossroads in *No Telephone to Heaven*

Jamaican-born writer, Michelle Cliff's, novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1989) tells the story of Clare Savage, a young woman born to a light-skinned father and a dark-skinned mother amongst the middle class members of Jamaican society. Her father brings her to live in New York City as a young girl, and she travels to the “motherland,” England, to receive a formal education, only to end up as a Jamaican freedom fighter against American neocolonial forces. Clare is what Cliff describes as a “crossroads

character,” as she struggles to confront a complex colonial history that continues to rear its ugly head and cause family feuds, social anxieties, and personal doubt. Cliff states, [Clare Savage’s] name, obviously, is significant and is intended to represent her as a crossroads character, with her feet (and head) in (at least) two worlds. Her first name, signifies, light-skinned, which she is, and light-skinnedness in the world in which Clare originates, the island of Jamaica in the period of British hegemony, and to which she is transported, the United States in the 1960s, and to which she transports herself, Britain in the 1970s, stands for privilege, civilization, erasure, forgetting. She is not meant to curse, or rave, or be a critic of imperialism. She is meant to speak softly and keep her place. (265)

But Clare is not only at the crossroads of her familial, national, and ethnic allegiances, as I argue, she is also at the crossroads regarding her sexuality in the novel. The heteronormative model of the nuclear family fails Clare and is proven unsustainable, given the racial and class relations between the individual members of the Savage family, as Boy and Kitty are divided according to their understandings of race and the responsibility that comes with it. Boy decides to pass as white in the United States, while Kitty longs to return to Jamaica where she explores and enjoys her blackness. Clare is left struggling to find a place where she belongs, as “there are many bits and pieces to her, for she is composed of fragments” (*No Telephone* 87). She struggles to fix her

identity, to not be a crossroads character, but to be either white or black, Jamaican or British, normative or queer.

However, this seems to be an impossible quest for her, as she, at first, cannot find home, comfort, or community. At the beginning of the novel, we see Clare having sex with a young teenage boy in her Jamaican social circle. Cliff writes, “She seemed to want to get it over—he could tell—and moved away too quickly once he came into her. [...] She said nothing...just got up and walked out of the poolhouse and back to the party” (88). When she returns to the party, Clare immediately vomits into the pool, exhibiting true disgust for the heterosexual encounter. Cliff writes, “Clare could entrust her body to this boy she barely knew and watch herself as he fondles her and feel pleasure in her parts but still be apart from him. Feeling free, the word she put to it then” (88). In this way, Cliff shows how Clare does not feel herself to be a part of heteronormative culture, even though, as a young girl, she feels like it is the right thing to belong to—what Adrienne Rich refers to as “compulsory heterosexuality.” Furthermore, Cliff makes it very clear that Clare is removed from the heteronormative lifestyle, as she gets her period and thus reflects that “she was free of him” (89). Thus, from the start, Clare is denied such heteronormative clichés as happily losing one’s virginity, falling in love with a boy, and becoming a mother, and she is, instead, established as a queer character at the crossroads.

When she is living in England, Clare has multiple encounters with women with whom she shares an erotic attraction, but she is unable to fully express or act upon her

desires. Cliff writes, describing a “reasonable [sexual] possibility” that enters Clare’s mind,

The day before [Clare] had given a light to the woman sitting next to her on the tube. The two had chatted and the woman asked her to be her guest at the ballet that evening. Margot Fonteyn was dancing, the woman said. Clare fled. Had she expected the woman to seek her out? Did she want this? A simple want next to the want she felt. (115)

The wordplay in the last line alludes to want as both a desire and a lack, respectively. Though Clare feels attraction to the woman, she is lacking the self-knowledge and courage to recognize and accept such desire. Thus, too scared to recognize or act on her feelings, Clare questions her erotic attraction to the woman on the train. Later in the novel, Clare befriends Liz, a fellow student, who invites her to an all-female getaway. Though Clare proclaims that she is “not quite sure why she had been asked [to come along] in the first place,” Cliff presents this as another possibility for an erotic encounter. However, the racial and class tensions between Liz and Clare ultimately prevent any kind of intimacy, and Clare is left again reflecting on “her youth, her color, her strangeness, her unbearable loneliness” (137). Thus, Cliff presents Clare struggling to understand “her strangeness,” outside of heteronormativity. It is not until Clare returns to Jamaica

that she is able to find true belonging, as, upon her return, she experiences a satisfying physical pleasure that makes her realize that she belongs on her native island.

Animacy and the Jamaican Land

Jocelyn Fenton Stitt reminds us that the trope of the feminine land was carried through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, when European nationhood became solidified. She remarks on Romantic nationalism's "emphasis on mothers and landscape," stating that traditional nationalism employs "modes of nationalist discourse which rely on an *organic* link between the landscape, the qualities of the folk, and perhaps most importantly—the figure of the national mother" (56). Stitt states that though Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff uses Romantic nationalism in her first novel *Abeng* (1984), she succeeds in disrupting this model in *No Telephone to Heaven* by presenting more complex notions of identity. However, the succession of the feminine line in *No Telephone to Heaven*, which is inherently linked to three women's association with the Jamaican landscape, clearly aligns the feminine with the land, so much so that the land itself actually becomes a feminized object. However, unlike travel narratives and Romantic national narratives, the land is not a submissive, less animate object to be conquered by white male superiority. Instead, the land in Michelle Cliff's work becomes a full character within the text, one that entices and arouses other, human, characters, thus

disrupting traditions of natural history and Western humanism, as the land becomes a fully animate being engaged in queer relationships.

Cliff states that she understands the landscape in her writing to be female. She writes, “For me, the [Jamaican] land is redolent of my grandmother and mother, it is a deeply personal connection. The same could be said of Clare Savage, who seeks out the landscape of her grandmother’s farm as she would seek out her grandmother and mother” (“Clare Savage” 266). Thus, while Clare’s father, Boy Savage, chooses to live in New York City, her mother, Kitty, must return to her native island, because she is “cut from home” (60). Further, Kitty reminds Clare of her responsibility to the nation, and to the people. She tells Clare, “A reminder, daughter—never forget who your people are” (103). And it is her grandmother’s, Miss Mattie’s, farm that Clare returns to and that serves as a base for Clare and her fellow “soldiers” who grow food and ganja on the farm in order to fund their acts of resistance against the neocolonial presence of the American film crews at the end of the novel. Thus, by connecting the female characters to the land, Jamaica, as a conceptual nation and as a landscape, is aligned with the feminine and with the mother.

The association of the nation with the feminine is also employed in *Abeng*, in which Cliff narrates Clare Savage’s childhood in Jamaica. Along with Kitty who, “is aligned with an authentic Jamaican identity through her appreciation of the Jamaican landscape” (Stitt 57), Cliff enriches the novel with semi-mythical stories of female warriors and healers, such as Nanny and Mma Alli. Nanny, “who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless,” is the mythical leader of the

Jamaican Maroons, who fought against the colonizers. She supposedly died in 1733 during the War of the Maroons (14). Her character echoes Clare's future character in *No Telephone*, when Clare joins the guerillas to fight against Western imperialism.

Similarly, Mma Alli is a "one-breasted warrior" woman who is a healer among Jamaican slaves. She is associated with Jamaica's African ancestry, as she "taught the children the old ways—the knowledge she brought from Africa...where one-breasted women were bred to fight" (34). By using her as a key figure in Jamaican ancestry, Cliff imbues Jamaican identity with a femininity that is fierce, powerful, and resistant. Furthermore, along with being a strong fighter and keeper of history, Mma Alli is a queer character in that she "had never lain with a man." Cliff writes,

The other slaves said she loved only women in that way...They said that by being with her in bed, women learned all manner of the magic of passion...How to touch a woman in her deep-inside and make her womb move within her. She taught many of the women on the plantation about this passion and how to take strength from it. To keep their bodies as their own, even while they were made subject to the whimsical violence of the justice and his slavedrivers. (35)

While Mma Alli joins Nanny in creating a history of Jamaica that is intrinsically tied to the history of strong warrior women, she also queers Jamaica's history as a figure who slept only with women and who taught women how to resist slavery's violence. Both

Nanny and Mma Alli's characters are precursors to the female characters in *No Telephone* who also represent the nation while creating resistance toward western power.

Kitty initiates this resistance by prompting Clare to make something of herself and to help her people (103). However, Clare has become estranged from her mother, and thus from Jamaica, by her father who has encouraged her to pass as white in the United States. When Kitty leaves Boy and the U.S. to return to Jamaica, she takes her younger daughter, Jennie, who has darker skin, and leaves her lighter skinned daughter, Clare, to live in America with Boy. Thus, because of her skin color, Clare is forced to identify with the masculine, white side of her family. Cliff writes about skin color in her home country, stating, "This thing in Jamaica was significant of origin, expressive of expectation" (120). Thus because Clare has lighter skin, she is forced to forsake her maternal, Jamaican identity and instead identify with her light-skinned father who passes for white in America. When Kitty dies, Clare does not even visit her grave. Instead, she remains a visitor to her homeland while living abroad in England. Clare's destiny as a resistance fighter, which is first uttered when Kitty reminds her daughter to help her people, remains, for a time, forgotten.

However, during a visit back to Jamaica, Clare befriends Harry/Harriet (H/H), whom critic Judith Raiskin has marked as hermaphroditic, but whom Cliff states is simply someone "that nature did not claim" (21). H/H replaces Kitty as the emblem of the nation, as he/she is intimately knowledgeable about the island and teaches Clare about its ways. Throughout the novel, H/H and Clare hold dialogues in which H/H instructs Clare about life in Jamaica. For example, H/H tells Clare that Jamaica has "taken the

master's past as our own. That is the danger...Jamaica's children have to work to make her change. It will be worthwhile...believe me (127). Just as Kitty once did, H/H reminds Clare of her responsibility towards Jamaica, repeatedly enticing her to return. He/she entreats Clare, "Come home. I'll be here. Come back to *us*, once your studies are finished" (127, my emphasis). H/H writes three letters to Clare while she is in England, all of which instruct her in the current happenings of her country, and all of which entice her to return. Thus, H/H's character symbolically represents the nation, as his/her words "reached Clare through levels of consciousness, as the sun began to burn her salt-caked skin" (132). Like Kitty, H/H appears knowing not only about the island, but about Clare's destiny with the island. In this way, H/H replaces Kitty as representing Jamaica by becoming a queer feminine figure, beckoning Clare back home to the island. Once H/H decides to become "Harriet," this transformation is complete, as Harriet identifies as completely feminine, further aligning her with the nation and the land, and precluding the existence of liminal identities within the Jamaican setting.^{li} Cliff originally describes H/H and herself as being "neither one thing nor the other," opening up the multiple possibilities for identity outside of western binaries that have been imposed by the colonizing and imperial forces. However, H/H, who symbolically represents the nation, tells Clare that "the time will come for both of us to choose. For we will have to make the choice. Cast our lot. Cyaan live split. Not in this world" (131). H/H states that both he/she and Clare must choose to be one thing or the other, thus conforming to society's rigid standards for gender norms. Stitt describes this statement as political; in order to act, H/H and Clare must choose sides (68). However, I argue that this decision to

identify as a woman, and to assume the categorization of “woman” problematically “affirms a regulatory system of dichotomous gender” categorization and closes off the disruptive work that H/H as a gender queer character could offer (Spade, “Mutilating Gender” 322). The queer gender formation that H/H once occupied seems to have no place in Jamaican politics and culture, where a person “cyan live split.”

Cliff provides a more thorough description of gender queer and queer roles in traditional Jamaican culture in *Abeng*. When Clare realizes that she is both emotionally and physically attracted to her best friend Zoe, she is concerned about how her family will perceive these feelings. Clare compares herself to her Uncle Robert who had a “dearest friend” when she was younger (125). Clare’s family tells her that Robert is a “battyman,” the slang term for homosexual, and that he is “a little off.” It is clear that the family looks down upon Robert and labels him a homosexual. Because she is young and impressionable, Clare internalizes this mindset:

She saw him as embarrassing himself—if this was something out of his control then he must be crazy in some way. Deficient. Clare became afraid of talking to him...She did not know why her fear of him was so strong—only that Boy spoke of his cousin with a certain pitying tone; Dorothy had said he was hopelessly afflicted; and the family talked of how there was no room for such people in Jamaica. It must have been caused by inbreeding. Or the English residents and American tourists—they

brought all manner of evil to Jamaica. How could Robert do this to the family... (126-127)

Robert's desire for other men is a threat to the heteronormative family structure. It is seen as a Western import, as a sexuality that cannot be inherent to Jamaica, and, for these reasons, Robert is ostracized, and he commits suicide, just as Clinton, the other "battyman" character, had done before. Though Clare fears that her relationship with Zoe is part of Robert and Clinton's illnesses, her childlike reasoning allows her to conclude that because her and Zoe are not men, they cannot be "battymen," and they are safe from being labeled as such. Cliff writes, "It would not have occurred to [Clare] to place those swift and strong feelings...she had for Zoe in the category of 'funny' or 'off' or 'queer'...They were girls—not men. And it seemed...that 'funny' people were only battymen. Men like Robert and Clinton" (126). Thus because of Jamaica's homophobic culture, which forces the queer characters to commit suicide, Clare cannot even contemplate that her feelings for Zoe are queer. Instead, she rationalizes that her fear about her feelings towards Zoe are based upon "loving someone darker than herself" (127). The queer aspects of Zoe and Clare's relationship are thus ignored, while the racial tensions between the two girls are inflated.

However, despite Cliff closing H/H off from being gender queer and instead conforming her to gender-normativity, she presents another queer relationship in Jamaica with H/H in *No Telephone* involving Clare, H/H, and the Jamaican land. When H/H first asks Clare if she has any interest in a same-sex relationship, Clare is put off; "she was annoyed that the question made her uncomfortable and answered her friend too sharply"

(122). Then, during her stay in England, Cliff suggests two opportunities in which Clare could have a same-sex relationship—one with the woman on the tube who asks Clare out to the ballet, and one with her friend Liz who invites her to a girl’s getaway in Gravesend. However, it is only when Clare returns to Jamaica that she is able to have a queer relationship. In this way, Cliff rewrites the postcolonial queer subject. Instead of being seen as “foreign,” or as a “product of ‘being too long in the West,’” and therefore “annexed to the ‘host’ nation,” Cliff removes queerness from the West and places its origins in Jamaica (Gopinath). By recognizing her queer sexual desires in Jamaica, Clare “reverses the standard notion of a ‘gay’ subject having to leave a ‘third world’ site of gender and sexual oppression in order to ‘come out’ into the more liberated West” (272).

This desire takes shape as Clare and H/H interact with the land, which ultimately becomes a fully animate character in the text. The relationship with H/H begins with the masculinized Clare feeling “almost womanly in her sympathy” for her friend (128), and the reader sees it take a physical dimension while H/H and Clare are enjoying the Jamaican land; “resting from riding the breakers, warmed by their feast and the sun, they lay side by side under a sky thrilling in its brightness. Touching gently, kissing, tongues entwined, coming to, laughing” (130). The intimacy between H/H and Clare only occurs while they are enmeshed within the Jamaican landscape, so much so that the land itself becomes a character that produces an erotic desire amongst H/H and Clare. The two human characters’ desire is inherently connected to the land, and, as such, would not exist without the land’s stimulating impulses. Indeed, Clare’s queer relationship with the Jamaican land is exemplified while she is standing in the river near Miss Mattie’s farm.

This river was an essential part of her life on the island, and Clare identifies it with her female precursors—Miss Mattie and Kitty. Cliff writes, “The importance of this water came back to her...She shut her eyes and let the cool of it wash over her naked body, reaching up into her as she opened her legs” (172). Thus, Clare receives physical pleasure in the novel, not from a human being, but from the land, showing how the land itself has the ability to create an erotic affect.

The land washing over Clare’s naked body and “reaching up into her as she opened her legs” takes on an unembodied form of femininity that can be useful in queer materialisms and trans studies, in that it allows us to speculate about ways in which gender operates discursively, outside of the material body (See Butler), as part of the project of both fields of study is to “investigate questions of embodied difference, and analyze how such differences are transformed into social hierarchies” (Stryker 3). Cliff’s depiction of Clare and H/H’s erotic relationship with the Jamaican land as a fully animate character allows us to analyze how femininity was and is discursively produced through colonial and postcolonial rhetorics of the land. Such femininity was classified as less animate and hierarchically lower than (white, male) human beings through the colonial and Enlightenment rhetoric of Natural History, but, through Cliff’s writing, is developed into a fully animate character with the power to offer us new possibilities for conceiving gender (un)embodiment and sexual desire. Having one of Clare’s sexual object choices be non-human “complicate[s] the assumption that the material body is unproblematically available to us” while also challenging dominant notions of the hetero/homo dichotomy (Salamon 4). As sexual object choice is “the very concept used to distinguished hetero’

from ‘homo’ sexuality,” having the land as one such object calls into question the “sex” of the “object” and the material origins of gender (Stryker 7). Indeed, in this case, the land is rhetorically constructed as feminine; it is not embodied; and it is both Clare and H/H’s sexual object choice. As this is the only place in the novel where Clare is able to enjoy sexual pleasure, her most satisfying physical relationship in the novel thus occurs with both H/H and the Jamaican land, offering the reader new conceptions of how intimacy may occur, and who or what might be the object of one’s affection. It is here that Cliff moves us away from heteronormative sexuality aimed at reproduction and towards objective desire and affection that transcends the self as subject.

Similarly, in *Abeng*, Clare’s physical desire for her friend Zoe is only felt while the two girls are enjoying the Jamaican landscape, basking in the sun by the river. In this instance, the land provides an erotic catalyst for female homosexual desire, thus further exhibiting queer animacy. Cliff writes, “The two girls closed their eyes against the rise of the sun to noon overhead and touched hands. Brown and gold beside each other. Damp and warm. Hair curled from the heat and the wet. The warmth of sunlight on their bodies—salty-damp” (120). Clare reflects back on this moment when she was laying naked in the land with Zoe, thinking that “she wanted on the rock to tell Zoe what she meant to her...She had wanted to lean across Zoe’s breasts and kiss her” (124). But because of society’s homophobia, which Clare has internalized, she is too scared to act on her feelings. In her diary, Clare writes “about being naked with Zoe and about being frightened” (145). Thus, while this scene in *Abeng* directly parallels the moment when Clare and H/H are laying naked, kissing on the rocks by the river in *No Telephone*, it

differs in that, as a young girl, Clare is not ready to come to terms with her queer desire. However, both scenes draw direct parallels between the queer relationships amongst Clare and her friends and the erotic energy produced by the Jamaican land.

In other words, Cliff presents these relationships as only being possible in the Jamaican river, rocks, and sun, thus queering the landscape itself and writing it as a fully animate character in the text that has the power to affect other characters' thoughts, moods, and actions. The biopolitical normalization of life forms and ways of living is disrupted through such a portrayal of the land as an animate being that interacts with humans, specifically in an erotic manner. Therefore, while Cliff feminizes the land, just as travel writers and colonial conquerors have done before, she refutes such a masculine, heteronormative tradition and, instead, portrays the land as having equal animacy with humans; it is not just virgin territory to be filled with masculine power. Thus, through a perverse reading, we see how Cliff offers us new sexual objects outside of the human realm that are not folded into the biopolitical management of life, and thus opens up queer possibilities for desire and intimacy.

Conclusion

All three authors explore what it means to incorporate the land as a fully animate character within their narratives, according to Glissant's argument—not as a personified creature, but as separate non-human entity. Not only is the land an animate being, but it interacts with the human characters, queerly affecting them and either participating, as in Cliff and Rodriguez's narratives, in non-normative sexual acts with the human characters,

or simply enticing the characters to push their sexual boundaries, as in Mootoo's work. These authors show a transgression of animacy, sexual desire, and erotic intimacy that forces us to rethink what Chen refers to as the human-centeredness of biopolitical theory, and they challenge the "normativity of sex (sexing) that are sometimes biopolitically authorized" (Chen 11). Such biopolitically authorized sexualities include what Puar refers to as "Homonationalism," where particular gay and lesbian bodies, once designated as queer, are now aligned with the neoliberal state. By exhibiting human characters' erotic encounters with the landscape, Cliff, Mootoo, and Rodriguez rewrite and revise the history of imperial travel writing, in which the land was a partially animate, feminized object to be conquered and exploited and thus disrupt remnants of imperial classifications and contemporary biopolitical regulations. By representing the land as a fully animate being that queerly affects human characters, these authors present us with new possibilities for gender embodiment, queer desire, and sex objects that are not biopolitically authorized nor recognized by the neoliberal state. As animacy is directly related to power, theorizing new animacies is essential to producing a strong critique of the biopolitical management of life while recognizing what objects may be viable. Doing so allows us to produce possibilities for new ways of living, establish intimacies that resist state recognition, revise biopolitical spheres, and provide opportunities for how to live and love, differently.

Chapter 3

“Outside I was One Way, Inside I was Another”: The First-Person Queer in Jamaica

Kincaid’s *Lucy* and Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

In the summer of 2012, the national media reported that the fast food chain, Chick-fil-A, had been donating a share of its profits to notoriously anti-gay groups, such as Focus on the Family (Severson), and many gay and lesbian activists on college campuses and in urban centers proposed a boycott of all Chick-fil-A restaurants. While the news of the corporation’s conservative Christian values was nothing new (“Chick-fil-A Defends”), what did make headlines in Los Angeles that summer was the international coffee chain, Starbucks’s, proclamation that it supported gay and lesbian rights. After this news, many middle class, gay-identified Angelinos could be found rallying at their local Starbucks in the summer heat, attempting to increase the corporation’s sales in order to compete with the rising profits of the “anti-gay” Chick-fil-A (Hsu). So while the conservative National Organization for Marriage launched its “Dump Starbucks” campaign, the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s oldest gay and lesbian rights group, lauded Starbucks and proclaimed that the corporation’s views “are in line with the majority of Americans” (“HRC Encourages Consumers”).

I share this anecdote as a poignant example of how the gay and lesbian movement in the United States buys into dominant neoliberal ideology, to the detriment of queer activists who refrain from appealing to the norm for approval and recognition. As Michel Warner reminds us, since the 1990s, gay and lesbian politics have had an agenda, not of

assimilation, but of normalizing. He states, “Like most stigmatized groups, gays and lesbians were always tempted to believe that the way to overcome stigma was to win acceptance by the dominant culture, rather than to change the self-understanding of that culture” (*The Trouble with Normal* 50). We see such an agenda play out in the Chick-fil-A vs. Starbucks debate, which essentially becomes a battle to ensure that there are gay and lesbian corporate sponsors. As a multi-national corporation that has notoriously put independently owned, small operations out of business in the name of Western capitalism and free-market domination, Starbucks is a go-to example for neoliberal efficiency when it comes to wiping out the small-timers (See Faris). When we see gay and lesbian groups promoting such a corporation, or any corporation for that matter, we can see neoliberalism at work. In essence, we see a privatized public—a public that does not exist to exchange or debate ideas, nor to serve democracy, but to enhance privatization and capital accumulation by corporations. We see “neoliberal policies shrink[ing] the spaces for public life, democratic debate, and cultural expression...through their own versions of identity politics and cultural policies, inextricably connected to economic goals for upward redistribution of resources” (Duggan xx), with the gay and lesbian movement as the whipped cream on top.

David Eng defines this contemporary trend of gay and lesbian-identified citizens normalizing themselves as “queer liberalism,” a failure of progressive coalitional politics, where “queer” now refers to “more narrowly pragmatic gay and lesbian identity and identity politics, the economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness, and liberal political norms of inclusion—including access to marriage, custody, inheritance, and

service in the military”—which invokes a “political rhetoric of colorblindness that refuses to recognize the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation continue to be articulated and constituted in relation to one another in the ongoing struggles for equality and social belonging” (x, xi). In other words, queerness no longer has its oppositional connotations, but now is dominated by the gay and lesbian-identified, white, middle-class populations, which serves them in their interests of gaining state-based rights and “normative” privilege—traits which inherently align the movement with the neoliberal agenda. Thus, the U.S. Supreme Court overturns sodomy laws in Texas in *Lawrence vs. Texas* (2003) and revokes parts of the federal Defense of Marriage Act and the entirety of California’s Proposition 8; gay marriage has been legalized in twelve states; and gay activists join forces with Starbucks, trying to increase the corporation’s daily profits in the name of equal rights. Meanwhile, the law does nothing to address private and institutionalized homophobia or discrimination. Even as more state-based recognitions for gay and lesbian citizens increase, the everyday lived experiences for those who identify as queer remain exposed to violence, hatred, and exclusion (Sedgwick, “Queer”). As Eng states, public discussions of race and sexuality “have been systematically and precisely precluded through a rhetoric of colorblindness [and acceptance] accompanying the incredible shrinking public sphere. As such, we must develop a critical vocabulary and analysis of the ways in which racial disparities, [homophobia], and property relations embed and recode themselves within the private

realm of family and kinship relations, only to seep back into circulation within the public domain” (*The Feeling* 6).

It is this chapter’s goal to articulate an active queerness which resists neoliberalism and the current gay and lesbian alignment with its ideology. I intend to describe a persistent queerness with the potential to be oppositional, that is imbued with the complex intersecting recognitions of race, class, gender, age, and nation that Eng describes as having been lost in the era of multiculturalism and colorblindness. It is crucial to extend a critique of dominant equal rights movements, especially those that willingly align themselves with the neoliberal agenda of privatization; free-market capitalist accumulation and development as freedom; corporations as people; and the inherent economic growth of the global North at the expense of the global South. In such an environment it becomes difficult to recognize that which is oppositional or queer, where “queer” refers to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically” (Sedgwick “Queer” 8).

Thus, in an attempt to create a critical discourse through which we might discuss queerness that exists in opposition to or in spite of the neoliberal ideology that influences every aspect of our public and private lives and our “commonsense way of interpreting the world” (Harvey 3), I will argue that such a critique begins with the personal articulation of queerness. I intend to describe the *personal articulation*, or words and phrases spoken in the first person, in Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, *Lucy* (1990) and Junot

Díaz's novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and I argue that the "first-person queer," as I will refer to it, is a relationally queer rhetorical space that is often contingent upon neoliberal notions of the private and the public domains. In other words, such space, created by first person articulation, holds the possibility for resistance and opposition, but does not always follow through. By doing so, I am building off of the monumental work conducted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as she once suggested that "there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only *when attached to the first person*" (9 original emphasis).^{lii} This chapter will examine personal articulations that express nonnormative and oppositional tendencies with the power to disrupt dominant neoliberal ideologies in that they exist *in relation to*, but are not necessarily dependent upon, the public and private spheres. I will look at the powerful first-person statements of Jamaica Kincaid's narrator, Lucy, a West Indian *au pair* living in New York and working for a white family, and Junot Díaz's Oscar Wao, the son of a Dominican immigrant living in New Jersey and struggling to find his place. Both characters are members of the Caribbean diaspora living in the United States and are thus confronted with multiple, oftentimes conflicting, political and personal identities. I will look at *when* these characters present themselves as queer through first person articulations which, I argue, signify only *in relation* to a particular time and place. In other words, I argue that Lucy and Oscar do not provide embodied examples of queerness; indeed, they often conform to dominant heterosexism and to neoliberal goals. Instead, these characters offer us examples of Sedgwick's hypothesis that "queer" can have meaning only when used in the first person. In other words, I am arguing for queerness as a discourse that is

formulated and problematized in the novels rather than treating the two narrators/protagonists as emblems or exemplars of queer subjectivity. Thus, I assert that both Lucy and Oscar provide us with examples of how the personal, which I separate from neoliberal notions of the private and public, can be used to articulate queerness as that which is temporally and spatially contingent, thus removing “queer” from its association with embodied U.S. citizens and pushing it into the realm of infinite possibility. I assert that the space of literature is useful for thinking about queerness because novels are a space of contingency and articulation rather than commodification and affirmation of the private individual and the public domain within neoliberal ideology.

The Public and Private in Neoliberal Ideology

It is first necessary to clarify my distinction between the personal and the public and private realms, as one might immediately think that the personal is that which belongs to the private. However, in this chapter I define the personal as that which is spoken in the first person. The key to understanding this distinction lays in the awareness of neoliberal rhetoric that began in the 1940s and 1950s and that formed in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, the “Washington Consensus” took shape between institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization, and the U.S. Treasury which implemented policies that expanded the capitalist free market economy and increased privatization while removing programs that could potentially prohibit profit, such as public programs

(Duggen xii-xiii). The rhetoric of neoliberalism maintained that there were two separate spheres, the public and the private, or the economic and the political and cultural, making it so that economic profit appeared as a “neutral realm” where anyone could work their way up to the top tiers (Duggen xiv). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Jürgen Habermas explains that the idea of the two distinct spheres of the public and the private comes from eighteenth century European culture prior to the global expansion of capitalism, where democratic ideals were debated by private persons in public space, while the private remained exclusive to the family and its economic production based in the home. The emergent bourgeoisie began to replace the public sphere in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, until, in the twentieth century, the state expanded its activity to include what was once public and private tasks, so that “from the midst of the publicly reventant sphere of civil society was formed a re-politicized social sphere in which state and societal institutions fused into a single functional complex that could no longer be differentiated according to criteria of public and private” (148). However, the increase in state intervention into what was once considered the private realm did not prevent the “illusion of an intensified privacy,” while, “in truth, [the private] lost its protective functions along with its economic tasks,” while “rational and critical debate” in the public realm was replaced by consumption (Habermas 156-157 and 161, respectively). In other words, neoliberal rhetoric maintains the illusion that there is a distinctive public sphere where critical debate may occur, along with a separate private realm where economics and state laws and regulations do not pertain. However, while the rhetoric maintains such a distinction, the fact remains that

“during every phase, the construction of neoliberal politics and policy in the U.S. has relied on identity and cultural politics,” and, in fact, “the economy cannot be transparently abstracted from the state or the family, from practices of racial apartheid, gender segmentation, or sexual regulation” (Duggen xii and xiv, respectively). Lisa Duggen argues that “as neoliberal policies continued to shrink the spaces for public life, democratic debate, and cultural expression during the 1990s, they were doing this *through* their own version of identity politics and cultural policies, inextricably connected to economic goals for upward redistribution of resources” (xx). Thus, neoliberal rhetoric relies on the illusion of a continued distinction between the separate spheres, while, in fact, economic policies and state regulation interfere in all realms so that the public and the private create a deceptive hierarchy.

It is for this reason that I focus on what I refer to as the personal, the first-person articulation, as I search for queer possibilities in texts from members of the Caribbean diaspora living and writing in the United States. It is my attempt to investigate potential sites where neoliberalism’s grasp is weak and open the door for new ways of conceptualizing the world. Exposing the unacknowledged overlaps and connections that exist in spite of the apparent segregation of the public and the private realms in neoliberal discourse, and focusing on the personal, first person articulation, allows me to begin such a task. In many recent works, queer theorists have noted the important fact that part of the neoliberal rhetoric that incorporates identity politics is that which situates the heteronormative couple as the national model, thus inherently tying the “private” to the “public” so that “official national culture...depends on a notion of privacy to cloak its

sexualization of national membership” (Berlant and Warner 187).^{liii} Indeed, this national model has of late begun to incorporate gay and lesbian political identities into what Jasbir Puar refers to as “homonationalism” and what David Eng refers to as “queer liberalism.” Both terms refer to the state-based, pragmatic politics of gay and lesbian movements which are aligned with the “economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness, and liberal political norms of inclusion—including access to marriage, custody, inheritance, and service in the military” (Eng xi). Thus, due to the increasing cooptation of identity politics by the neoliberal state, our goal becomes to “denatural[ize] liberal distinctions between the public and private domains by challenging its false divisions... In other words, we must contest romanticized notions of privacy and family as outside capitalist relations of exploitation and domination” (Eng 8).

In this chapter, I borrow from Eng’s methodology of investigating queer diasporas in order to formulate a new politics that resists alignment with the neoliberal state. Eng uses the methodological approach of queer diasporas in order to disrupt the “conventional focus on racial descent, filiation, and biological traceability” that neoliberalism values. Instead, by using queer diasporas as a methodology, one focuses on “queerness, affiliation, and social contingency.” Eng states,

[Drawing from queer diasporas] declines the normative impulse to recuperate lost origins, to recapture the mother or motherland, and to valorize dominant notions of social belonging and racial exclusion that the nation-state would seek to naturalize and legitimate through the inherited logics of kinship, blood, and identity. Instead, the methodology of queer diasporas denaturalizes race precisely

by contesting and rethinking the pervading rhetoric that ‘situates the terms “queer” and “diaspora” as dependent on the originality of “heterosexuality” and “nation.”’ 14

By using queer diasporas as a methodology, as does Eng, I will dismantle the false distinction between the public and private realm as it is depicted in contemporary literature of queer Caribbean diasporas. I will show how what is thought to be the realm of the private—which includes matters of sexuality, racial trauma, and gender difference—is always already imbued with public concerns, including those of the neoliberal capitalist ideology. Further, I will distinguish the personal from the public and private in order to reveal queer moments where the reader may gain insight into ways of living that do not easily comply with queer liberalism, homonationalism, and the neoliberal agenda.^{liv} In other words, I will look at first person articulations of queerness that can offer us new ways of thinking about identity which resist common notions of identity politics and which remain outside of state-based recognition.^{lv}

First-Person Queer

In her consistent and honorable quest to formulate an antihomophobic methodology for thinking about sexuality, literature and culture, pedagogy, and history, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her essay “Queer and Now,” hypothesizes that “queer” may only have meaning when it is used in the first person. Because we live in an essentially homophobic society, where the “heterosexist assumption” legitimizes itself on the back of its “darker” half, homosexuality, queerness is consistently ignored, denied, and

destroyed. Sedgwick states, using the frequency of queer adolescent suicides as an example, “Culture has [profligate ways] of denying and despoiling queer energies and lives,” and she explores the possibilities for “queer” within the essay, while reflecting on the myriad ways in which sexuality is defined for us by dominant heterosexist culture. Thus, she states that “queer” can “refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically.” She goes on to state that a lot of scholarly work in queer studies expands “queer” in ways that do not address matters of gender and sexuality, such as “the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses” (8-9). By exploring the expanding possibilities for the concept of “queer,” Sedgwick comes to this concluding possibility:

A word so fraught as ‘queer’ is—fraught with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, excitement—never can only denote; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locutionary position itself. Anyone’s use of ‘queer’ about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else. [...]

‘Queer’ seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which ‘queer’ can signify only *when attached to the first person*. One possible

corollary: that what it takes—all it takes—to make the description ‘queer’ a true one is the impulsion *to* use it in the first person. (9)

Sedgwick’s proposal that “queer” signifies only when used in the first person allows us the opportunity to preserve “queer” as a open realm of possibility amidst discussions of homonationalism and queer liberalism, where gay and lesbian subjects seem to be the only possibilities for those who do not identify as heteronormative. Arguing that queerness can only make sense from a first-person perspective is a way of recognizing the speakers as persons or people rather than as subjects, consumers, and individuals created by neoliberal ideology and its corresponding identity politics. In a culture where the only choice is to side with Chick-fil-A or Starbucks, Sedgwick preserves the “invisible possibilities” that queerness offers us, and gives us permission to “smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled” (3).

This chapter branches off of Sedgwick’s work by looking at the queer possibilities in the first person articulations in contemporary Caribbean diasporic literature published in the United States. By focusing on the personal, I argue that Kincaid and Díaz disrupt conventional notions of the public and private realm and instead create a queer space where “queer-eradicating impulses” are challenged. One way to understand the first-person queer, as I will refer to the personal queer articulations made by the characters in *Lucy* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, is to compare them to the dominant heteronormative and neoliberal ideologies that pervade their lives and attempt to smother difference. As Sedgwick makes clear, heteronormative culture uses queerness and homosexuality as its other, in order to define and strengthen itself. Thus, by looking at

the first person articulations *in relation to* dominant ways of living and being in the world, and those which are spatially and temporally contingent, we may begin to understand the moments when “queer” may only signify when used in the first person.

Diasporic Relationality

Theories of diaspora often account for a “diasporic” identity, one that is formed when a subject becomes part of a different location, while presumably maintaining various ties to the homeland left behind. The diasporic identity is described as being dynamic, relational, or what Stuart Hall describes as “not an essence but a *positioning*” (“Cultural Identity” 226). This identity is defined not in terms of stable categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality, but in relation to various cultural identities in both the homeland and the diasporic location. Recent publications examining the relations between diasporic identities and queer identities have also revealed possibilities for varying sexualities outside of dominant ideologies, whether that ideology belongs to colonial and imperial remnants, globalized Western consumer culture, or transnational subjectivities.^{lvi}

Theories of diasporic subjectivities, such as those presented by Stuart Hall, Homi Bhaba, Edouard Glissant, and Paul Gilroy have deconstructed binary differences in order to assert notions of positionality, hybridity and relationality. As Glissant notes, theories that construct subjectivity as relational are most relevant to the Caribbean’s unique history, as it “may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly” (33). Referring specifically to Caribbean identities, Hall states that

they require “Derrida’s notion of *differance*—differences that do not work through binaries, veiled boundaries that do not finally separate but double up as *places de passage*, and meanings that are positional and relational, always on the slide along a spectrum without end or beginning” (“Thinking the Diaspora” 7). Such thinking both elides rigid conceptions of national identity and geography, and reflects the multiple territorial crossings of diaspora. Likewise, Gilroy posits a Black Atlantic subjectivity, which situates the subject in a black transnationalism and claims that “national borders, like the limits of gender, sexuality, and race, are policed by identity politics unwilling to permit the blurring of boundary lines” (qtd. in Holcomb 296). Thus by thinking of the Black Atlantic as a new territorial space through which one might conceptualize subjectivity, a more realistic identity as positional and relational becomes possible.

Similarly, in her book *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism* (2005), Carine Mardorossian presents a composite theory of relationality, borrowing discursive strategies from both Glissant and Gilroy. Looking at the work of female Caribbean diasporic writers, Mardorossian states that character identities should be discussed as relational. She claims, referring specifically to race, that “racial crossing in novels serves as a figuration for the transgressions of class and gender boundaries so much so that the notion of race itself has to be reinscribed as a complex set of crossing categories...rather than in terms of the simplified binaries of black/white and self/other. It challenges our deep seated investments in normative figurations of identity and forces us to develop new reading strategies that emphasize not *whether* but *when* characters are ‘black or white’” (16, original emphasis). Mardorossian’s methodology

can be compared to that of Eng, as, I argue, both theorists use diasporas to challenge stable identity categories and both construct relational identities—those which are spatially and temporally contingent. While Mardorossian does not use the word “queer” in her argument, her methodology of looking at relational subjectivities in diaspora mirrors Eng’s discussion of queer diasporas, in that both are based on “affiliation and social contingency” instead of traditional diasporic notions of filiation, lineage, and “dominant notions of social belonging and racial exclusion that the nation-state would seek to naturalize and legitimate through the inherited logics of kinship, blood, and identity” (Eng 14). I argue that by adopting such a methodology, as that shared by Mardorossian and Eng, we can investigate the first person articulations of queerness presented in Kincaid and Díaz’s work, and we may use queer diasporas as a methodology to locate a queerness that exists in relation.

The First-Person Queer in *Lucy*

In this section, I will focus on how “queer” is constructed in Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, *Lucy*, through the first person articulation of desire, in an attempt to illustrate a queer subjectivity which represents what Hall calls “a positioning.” In other words, I will examine *when* the protagonist of the novel, Lucy, can be read as having a queer sexuality, *when* Lucy is represented as deviating from traditional sexualities, when she is racialized, when she is gendered “male,” and when she is “female.” By examining how queerness is conceptualized through first person articulation, I attempt to reveal the emergence of a unique relational subjectivity in North American fiction.^{lvii} As a rewriting of the

traditional Bildungsroman, *Lucy* has offered critics a vast playing ground on which to test the discursive intersections of Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies, Western Feminism, and Queer Theory.^{lviii} As Maria Helena Lima states, “*Lucy* explores the intersections of colonialism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism in contexts that almost prevent access to the ‘selfhood’ that traditional renderings of the genre have claimed possible” (859). But while critics, such as Lima, have analyzed the many different facets of Lucy’s identity and how it challenges the humanist tradition of a coherent self, and while some, such as Gary E. Holcomb and Greg Thomas, have focused specifically on Lucy’s non-conformist sexuality, none have analyzed Kincaid’s work as a queer text that challenges identity politics and state-based recognition by looking at how Lucy presents us with a first person queerness that is spatially and temporally contingent. I argue that *Lucy* presents a poignant example of the first-person queer, in which personal articulations are used to elaborate a constantly shifting subjectivity that is queer in relation, thus providing us with possibilities for how to conceptualize “queer” outside of dominant neoliberal practices.

Kincaid’s work repeatedly denies and challenges stable identity categories. Though critics of *Lucy* have used the idea of a relational identity to describe the protagonist and narrator, Lucy’s, own subjectivity, I argue that using Mardorossian’s method of reading *when* Lucy occupies a specific sexuality and gender is crucial for conceptualizing a diasporic identity that is not contained by fixed categories. For example, Holcomb states that Kincaid uses Hall’s notion of a diasporic identity as hybrid and as always “becoming,” but he problematically simplifies and restricts Lucy’s sexuality to that of “slut.” This chapter will argue that Lucy’s character identifies as a

slut only *in relation* to her mother and the gender and sexuality her mother prescribes. At other times, such as when Lucy is relating her sexual activity to her employer, Mariah, in the United States, Lucy does not identify as a slut. In other words, she uses her sexuality tactically rather than as a definite part of her subjectivity. By conceptualizing Lucy in this way, this paper attempts to articulate an emerging model of a queer subjectivity in the diasporic subject that is articulated in the first person.

As Gayatri Gopinath notes, “Queer diasporic cultural forms work against the violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies” (4). Thus queer theory may be used to critique traditional diaspora discourses, in order to elucidate nonheteronormative and nonpatriarchal diasporic identities. Queer theory’s embeddedness within the Western academy has been noted by scholars, such as Gopinath, who express concern about its use in describing postcolonial subjectivities. Dennis Altman articulates this tension between Western Queer Theory and non-Western, non-heteronormative subjectivities by stating, “There exists a far greater variety of understandings of sex/gender arrangements than tends to be recognized by official discourses. Moreover, attempts to use Western terminology—*gay people, men who have sex with men, bisexuals*—often block us from understanding the different ways in which people understand their own sexual experiences and feelings” (“Rupture” 24). According to Altman, the economic and cultural forces of globalization attempt to produce “a common consciousness and identity based on [Western] homosexuality,” which is ultimately problematic in that it obscures other articulations of sexuality that exist outside Western discourses. Thus, scholars must

carefully choose terminology when referring to non-Western sexualities, or even go as far as critic Greg Thomas, who refuses to use the word “queer,” as he states it is “the latest embodiment of the humanist imperialism of Europe” (108). While this paper will use the term “queer” to refer to Lucy’s subjectivity, it will employ such identity categories, (along with others such as race and gender), in a relational mode so that they are never static. Instead, the term “queer” will refer to a subjectivity that can only exist as a relational referent. This is not meant to obscure the rootedness of queer theory in the Western academy, or to refute Thomas and Altman’s important critiques of the assumption that there is a global gay culture. Rather, it is to offer a methodology where the term “queer” can ultimately queer Western queer theory, and show how subjectivities must always be located in a specific cultural context and always be perceived as constantly in flux, as “a positioning.”

“Everything I Could See Made Me Feel I Would Never Be Part of It”

Set in the 1960’s, *Lucy* is the coming of age story of a woman, Lucy, who leaves her home in Antigua at the age of 19 to become an *au pair* for a wealthy, white family in New York. Lucy struggles throughout the text to situate her own subjectivity within the competing forces of global capitalism, diasporic consciousness, hetero-patriarchy, and homesickness.^{lix} The story is told in a powerful first person narration, which allows the reader access to Lucy’s personal thoughts, feelings, and desires. The use of “the persona,” versus the traditional “authoritarian universal” is unique to the novel and works to provide the reader with a voice that stresses personal experience, but without “resulting

in a demand for realism over modernism, or a poetic discourse, and posing the author as the transcendental signifier of the text, as its meaning and origin” (Covi 351). Instead, Lucy clearly informs the reader that they are gaining access to the personal in a way that the other characters in the novel do not, thus instructing the reader on how to read her narrative: as a investigation of the first person articulation.

Indeed, Lucy comments on her “two-facedness: that is outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true” (18). This comment, which recalls W.E.B. Dubois’s “double consciousness” and echoes Bhaba’s “colonial mimicry,” refers to how Lucy positions herself in an interstitial space between these two kinds of oppressive forces, thus she is affected by both and has to performatively and tactically confront both of them: her mother’s colonial-patriarchal ideology and the history of colonialism. It is this inner, “true” self that the reader learns about, one that does not conform to colonial, neo-colonial, or imperial forces, as represented by national institutions and domestic surveillance, as Lucy states, “Everything I could see made me feel I would never be part of it” (154). Thus, Kincaid’s use of the personal represents Lucy’s coming of age, and it also reveals that diasporic subjectivities must be individuated in order to be understood. Subjectivity is always already relational, and in order to understand it, one must understand one individual at a time, individuated in the interstices of power relations rather than seen as determined entirely by them. In other words, one must read *when* a character is represented with a specific subject identity. In order to do this, knowledge of the personal is imperative. As Lucy complains about her mother, “I had to suppress the annoyance I felt at her for once again telling me about everybody when I told her

something about myself” (139). In this way, Kincaid exemplifies Sedgwick’s hypothesis that queer can only signify when used in the first person, as she presents us with a truly relational queer diasporic subjectivity that cannot be understood generically, but only through the understanding of the personal articulation.

“Outside I Seemed One Way, Inside I was Another”

A particular scene from the past in the novel, which narrates the events of Lucy’s friend Myrna and the fisherman, Mr. Thomas, reveals how Lucy’s character may be viewed as queer only in relation to the colonial, hetero-patriarchal standards prescribed by Lucy’s mother, Annie, who warns Lucy against becoming a “slut” at all costs. Like all events in the novel, the scene is structured around the first person articulation, specifically the personal articulation of desire, represented in Lucy’s own thoughts and feelings. It also appears in a “flashback” moment within the narrative, juxtaposing Lucy’s present with her past, thus showing how the two are intimately interconnected. Indeed, Lucy states throughout the novel that she cannot and will not return to Antigua, disrupting traditional diasporic narratives which usually include a desire for, or an actual, return to the homeland. Instead, Antigua is what Salman Rushdie refers to as an “imaginary homeland” that reappears through flashbacks. She states, “An ocean stood between me and the place where I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back” (9, 10). By referring to the past and to homesickness, and by juxtaposing scenes from the past with scenes from the present within the novel, Kincaid constructs a character that is constantly returning to the

homeland, albeit only in her mind. Thus, Lucy states, “I wondered if...a day would go by when these people I had left behind, my own family, would not appear before me in one way or another” (8), showing that Antigua is forever a part of Lucy’s present.

While visiting her soon-to-be boyfriend Paul’s apartment, Lucy sees Paul’s hands underwater in a fish tank. It is at this moment that she remembers a girl from Antigua named Myrna, and Myrna’s sexual encounters with a local fisherman, Mr. Thomas. As a young girl, Lucy learns that Myrna has been meeting Mr. Thomas,

...under a breadfruit tree that was near her latrine and near the entrance to the alley that was at the back of her house, and she would stand in the dark, fully clothed but without her panties, and he would put his middle finger up inside her... After he had removed his finger from inside her, he would give her sometimes a shilling, sometimes just sixpence; he never told her why it was sometimes more, sometimes less. (104)

Here Kincaid disrupts the expected reading of this scene as one of female abuse, possibly child abuse, and instead focuses on Myrna’s agency, commenting on how she coveted the money from these encounters. She writes, “[Myrna] kept the money in an old Ovaltine tin, hidden under stones... She said that she had not decided exactly what she was going to do with the money yet, but whatever it would be she did not yet have enough” (105). Sexual pleasure does not seem to be a factor for Myrna in her relations with Mr. Thomas, but the power to accumulate money certainly is. Further, the scene is not marked by physical or emotional violence; what we see instead is Myrna’s careful management, calculation, and accumulation of wealth, which is classic capitalist behavior. Thus, this

scene may be read as a woman willingly entering into the global capitalist economy which situates female sexuality as a commodity, as money is involved “in a great many sexual encounters in almost any cash economy, and the great majority of such transactions will not involve people who identify themselves as professional sex workers, but see it rather as one among a number of strategies to survive” (Altman, *Global Sex* 102-105). Thus, the reader may see Myrna as willfully commodifying herself, as she explicitly makes clear that she is in it for the money. Thus, when Mr. Thomas dies, “[Myrna] said it was for this she cried: whatever she would eventually do with the money, she did not have enough of it yet” (104). This is where the capitalist system thwarts the aspiration of a young woman like Myrna, as there is an implicit indictment of the commodification of a woman’s body for a man’s physical pleasure, especially since the man chooses to reward the woman with a monetary amount that is simply up to his own whims and fancies.

For those without access to Lucy’s first person statements, she appears to conform to her prescribed gender role. For instance, she states that Mr. Thomas, who did not know her personal articulations, thought that she was “a teenage girl so beyond reproach in every way that if you asked her a question she would reply in her mother’s forty-year-old voice—hardly a prospect for a secret rendezvous” (107). Here we see that Lucy is the product of her mother’s upbringing, which, as she states, “had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut” (128). She appears to be a “respectable” girl, one that conforms to Christian colonial and heteropatriarchal notions of what the female gender should be, notions for which her mother is the mouthpiece. Indeed, upon Lucy’s

first arriving in New York, her employer's maid remarks that Lucy "spoke like a nun, I walked like one also, and that everything about me was so pious it made her feel at once sick to her stomach and sick with pity just to look at me," thus reiterating the inside/outside divide that Lucy acknowledges and of which the reader is explicitly made conscious (11). Therefore, to those who judge her sexuality from the outside, like her mother would, Lucy is feminized as the pure, respectable girl she was taught to be. It is only through the articulation of her personal desires that we see Lucy as queer.

We see that Lucy's personal reaction upon learning about Myrna's sexual experience reveals a relationally queer subjectivity that refuses to participate *as a woman* in the global capital economy where sex and money are interrelated. Instead, Lucy expresses a personal desire that queers the global capitalist, hetero-patriarchal prescription for female sexuality that is evident in both Antigua and the United States. Lucy thinks,

I was almost overcome with jealousy. Why had such an extraordinary thing happened to her and not to me? Why had Mr. Thomas chosen Myrna as the girl he would meet in secret and place his middle finger up inside her and not me? ... This would have become the experience of my life, the one all others would have to live up to. What a waste! ... For me, the money would have been beside the point. I am sure I would have given it away; I am sure, in fact, that I would

have found a way to steal a shilling or two and give it to Mr. Thomas to have been in Myrna's shoes. (105-106)

Lucy expresses sexual desires that are in direct conflict to the dominant ideology in which she was raised, where a girl is meant to be sexually pure, and her story about Myrna expresses Lucy's longing "to break out of roles, even if this escape must take place at the expense of her own body" (Ferguson 248). Indeed, Lucy states that she would not have been the recipient of money if she were in Myrna's place. Instead, she would enter the global capital economy in a traditionally masculine position, as the subject with the power to purchase, instead of the feminized subject who is purchased. She would have purchased Myrna's position and used Mr. Thomas for her own pleasure, thus reversing the power relationship. What is also important is that Lucy thinks of Myrna's failure to accumulate enough wealth for whatever she wanted to purchase as a "waste," and Lucy's own motive for engaging in sexual activity with Mr. Thomas doesn't involve wealth accumulation for a specific goal. What Lucy wants here is the extraordinary experience, the sexual relation, which would thus disrupt normative understandings of female sexuality as either the virgin or the whore. Thus, through this scene, we can see Lucy's queer first-person articulation of these life events which position her as a "slut" in relation to the heteropatriarchal sexuality prescribed by her mother, and as masculine in relation to global capitalism.^{lx}

On the other hand, Lucy is always gendered female in relation to her mother, who expects certain things from her, as a girl. Kincaid writes, "My past was my mother," which makes her realize, "I was undeniably that: female" (91). She is also gendered

female in relation to hetero-patriarchal Christian colonial society, (which her mother represents, but which also exists in the United States), leading Lucy to lament, “I was not a man, I was a woman living on the fringes of the world” (95). Most importantly, Lucy is gendered female in relation to her sexuality, or lack thereof, prescribed by her mother.^{lxi} “To be labeled a slut, especially by one’s mother, signifies social stigma, and it is uniformly gendered. If a young woman does not follow strict codes of sexual behavior, she is marked a slut, an act meant to shame and strip her of control over her reputation. The slut is entirely passive, an object of action” (Holcomb 305). Thus, when she is worrying about becoming a slut as a young girl, or defying her mother by proclaiming that she is a slut, Lucy is gendered female (127).

The way that Lucy determines her own existence is by expressing personal articulations of desire. She “finds...a way of determining an existence contrary not only to Christian colonialist morality but also to the morality to which her mother would compel her to submit herself, one founded on the imperative that a young woman avoids becoming a slut at all costs” (Holcomb 301).^{lxii} By looking at how Lucy’s desire is represented in the first person, the reader learns that this proper girl, “of whom certain things were expected” is only who Lucy is on the outside, how she appears to Mr. Thomas. On the inside, however, Lucy desires Myrna’s sexual experience, which may be considered queer. Therefore, both Myrna and Lucy’s real and imagined experiences with Mr. Thomas are not represented as “shameful” or an attempt to “eliminate such burdens

as social morality,” as Holcomb suggests. Rather they represent a unique space in North American fiction where emerging conceptions of relational sexualities are presented.^{lxiii}

Diasporic Queer

Once Lucy is living in the United States, she is in an environment that is relatively welcoming to female sexuality, and the first-person queer is exhibited when Lucy makes personal statements regarding Antigua and her mother, such as when she replies to her mother’s letters or when she remembers her life on the island. The acceptance of her sexuality is exhibited by Mariah, Lucy’s boss, who is part of the Western Feminist movement of the 1960s (she gives Lucy a copy of Simone du Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, a foundational text for the Women’s Movement). Lucy states, “Mariah did not shave... as a symbol of something, and she had not been a virgin for a long time” (80). Though Lucy constantly distances herself from the Women’s Movement, (in relation to which she is ultimately racialized as “other”), she also benefits from it, in that it provides a safe space for her to pursue her burgeoning sexuality.^{lxiv} Also during this time in the United States, the “free love” movement made both men and women’s sexual agency more socially acceptable. Though this history is not explicitly represented in the novel, it is referred to through the character of Mariah, and stands in stark contrast to Lucy’s mother proclaiming that she must never be a “slut.” For example, Lucy states that Mariah repeatedly tells her to protect herself while engaging in heterosexual sex: “She had taken me to her own doctor, and every time I left the house on an outing... Mariah would remind me to make sure I used the things he had given me” (67). It is clear that Lucy is

engaging in heterosexual practices, and that the reader may only be receiving a taste of her sexual adventures. Thus, in opposition to her queer sexuality in Antigua, which was antithetical to her mother's colonial/hetero-patriarchal doctrine of female purity, Lucy's sexuality is accepted and welcomed in the United States, as her and her friend Peggy go cruise the park to look for men, and Lucy is free to sleep with Hugh and Paul without being negatively judged or censored by Mariah.

Indeed it is only when she is in the United States that Lucy is able to narrate, in the first person, her sexual awakening, which began in Antigua with her friend Tanner, Myrna, and other boys. While Holcomb argues that "Lucy wants nothing less than an erotic adventure during her sojourn in the land of the metropolitan exotic," and while it can be empowering to read about a female traveler's sexual escapades, Lucy's character should not be understood by her sexuality alone (305). What should be understood are the conditions under which Lucy is able to express herself and develop as a sexual being, a process presented in the novel as essential to her development as a person. This is not to suggest that Antigua itself represents a repressive environment, or that the United States should be lauded for allowing women to express their sexuality. Rather, by examining how Lucy represents her own personal desire, which stands in direct conflict to her mother's strict rules, we see a unique sexuality that can only be fully expressed by the diasporic subject who has left the homeland, thus providing further evidence that queerness is relational and that understanding the personal, the first person articulation, is essential to understanding queerness. In this way, we see that queer exists in the first

person articulations, as Sedgwick suggests, *and* in relation, in that it is spatially and temporally contingent.

Though Lucy is not considered a “slut” in the U.S for expressing sexual desire, she constantly distances herself from the Women’s Movement, which racializes her.

When Mariah attempts to share the (white) philosophy with her, Lucy states,

 Mariah left the room and came back with a large book and opened it to the first chapter. She gave it to me. I read the first sentence. “Woman? Very simple, say the faciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, and ovary; she is a female—this word is sufficient to define her.” I had to stop. Mariah had completely misunderstood my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open. My life was at once something more simple and more complicated than that... (132)

Lucy is aware of her racialized status and its relation to her surroundings from the beginning of the novel, as she remarks upon her uniqueness as a black woman of Afro-Caribbean descent arriving in the United States to work for a white family. She states, “I was not cargo,” distinguishing her own journey from that of the thousands of African slaves who had traveled between the United States and the Caribbean years ago (7). Lucy is not a slave, and she continues to assert that fact throughout the novel, as she describes her relationship with her employers. This heightened awareness of her racialized status implies that Lucy, as a woman of color working for a white family in the

United States, could have been a slave at a different time, and she clearly carries with her the historical burden of colonialism, genocide, and the slave trade. Thus, in relation to her white employers in the U.S., Lucy is consistently racialized and reminded of how precarious racial relations are. Indeed, though her employers tell Lucy to regard them as family, it is clear that the racial tensions between them prevent her from belonging. Thus, Lucy remains an outsider in their household, as she is constantly reminded of her designated race and its connection to “the fundamental gulf between the ‘conquered,’ the poor, those who wait; and the ‘conquests,’ of the rich, those who profit from the inequities of the global system” (Scott 988). For example, Kincaid writes, “It was at dinner one night not long after I began to live with them that they began to call me the Visitor. They said I seemed not to be a part of things, as if I didn’t live in their house with them, as if they weren’t like a family to me...” (13 and 29). This ghost-like status gives Lucy a queerness that separates her from Mariah and her family, and allows her to see things that they cannot see, as Mariah attempts to “homogenize difference and subsume it within [her] jurisdiction” (Ferguson 239). For instance, when Lucy and Mariah are travelling on a train together, Lucy notes that “the people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah’s relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine,” and that night she dreams that “thousands of people on horseback were following me, chasing me, each of them carrying a cutlass to cut me up into small pieces” (32). Then, when Mariah and Lucy pass a plowed field that Mariah loves and finds beautiful, Lucy remarks, “Well, thank God I didn’t have to do that,” and Mariah doesn’t understand her meaning (33). Thus, the traumatic history of slavery and genocide follows Lucy into

the United States, where she is constantly aware of race relations in a way that her white employers are not. This allows Lucy a queer way of seeing her environment in relation to Mariah and Lewis's colorblindness, and it is shown in her personal articulations regarding race, slavery, and privilege.

Like her racialized status in relation to Mariah and Lewis, Lucy's gender may be read as queer in her expression of her personal relationship with love and sex, while she is in the United States. Throughout the novel, Lucy makes it clear to the reader that she does not fall in love with the men that she sleeps with, disrupting readers' expectations of traditional gender and sexual norms, which are also represented through Mariah, who expresses excitement at the prospect of Lucy falling in love. Kincaid writes, "What made sense to [Mariah] was that if you liked being with someone in that particular way, then you must be in love with him. But I was not in love with Hugh" (70-71). By disrupting traditional Western gender norms, where the woman is meant to fall in love with the man, Lucy can be read as having queer desire in the United States. Even more so, she repeatedly states that she is not looking for love, that "I did not fall in love," and even goes as far as to unabashedly say that she slept with a man she just met, and "we did not exchange telephone numbers" (23,66,100, and 116, respectively). Instead, Lucy takes on the traditional masculine role of having sex without emotional attachment.^{lxv} Thus, Lucy is ultimately masculine in relation to her personal, sexual desire, as she does not conform to the feminine trope of looking for love and romance.^{lxvi} In this way, she disrupts heteronormative assumptions of desire and family—those that support neoliberal

ideology—and thus thwarts dominant notions of the public and private realm through her personal articulations.

Lucy's gender is also masculinized through her ability to manipulate capital in the United States. In the scene with Myrna, we see Lucy daydreaming about a sexual encounter with Mr. Thomas, reflecting that she would not want money, or she would give money away, if Mr. Thomas offered it. At this point she refuses to participate in a global economy that views female sex as a commodity. Similarly, at the end of the novel, we see Lucy maturing, and accumulating capital *on her own terms*. She states, "I would do what suited me now, as long as I could pay for it. 'As long as I could pay for it.' That phrase soon became the tail that wagged my dog. If I had died then, it should have been my epitaph" (146). In this way, Lucy acquires power over capital, in that she is able to use it to her own advantage and understand that this accumulation entails her ability to do things, such as rent her own apartment with her friend Peggy. Thus, Lucy takes an active, assertive, and empowering stance toward money, which may be seen as masculine in the novel where women are housewives, like Mariah, and financially dependent on men, like Lucy's mother Annie. Lucy remarks, "My father had died leaving my mother a pauper. He had no money...When she went to the bank, his account had no money in it...My mother had to borrow money to bury him," commenting on her mother's financial dependency on her husband. It is this dependency that Lucy refutes in her own relationship to money. As it is the man's traditional gender role to provide for his family by becoming financially capable, Lucy is masculinized in relation to capital. Indeed,

Lucy is able to send money home to her mother after her father dies. As Denise Decaires Narain states in her reading of the end of the novel, Lucy invests a “crucial importance in having access to the material resources necessary to articulate ‘selfhood’ in public discursive spaces” (501). Thus, I argue that by the end of the novel, we see Lucy fully engaged in the neoliberal capitalist enterprise. However, the self that is articulated in relation to capital, both in Antigua and in the United States, is masculine, which makes Lucy “queer,” as she acquires the ability, reserved for her father and not her mother, to accumulate money. Thus, Lucy states, “I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected...But in one year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence,” reiterating the fact that in the United States, she adopts a relationally masculine gender. As Duggan reminds us, “[the] economy cannot be transparently abstracted from the state or the family, from practices of racial apartheid, gender segmentation, or sexual regulation” (xii and xiv). Lucy’s character disrupts this connection between the public economy and the private sphere by inserting the personal, which disrupts neoliberal norms. Thus, while she abides by the gender segmentation of the capitalist marketplace, she aligns herself with the “wrong” gender, thus providing readers with new possibilities for existing within neoliberal ideology.

Maria Helena Lima assesses Lucy’s character as exhibiting a strong sense of self and as “permanently displaced...neither here *nor* there at the same time” (863). But by engaging in a close reading of the novel where relational subjectivities are abundantly at play, I argue that through the use of the personal, Kincaid presents a female subjectivity that does not have a unified self at its core. Rather, Lucy’s power resides in a subjectivity

that is always “a positioning,” a productive compilation of identities and desires that are anchored in *both* Antigua and the United States, *at the same time*, and are articulated through the personal. In this way, Kincaid constructs “queer” through Lucy’s first person articulations as something that resides within and that is relational to both local and global forces. Thus, at the end of the novel, Lucy reflects, “The person I had become I did not know very well. Oh, on the outside everything was familiar...But the things I could not see about myself, things I could not put my hands on—those things had changed, and I did not yet know them well. I understood that I was inventing myself” (133). Here, she reminds the reader that what she appears to be on the outside is not really who she is on the inside. Furthermore, she states that even she does not know her inner, personal self well, which means that she cannot possibly have a fixed, stable subjectivity. Instead, she is always changing, always learning anew who she is. It is through this relational subjectivity, expressed in the first person, which may be considered queer at times, that ultimately makes Lucy a startling unique and powerful heroine/hero of Kincaid’s new model of the Bildungsroman.

“I Don’t Know if I’m even Here”: The First-Person Queer in *Oscar Wao*

Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* also portrays a relationally queer subjectivity which is expressed in the first person by Oscar de León, an overweight, sci-fi loving, Dominican American, “ghetto nerd.” Oscar falls helplessly in love with many women without reciprocation because he is the inheritor of a fukú, or curse, that has haunted his family and that is a result of colonialism and imperial domination in the

Caribbean. The curse, which functions as a social allegory for the lasting effects of colonialism in the Caribbean, is thus part of the public sphere. Furthermore, it is tied to the family as a kinship structure, making it part of the private sphere as well. However, the curse's existence can only be known and articulated through the personal, the first-person, as it is experienced. Díaz's narrator, Yuniór, explains that it "is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed fukú on the world, [the curse on the West for their invasion], and we've all been in the shit ever since" (1-2). Indeed, Díaz begins the novel detailing U.S. Caribbean relations and the conquest of the New World, introducing "the generational curse of the fukú as a metaphor for the perpetuation of colonial power structures" (Mahler 119). In this way, he brings the reader into the story from the perspective of the Dominican diaspora in the United States. Yuniór tells the reader that "it's perfectly fine if you don't believe in these 'superstitions.' [...] Because no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you" (5). The book is thus set up as a "zafa," or counter spell, to the fukú that has haunted the Cabral/de León family and that tortures Oscar throughout his life. In this way, Oscar's personal experiences are aligned with diaspora and such "superstitious" beliefs that conflict with dominant neoliberal ideology in the United States, where Oscar lives. By employing the curse of the fukú, Díaz "represent[s] the perpetuation of colonial hierarchies in the Dominican Republic" (Mahler 120). Yuniór tells the reader about the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and Iraq, drawing parallels between all invasions and claiming that "the United States as an imperial power... veils its true intentions under the guise of spreading democracy."^{lxvii} According to Yuniór, the fukú's continuous assertion of power over

Oscar and his family attests to the “predomination of hegemonic colonial power structures” still perpetuated by the United States. As an example of such power, Yuniors juxtaposes the “mind-boggling poverty” alongside “the Dunkin’ Donuts” in the contemporary Dominican Republic, “a paring that contains a condemnation of neoliberal economic policies in its associations of the presence of foreign corporations with abject poverty” (Mahler 121). Anne Garland Mahler notes that the Cabral/de León families try to escape the fukú through capitalist consumption, another part of neoliberalism, and only succeed in feeding the curse’s perpetuation (127). Thus the curse creates multiple subjectivities—those that adhere to neoliberal ideology, like the Cabral/de León families, and those that articulate a queer subjectivity that does not adhere to such beliefs, such as Oscar. Indeed, Mahler argues that Oscar’s writing, his language, can be understood as “anticolonial writing” and it stands as a counter-curse. While her argument parallels my own, in that it focuses on the power of Oscar’s language, I argue that Oscar’s articulations of queerness allow him to defeat the colonial curse and extend queerness into a hopeful horizon. Thus, in this section I assert that while Oscar may appear as a homosexual nerd to his peers, he is actually a queer figure, and his queer, first person articulations interjected throughout the text work to upset and counteract dominant U.S. norms for race and gender, even as such norms are perpetuated by the neoliberal agenda and are, like Dunkin’ Donuts, similarly branded as commodities within the social logic of the neoliberal marketplace.

From the outset, Oscar’s character forces the perverse reader to recall the many queer youths in the United States who, as Sedgwick reminds us, “are two to three times

likelier to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others” due to “the profligate way this culture has of denying and despoiling queer energies and lives” (“Queer” 1). Oscar is described as having a “cheerless, sexless adolescence,” as he does not fit in with U.S. dominant culture or with the hyper-masculinized Dominican diasporic culture in New Jersey. While many critics have commented on Diaz’s queering of genre and form, his portrayal of race in the Dominican Republic and the diaspora, and the queer relationship between Oscar and Yuniór, no critics have thoroughly examined Oscar’s short, first-person articulations that interrupt and engage with Yuniór’s narration of the Calbrón/de León family history and the colonial curse of the fukú.^{lxviii} I argue that by examining Oscar’s first person articulations that appear rarely throughout the novel, we can see two things: first, that Oscar’s queerness is not aligned with homosexuality, although it is often read by his peers as such, allowing us to “spin the term [queer] outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under...sexuality at all” (Sedgwick “Queer” 9).^{lxix} Second, we can see that Oscar’s personal recognition of his queerness at the end of the novel allows him to transcend the restrictions of dominant Dominican and U.S. culture, and it suggests that queerness is what José Esteban Muñoz describes as “a rejection of the here and now and an insistence on the potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). It is true that “by emphasizing the constructed nature of all histories and narratives in general, the [novel] compels readers to examine the power structures behind the act of telling” (Hanna 501). Furthermore, we may draw parallels here between Oscar’s nerdiness or “nerdboy” status and Lucy’s status as “slut,” as both categories thrust the characters outside of the privatized neoliberal marketplace. If we understand nerdiness as a

fascination or obsession with knowledge or information that goes beyond the exchange value of information as a commodity, we can see how Oscar, as a “nerdboy,” challenges commodity culture, just as Lucy, who proclaimed that she would engage in sexual activity with the fisherman without being paid, stepped outside of the capitalist market. Thus, by continuing to examine how queerness in the novel can be articulated only in the first person, and in relation to specific temporal and spatial circumstances, we can articulate how “queer” can signify outside of queer liberalism and state recognition.

Male Units and Morlocks: Oscar’s Articulation of Gender and Race

The novel, while incorporating many voices, is narrated by the person closest to Oscar—his college roommate, Yuniór. Oscar’s rare interjections into the text, which are more like sound bites than a continuous narrative, provide the essential tools for understanding his character. The story opens with Yuniór describing the fukú and then going into almost thirty pages of detail describing Oscar and why he didn’t fit in with either U.S. or Dominican diasporic culture. Yuniór details Oscar’s adolescence as a time when “he grew fatter and fatter” and his skin became covered in zits, “making him self-conscious; and his interest—in Genres!—became synonymous with being a loser with a capital L” (16-17). Indeed, Yuniór’s third person omniscient narration makes it clear that high school was, “for a fat sci-fi reading nerd like Oscar, a source of endless anguish” (19). But it is not until the reader receives Oscar’s first person articulations of his outsider status that they become truly aware of how different he is, how *aware* of his difference he is, and how he is plagued with shame, embarrassment, and anguish. For

instance, Oscar consistently speaks as though he is years ahead of his high school education, using words like “septuagenarian” and “orchidaceous” in everyday sentences (35). Beyond in his years and his understanding, Oscar is not surprisingly abandoned by his two “nerdboy” best friends, Al and Miggs, who realize they have a better chance at being “normal” without him. Yuniór tells us, “He realized his fucked-up comic-book-reading, role-playing-game-loving, no-sports-playing friends were embarrassed by *him*. [...] Jesus Christ, he whispered, I’m a Morlock” (29 and 30).^{lxx} Rejected by his nerdy, loser friends in high school, Oscar is highly aware that there is something about him that makes him different from everyone. As the self-proclaimed “top expert in the state” on being “weird,” Oscar knows “how absurd he sounded” (43). Thus, while Oscar uses sci-fi creatures to describe himself, or the word “weird” or “absurd,” I argue that an apt term for understanding Oscar is “queer,” and this is seen through his first person articulations of queerness which disrupt heteronormative and homonormative ways of belonging to the neoliberal state and, instead, posit queerness as that which is not yet a part of our world, as our “horizon.” In this way, I follow Muñoz’s assertion that queerness is something that is “singularly plural,” or “an entity [which] registers as both particular in its difference but at the same time always relational to other singularities” (11). Queerness, in my argument, registers through the singular and through the first person articulation. At the same time, it cannot exist in isolation, and it appears in relation to other first person articulations and other particularities, such as race, gender, class, and national belonging. Thus, we might understand Oscar’s articulations as a singular plurality, as his personal discourse appears queer only in relation to Yuniór’s vernacular and to his fellow

schoolmates. Oscar does not speak in gibberish or nonsense; instead, his personal articulations are relatively sophisticated and complex, forcing the other characters to rise to his level of speech. In this way, I argue that his language can be thought of as provocation, rather than obfuscation—that which challenges the norm as it is represented by his peers.

For example, Oscar's first person articulations regarding his gender in relation to dominant U.S. culture and Dominican culture is queer in that it does conform to traditional notions of masculinity. As Yuniór explains, "He didn't have no kind of father to show him the masculine ropes, he simply lacked all aggressive and martial tendencies" (15). Indeed, the novel "contests the binary opposition between diaspora and nation, ultimately showing how a common inheritance of exclusion and oppression links these communities together. [...] For U.S.-born Oscar to be a diasporic subject, he must be domesticated according to the [heteronormative] code of national belonging, as enforced by the Dominican Republic-born Yuniór" (Sáez 526). The Dominican culture in which Oscar is immersed, while living in the United States and later when he travels to the Dominican Republic, prescribes that those who identify as male display a hyper-masculinized persona that includes being strong, aggressive, athletic, and a "player" with women—qualities that Oscar lacks entirely. As Yuniór states, Oscar "had none of the Higher Powers of your typical Dominican male, couldn't have pulled a girl if his life depended on it. Couldn't play sports for shit, or dominoes, was beyond uncoordinated, threw a ball like a girl. Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks" (20). Under the rule of law that "no

Dominican male has ever died a virgin,” Oscar is completely at odds with dominant gender roles as part of the Dominican diaspora in the United States (174). Indeed, when Oscar articulates his gender in the first person, he tellingly states that he is a “male unit” (27). This definition of his gender makes Oscar queer, in that he articulates himself as something that is both male and “other” at the same time. The word “unit” refers to that which is not human, not normal, and definitely not part of the standard categorization of male. This term, which is laden with science fiction overtones and calls to mind robots and cyborgs, forces the reader to code switch into a relational subjectivity and pushes the boundaries of our understanding of gender categories. Thus, Oscar articulates that he is male plus something that is beyond male—a “unit,” an other, and that which is decidedly queer.^{lxxi}

It is this otherness that prompts Oscar’s fellow classmates to label him as homosexual. Because Oscar cannot be placed within the dominant gender schema, his heteronormative peers, who are immersed within the dominant system of the gender binary, label him derogatively, as a “faggot” and “fag” (19 and 43). Oscar’s school mates taunt him by asking, “Hey Oscar, are there faggots on Mars?” (19). When Oscar meets the boyfriend of his high school crush, Yuniior states that it was “about as fun as being called a fag during school assembly (which had happened). (Twice)” (43). And when Oscar leaves for college at Rutgers, his uncle gives him a box of condoms and tells him, “Use them all, and then added: on girls” (49). Indeed, when Oscar dresses up as Doctor Who for Halloween, Yuniior, revealing his own familiarity with Oscar’s world of the “ghetto nerds,” decides that Oscar looks more like “that fat homo Oscar Wilde” (180).

Not knowing who Wilde is, Yuniór's friends translate the name, and thus is born Oscar's nickname, "Oscar Wao," which is derogative in the context of Yuniór and his masculinized friends. This nickname refers to the ways in which Oscar is queer and unable to conform to dominant masculine gender roles. Unable to be recognized within dominant U.S. and Dominican culture, Oscar proclaims, "I don't know if I'm even here, you know?" (48), showing that "even within the diaspora a silencing can occur [that reinforces dominant culture], because the diaspora is also conditioned by the logic of the nation" (Sáez 525). Indeed, Yuniór, who, unlike Oscar, adapts to the norms of dominant culture, laments, "Perhaps if like me he'd been able to hide his otakuness maybe shit would have been easier for him, but he couldn't" (21).^{lxxii} Oscar thus exists outside of the recognizable and identifiable, as, in relation to Yuniór's masculine self presentation and what it means to be a Dominican-American male, Oscar is gender-queer. Oscar's gender and sexual identity is connected to his cultural identity and knowledge base, specifically his science fiction/Japanese pop culture nerd-boy knowledge, and that kind of knowledge is considered by Oscar's peers as effeminate or homosexual. In this way, we can understand Oscar's first-person articulations, what I have argued make up the personal realm, as differing from the public sphere of cultural identity and the private sphere consisting of Oscar's family and friends.

Furthermore, Oscar's gender-queer status affects his racialized position as an American-born Dominican male, making him queer regarding to his race as well as his gender. Because of his particular way of speaking and his non-masculine characteristics, Oscar cannot be accepted as a true Dominican by his hyper-masculinized peers in the

novel. After leaving for college, where he thinks he will find “someone like him,” Yuniór narrates that that “the white kids looked at [Oscar’s] black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You’re not Dominican” (49). The “inhuman cheeriness” refers to the ways in which the white children mask their racism by acting overly friendly with Oscar, thus othering him by behaving disingenuously. Furthermore, Yuniór states that his friends would pick on Oscar saying, “Tu no eres nada de dominicano” and “Oscar would insist unhappily, “I am Dominican, I am” (180). Indeed, Oscar’s inability to fit into the norms of either white American culture or Dominican diasporic culture prompt him to speculate about the way that race functions by wondering, “If we were orcs, wouldn’t we, at a racial level, *imagine* ourselves to look like elves,” using J.R.R. Tolkien’s racialized world in *Lord of the Rings* to articulate his feelings (178). This articulation shows how Oscar has a queer understanding of race as that which is subjective and in the eye of the beholder. Orcs are ugly, evil mythical creatures, while elves are attractive and good. Oscar’s statement suggests that individuals who are racialized by dominant culture may not perceive themselves in the same light or even as the same race, and that race itself is something that is unfixed and left to be determined by the imagination of a particular person. However, there is also a hierarchical power relation articulated in his statement as well, as the orcs want to be the elves. This hierarchy is representative of Oscar’s racialized status as part of the Dominican diaspora in the United States and his own displacement in the black-brown-white hierarchy. Thus, Oscar shows how it is always those on the lower rung of the

racial ladder who imagine themselves as beings higher up. He code-switches between the painful social reality (being neither white nor a person-of-color) of his existence and his nerdboy knowledge base, which he uses to try and interpret his unpleasant social reality. In this way, Oscar queers race as, instead of dwelling on the fixed categories of white-brown-black that confound him, Oscar tries to switch them into terms that he can understand, and by so doing denaturalizes and defamiliarizes our conventional racial labels.

“Dude Used to Say He was Cursed”: Turning Queerness into Future Possibility

It is this inability to fit in with either U.S. or Dominican diasporic culture that makes Oscar feel unsure about whether he even exists and prompts him to attempt suicide during the end of his sophomore year of college, again reminding readers of the many queer youths in the United States who have taken their own lives. After being rejected by Jenni, a girl that Oscar falls in love with, Oscar “review[s] his miserable life” and “wish[es] he’d been born in a different body” (190). He drinks two bottles of strong liquor and intends to jump off of a highway bridge. In his suicide note, Oscar signs his name, “Oscar Wao,” instead of Oscar de León, which is, I argue, another first person articulation that signifies his queerness in relation to heteronormative U.S. and Dominican diasporic cultures. By using the offensive nickname that his tormenting peers conjured after Yunior made cracks about Oscar resembling “that fat homo Oscar Wilde,” Oscar shows the reader that he is aware of his queerness and that, at this point in the novel, he has internalized dominant culture’s oppression. Indeed, “his choice to identify

with the translation, to respond to the name Oscar Wao, signifies a quiet acceptance of a queer identity,” although at this point in the text, I argue that such queerness has a negative connotation (Sáez 547). Furthermore, Oscar is aware of his queer position in relation to national culture and diaspora, in that he references his cursed status, his inheritance of fukú (171). After his suicide attempt, Oscar tells Yunior that the fukú belongs to them both and states, “It was the curse that made me do it, you know” (194). In this way, Oscar references the colonial history of the Caribbean and the United States and his inheritance of this “cursed” state—being an outsider, someone who is queer and unrecognizable, to both cultures.^{lxxiii} Thus, Oscar states, in an unnerving comment that the narrator, Yunior, labels a joke, “Suicide suits me” (193).

However, Oscar ultimately refuses to be victimized by the fukú, as he does not actually commit suicide and instead claims that he has been “regenerated” (192). It is at this point in the novel, after the suicide attempt, that Oscar begins to embrace his queerness/cursedness and work with the fukú to obtain what, Yunior claims, he wants: heterosexual sex. Indeed, scholar Elena Machado Sáez’s insightfully queer reading of the text claims that Yunior imposes his own dictatorial narrating powers on Oscar’s story to essentially normalize him and contain him within traditional national and diasporic narratives, while also denying Yunior and Oscar’s homoerotic bonds.^{lxxiv} While this argument provides readers with a vitally important interpretation of the text through a queer lens and correctly ties the novel to a long history of homoerotic bonding between men in supposedly heteronormative romance plots, I assert that we cannot know what Yunior is leaving out of the narrative, as he is a playful narrator with uniquely omniscient

powers. While I do not intend to argue against Sáez's reading because it contributes such valuable ideas to scholars engaged in queer readings, I assert that Oscar does indeed want to lose his virginity to a woman, as Yunió states. However, I argue that while Oscar is eventually inducted into the realm of heterosexual privilege, which Sáez states is due to Yunió's normalizing embellishments, Oscar does remain queer by the end of the novel, as long as we understand "queer" as not being essentially tied to sexuality only.^{lxxv} Thus, my argument differs from Sáez's, who states that queerness is that which calls "into question the systems of categorization that have served to define sexuality" (524). I assert that we need to expand the notion of queerness in order to recognize it in all of its forms, and that Oscar shows us how to begin such an endeavor. For instance, Yunió tells us that in the school where Oscar begins his teaching career, "Every day [Oscar] watched the 'cool' kids torture the crap out of the fat, the ugly, the smart the poor, the dark, the black, the unpopular, the African, the Indian, the Arab, the immigrant, the strange, the feminine, the gay—and in every one of these clashes he saw himself" (264). As a gender-queer and racially queer figure, one who is unattractive, overweight, and unpopular—Oscar draws from a history of colonial curses in order to project, into the past, present, and future, what is ultimately a queer utopic vision. After his "regeneration," Oscar realizes that he doesn't want the future that is laid out for him, the one where he becomes an "old bitter dork" (268). Therefore, at 23 years old, he travels to the Dominican Republic to "try something new," and it is there that he refuses to become a victim of the "Curse of the Caribbean" and its history (272). Yunió tells us that Oscar "refused to succumb to that whisper that all long-term immigrants carry inside

themselves, the whisper that says *You do not belong*” (276). Refusing to become a victim of his own queerness and invisibility in dominant culture, Oscar embraces his cursed history; he states, “It’s the ancient powers. They won’t leave me alone” (315) as he turns this curse into queer possibility.

“Transcendence is Miiiiine!”

While visiting the Dominican Republic, Oscar falls in love with a middle-aged prostitute, Ybón Pimentel, whose boyfriend has his cronies beat Oscar almost to his death. After his first kiss with Ybón, Oscar’s first person articulations begin to gesture towards a queer temporality, where the past and future are continuously in the present, and he becomes attuned to what Muñoz refers to as a queerness that is “not-yet-here” (12). Muñoz thinks of queerness as a “temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity” (16). He offers a way of thinking about queerness as that which is “not-yet-here,” as horizon, and calls for an idea of “a queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present” (18). By embracing the fukú as that which has been in the past, plagues him in the present, and projects him into an “eternal return” (296), Oscar is able to offer us an example of queerness that is detached from sexuality and that exists as that which is not-yet-here but that can be gestured towards with the feelings of hope and utopia that Muñoz details (18). Indeed, the novel “charts a movement not only from one place to another but also from one historical continuum to another” (Kunsa 213). As Oscar seeks to be united with Ybón, he exclaims, “You don’t understand what’s at

stake,” referring to the vast history and future of the fukú, of which he is an active part, and the (somewhat clichéd) love that he has for Ybón which allows him to go on. While Sáez suggests that “in the final analysis, what Yunior succeeds in doing is merely reinstating the very standards of masculinity and Dominicanness that alienate Oscar and himself,” I argue that by the end of the text, Oscar’s personal exclamations claim his queerness and the fukú in order to inject hope, futurity, and queer utopia into the narrative, in accordance with Muñoz’s theory (552). Indeed, when Oscar is once again beaten by the boyfriend’s thugs, he gives a speech that references his eternal status, claiming that the thugs would “sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn’t be no fatboy or dork or kid no girl had ever loved; over there he’d be a hero, an avenger. Because anything you can dream [...] you can be” (321-322). Here Oscar’s first person articulation signifies his queerness as a “fatboy, dork, and kid no girl had ever loved.” However, I argue that it also asserts his understanding of queerness as horizon, as that which is not-yet-here, but that will arrive as a “hero” or an “avenger.” Indeed, here we see that the novel “ultimately asks how the Other be encountered without resorting to assimilation—the denial of otherness altogether—or annihilation” (Patteson 17). Oscar’s speech remains prominent in its assertion that his queer status will not succumb to normalization, but will instead use the past and the history of the fukú to

continue into the future until he is no longer identified as “other” but celebrated as diasporically queer.

Conclusion

In a world where the distinctions between public and private are as few as the distinctions between corporate fast food chains, both Lucy and Oscar’s first-person articulations remind us that queerness can grow in the cracks of neoliberal ideology. By examining how these articulations exist in relation to dominant forms of gender, race, sexuality, nation, and diaspora, I have shown that they are not dependent upon neoliberal notions of public and private but are, in fact, queer opportunities for resistance, difference, and hope. This is to distinguish from the biopolitical regulation of life processes that exists under a neoliberal world order. According to Aihwa Ong, “Neoliberal governmentality can be traced to Foucault’s notion of ‘biopower,’ a modern mode of governing that brought ‘life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent in the transformation of human life’” (13). Indeed, Ong states that “neoliberal logic requires populations to be free, self-managing, and self-enterprising individuals in different spheres of everyday life—health, education, bureaucracy, the professions, and so on. The neoliberal subject is therefore not a citizen with claims on the state but a self-enterprising citizen subject who is obligated to become an ‘entrepreneur of himself or herself’” (14). In other words, you need to constantly improve your ability to be productive (both economically and socially) and to do so requires adhering to reified notions of gender and sexuality that are manifest

in the private individual. Hence the personal, paradoxically, is not equatable with or reducible to the individual under neoliberalism. I argue that both Lucy and Oscar disrupt such neoliberal biopolitical regulation through the personal, or first-person articulations, which disrupt normative gender, sexuality, and racial categories. Neither character embodies or defines queerness, and both Lucy and Oscar often conform to what Michael Warner would call “normal.” Lucy engages in heterosexual romances and resolves to accumulate capitalist wealth, and Oscar attempts to fight his curse through consumption while being fully intoxicated by heterosexual desire. However, by following Sedgwick’s assertion that “queer” can only have meaning when used in the first person, I have shown that Lucy and Oscar’s personal articulations articulate a queerness that is temporally and spatially contingent. Through such an examination, we can nudge open some space where “queer” can move freely without being pinned down by definitions of citizenship, nationhood, identity politics, and alignment with the neoliberal state, and open the way for queerness to become our horizon, our future, and our infinite possibility.

Chapter 4

Queer Time in Diaspora: Historicism, Chrononormativity, and New Public Spheres

“Naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation:

binding is what turns mere existence into a form of mastery.”

--Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities,*

Queer Histories

“There’s a kind of forgetfulness that capitalism produces...”

--Dionne Brand, Interview with Christian Olbey

This chapter continues the trajectory of Chapter 3 in its engagement with queer Caribbean diasporic writers’ negotiation of public and private spheres under neoliberalism. It builds on the recent work of Raphael Dalleo, in that it is invested in recognizing how these writers create new public spheres outside of the “commodification of public space [which] has meant not only the deprivileging of revolutionary discourse, but of literature itself” (Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature* 226). To do this, I consider the problem of public spheres through the work of postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty alongside queer theorists Elizabeth Freeman, Jack Halberstam, and Jasbir K. Puar in order to look at how contemporary Caribbean diasporic writers queer public understandings of temporality and historiography that are maintained by the neoliberal world order. Looking at the fictional work of Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* (1986) and Achy Obejas’s *Memory Mambo* (1996), I argue that these writers

engage in the massive task of rerouting our notions of time, history, and cultural memory away from hetero/homonormativity, identity politics, and the neoliberal state, and, instead, thrust us into a new public space made up of radical moments of possibility.

Raphael Dalleo's methodology, which I will adopt in this chapter, offers a point of departure for my own argument that fiction can articulate new Caribbean public spheres that, in turn, reimagine postcoloniality, historicity, and queer temporalities. In his book *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial* (2011), Raphael Dalleo addresses postcoloniality not as the end of empire, but as "the rise of a new international regime" under globalization, with a "strong continuity in terms of which countries occupy privileged positions—primarily the same countries from western Europe and North America that held power in the modern colonial period" (227 and 14-15). Further, instead of the "management of the global order" by nation-states, as there was during colonialism, there are dominant "global organizations" that maintain power. However, for Dalleo postcoloniality does not only include domination by global powers and U.S. neoliberal hegemony, it also signifies "an intellectual practice meant to combat the effects of modern colonialism." It is this understanding of the term "postcolonial" that I have applied throughout these chapters and continue to explore in this section. I understand postcolonial discourse—encompassing critical theory and literary texts—as both a mapping of the current global

power structures and an “intellectual practice” that attempts to disrupt these very structures at their epistemological and ideological core.

Dalleo notes important markers regarding imperial involvement in the Caribbean, which has been most prominently occupied by the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He notes the U.S.’s obtainment of Puerto Rico and Cuba at the end of the Spanish American War (1898) and the occupation of Haiti beginning in 1915—two events commonly cited as the start of Caribbean postcoloniality in the dominant historical record. However, Dalleo argues that the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 should be marked as turning moments in Caribbean postcoloniality, as they revolve around revolution. He suggests “a way of periodizing Caribbean [postcoloniality and] literature that does not discard the idea of the postcolonial, but defines it in relation to the history of Caribbean revolutionary movements, in order to keep alive the important lessons that tradition can offer radical politics in the region today” (“Post-Grenada” 65). Thus, by defining Caribbean postcoloniality by key revolutionary moments in its history, instead of the dates of U.S. lead occupation and exploitation, we can “pay homage to and criti[que] the limitations” of the anti-colonial movement.

This critique, for Dalleo, is initiated by Caribbean literatures, which he believes have the power to act as “discursive agents for [new] Caribbean public spheres,” which, in turn, create space for resistance to global power. According to Dalleo, Caribbean

writers operate within this public sphere, and they also create it as an imagined idea:

[They are where] material reality and imagined ideal—interact as a complex dialectic [and] the institutions and structures of the public sphere shape writers' imaginations even as writers imagine alternative arrangements and new ways of thinking that help create new public spaces and identities. [...] The Caribbean public sphere... is a counter-public marginalized from and thus opposed to (rather than a legitimizing check upon) the true centers of power, but at the same time serve the function of Habermas's idealized European bourgeois public sphere in claiming to represent the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the populace.

(Caribbean Literature 2 and 4)

By working in and imagining new public spheres, Caribbean writers generate the space for hope, change, and resistance to dominant neoliberal power. I draw on Dalleo's re-periodizing of Caribbean postcoloniality, along with his commitment to articulating new Caribbean public spheres to determine how Caribbean diasporic writers have reimagined dominant notions of history and historiography, time and temporality, and cultural memory. By examining these concepts in Caribbean diasporic literatures, I argue that we can articulate some of the very public spheres that Dalleo theorizes—"actually existing spaces [which] allow writers to imagine where public debate and community building might be located even as political, social, and economic realities circumscribe the range of possibilities available" (*Caribbean Literature 2*). This chapter will thus continue the trajectory of the last three by articulating queer temporalities and histories that create new public spheres outside of dominant power formations in order to shed light on

“oppositional ideologies of literature articulating a counterpublic opposed to foreign power” (*Caribbean Literature* 5).

Queer/Postcolonial Time

Postcolonial and queer theories offer productive insights into the remapping of temporalities and histories in the work of queer Caribbean diasporic writers, as they reveal how questions of nation, citizenship and historiography are inherently imbued with concepts of sexuality, gender, kinship and homonormativity.^{lxxvi} In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Elizabeth Freeman notes that queer theorists have mostly addressed matters of space and neglected issues surrounding queer times. Building on Freeman’s own conception of “chrononormativity,” or “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity,” I investigate multiple queer temporalities that exist within Caribbean diasporic literatures (1).^{lxxvii} Freeman suggests that chrononormativity at the level of national population can be considered “chronobiopolitics,” which regulates peoples behavior and their collective sense of belonging, ultimately favoring power. She writes, “In chronobiopolitics, this process extends beyond individual anatomies to encompass the management of entire populations: people whose individual bodies are synchronized not only with one another but also with larger temporal schematic experience” which presents itself as “natural” and makes us feel like we belong, and she offers the heteronormative examples of marriage, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its rituals (5). Thus the “perverse”—the queer figures, the gay and lesbian subjects—have traditionally stood outside of

chrononormativity and “have served as figures *for* history, for either civilization’s decline or a sublimely futuristic release from nature, or both” (7, original emphasis). Indeed, according to Freeman, this conceptualization of the “perverse” subject exists not only in the cultural imaginary but in the critical discourse of queer theory.

Freeman critiques traditional methods of queer critics whom, she states, rely too heavily on either deconstruction or Marxism. The problem with deconstruction, from a temporal perspective, is that it does “not always concern itself with history understood as a collective consciousness of the significance, singularity, and sheer pain of exploitation, or as collective agency toward relief from that pain.” Marxism, on the other hand, deals too specifically with temporal restraints and thus “has not always attended to the vagaries of temporality, as practiced and as embodied, that make new conceptions of “the historical” possible” (8). Instead, she calls for an understanding of queer temporality as that which holds in tension both deconstructionism and Marxism by focusing on time during periods of mourning and melancholia, which can stand still indefinitely, project us into the past, settle us in a present, and thrust us into the future. She concludes that we should understand the queer figure as “having emerged from raw suffering and subjectivity [and as] a record of partings and foreclosings, and absences” (11). In this way, queer time consists of “individual bodily imagos, in short, [which] are nascent collective and historical formations in that they may arise from contingent, institutionalized forms of hurt that are experienced simultaneously and survive over time yet cannot be reduced to the social relations of the mode of economic production” (12). Thus, the queer figure is removed from chrononormativity through institutionalized

forms of hurt which reject or purposefully harm that which does not comply to the dominant world order and is left with differing conceptions and perceptions of temporality that contain the possibility to resist capitalist and neoliberal ideology.

In her book, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Jasbir K. Puar responds to Foucault's notion of biopolitics by introducing the queer subject as one that is part of what she calls "sexual exceptionalism" under biopower, and her goal is to expose the convivial relationship between power and homonationalism, where the (white, male, upper class) queer functions as a regulatory agent, while rethinking queerness not as a binary or as part of individualized identity, but as an assemblage. In other words, she rereads biopolitics with regard to queerness and the intractability of queerness from biopolitical arrangements of life and death. According to Puar, queer and other sexual national subjects are folded into the biopolitical management of life, and queerly racialized "terrorist populations" are folded out of life, toward death. Thus, biopolitics delineates not only which queers live and which queers die...but also how queers live and die. She states that there is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e. gay marriage and gay adoption). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the "measures of benevolence" that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity. She states that this benevolence toward sexual others is contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege,

consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity. The contemporary emergence of homosexual, gay, and queer subjects—normativized through their deviance (as it becomes surveilled, managed, studied) rather than despite it—is integral to the interplay of perversion and normativity necessary to sustain the management of life.

At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism—the emergence of national homosexuality, what she terms “homonationalism,” where some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. Puar argues that dominant queer secularity in the U.S. demands a particular transgression of norms, such as religious norms. She states that “queer secularity is constitutive of and constituted by the queer autonomous liberal subject against and through the reification of the very pathological irrational sexualities that are endemic to discourses of terrorist culpability” (13). Because of this, queer Arabs and Muslims are doubly indicted for the fundamentalist religion they adhere to or escape from and for the terrorist bodies that religion produces, and they are either liberated, or they can only have an irrational, pathological sexuality or queerness. In this way, homonationalism works as a biopolitical regulatory power alongside dominant (white) heteronormative culture.

Therefore, Puar proposes that we understand queerness not as an identity nor an anti-identity, but an assemblage that is spatially and temporally contingent. As opposed

to intersectionality, the assemblage is an affective conglomeration that recognizes other contingencies of belonging that might not fall easily into identity politics, which, she states, collude with the disciplinary apparatus of the state (212). Intersectionality and identity politics, which aim for state recognition, most often lead to co-optation by the neoliberal state. “In the United States, efforts to end racial segregation and institutional racism, as well as feminist and lesbian and gay movements, have appealed to constitutional protections of equality for all citizens...[However], ‘issues of mere recognition are linked to the practice of imperialist racial domination’ [and do not] redress harm and reverse unjust practices” (Mullins 1101). Thus, to articulate a figure that cannot be recognized and co-opted, Puar uses the example of the terrorist body, specifically the suicide bomber, as an assemblage that resists queerness-as-sexual-identity, and instead illustrates queerness as spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences, implosions, and rearrangements. Puar defines the terrorist assemblage as: “a cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity and even queer anti-identity narratives and which bypass the Foucauldian ‘act to identity’ continuum that informs much global LGBTIQ organizing, a continuum that privileges the pole of identity as the evolved form of western modernity” (222). By focusing on the queer assemblage, Puar foregoes the idea of queer as part of a binary and queer as inherently resistant and sexual, and instead underscores queerness’s contingency and complicity with dominant formations. Thus, the terrorist assemblage is

a temporal rearrangement that can disrupt biopolitics and Freeman's notion of chrononormativity (205).

In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty addresses Europe, not as a specific geographical region, but as an idea that operates differently according to the specific region being discussed. Similar to how Edward Said describes the construction of the "West" and the "Orient" in western archives as an ideological space, Chakrabarty discusses Europe as a project whose modes of rational thought from the Enlightenment on have determined how scholars theorize "political modernity" today (state institutions, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprises). He points that the very notion of the political, (the right to citizenship, justice, enfranchisement, human rights, etc) is tied to humanist Enlightenment discourses which address the individual human subject as a coherent unit moving and changing through space and time in a progressive fashion, otherwise known as historicism. Historicism, according to Chakrabarty, not only influences the individual humanist subject, but also the concept of the nation and of history itself, entailing that Europe and "the west" conceptualizes itself as part of the "now" of history, moving in a progression, while the colonized peoples belong to the "not yet" of history, or "the waiting room of history" (8). As Chakrabarty states, "Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. [...]" Historicism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance... that was

assumed to exist between the West and the non-West. In the colonies, it legitimated the idea of civilization” (7, original emphasis).

In an endeavor to see European thinking as coming from a particular place and time, and not as a necessarily universalist method, Chakrabarty states that critics must at once see their indebtedness to Enlightenment theories of humanism, historicism, and the political, while also remaining critical. He points to two key moments that allow for a critical engagement with traditional modes of historicism: the self-insertion of postcolonial nationalisms into the “now” of history, and the enfranchisement of the peasantry in India following “decolonization,” in which the peasants became full citizens without having to embark on a process of educating themselves to become like the bourgeoisie (9-10). The peasant, for Chakrabarty, is “a shorthand for all the seemingly nonmodern, rural, nonsecular relationships and life practices that constantly leave their imprint [...]. The peasant stands for all that is not bourgeois (in a European sense)” (11). Looking at the ways in which postcolonial nations and peoples insert themselves into the “now” of history disrupts traditional modes of historicism and directly aligns the subaltern subject with political agency.^{lxxviii} Thus, Chakrabarty ultimately argues for a kind of disidentification with traditional of European Enlightenment temporality and history. He writes, “European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought—

which is now everybody's heritage and which affects us all—may be renewed from and for the margins” (16).

Thus, just as Freeman both borrows from and critiques traditional Western methodologies—Deconstructionism and Marxism—in order to develop the tensions that exist between them and to formulate queer temporalities outside of chrononormativity, so does Chakrabarty both embrace and critique Western humanism and teleological progress in order to look for the different life practices that have asserted themselves within dominant notions of time. Thus, comparisons may be drawn here between Freeman's conception of chrononormativity and Chakrabarty's discussion of historicism to show how historicism—the linear progression of time—makes up chrononormativity. Both conceptions are implemented through the nation form; both entail a rigid conceptualization of time and human bodies moving forward in such time; and both exclude those who do not fit in with the dominant order. However, while Freeman articulates a queer time that exists alongside chrononormativity but does not become a part of it, Chakrabarty discusses figures within the waiting room of history that then erupt into chrononormative time—not to become a part of it, but to challenge it from within. I understand both critics as offering us possibilities for differing temporalities that challenge chrononormativity—Freeman from the outside and Chakrabarty from within. Chakrabarty states that historicism “tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first, as an individual and unique whole—as some kind of unity at least in potential—and, second, as something that develops over time” (23). He argues that “modern politics is

often justified as a story of human sovereignty acted out in the context of a ceaseless unfolding unitary historical time,” and this conception does not provide an “adequate resource for thinking about the conditions of political modernity” in the postcolonial context (15). In order to conceptualize a politics from peoples in postcolonial settings, we need to see that “historical time is not integral, that it is out of joint with itself” (16). This, I argue, is an example of queer time—time that is “out of joint,” non-linear, that does not adhere to what Freeman refers to as chronobiopolitics—the management of the life functions of entire populations through structured temporality. For it is this kind of chronobiopolitics that attempts to keep postcolonial people in the waiting room of history.

In this chapter I will use Freeman’s conception of chrononormativity and chronobiopolitics and Chakrabarty’s conception of “the peasant” erupting into humanist teleological time in order to discuss the multiple queer times and queer histories presented in the work of Brand and Obejas. I will examine how the queer figures in the texts emerge out of pain and present us with queer temporalities that do not succumb to neoliberal historiography or capitalist demands on temporality, historicity, and cultural memory. By doing so I will open the door to new histories and temporalities that thrive

without state recognition, political identities, or corporate sponsorship in order to develop new public spheres.

“She Moving, Moving, Moving all the Time without Moving”

Dionne Brand’s novel, *In Another Place, Not Here* has been read numerous times in relation to postcolonial space, place, belonging, and physical movement.^{lxxix} I intend to investigate a different kind of movement in the novel—temporal movement, which, I argue, stretches, contracts, loops around, and ultimately shifts dominant notions of teleological time. To reference the title of this section, I will examine how the queer characters move time itself without actually moving in space—by exhibiting an understanding of the world that disrupts historicism and chrononormativity. Brand’s queer female characters, Verlia and Elizete, are Afro-Caribbean immigrants who move between Toronto, Canada and the Caribbean. These characters create a non-linear narrative that changes and conflates the third and first person, thus resisting the “conventions of realist narrative” and “signal[ing Brand’s] distance from narrative structures that would imperialistically impose a teleological order upon characters marked as Western, liberal subjects” (Mullins 1106). Brand tells the story of Elizete and Verlia’s love affair, which takes place in what Joanna Luft calls a “disrupted present,” and which is bound up in matters of anti-capitalist revolution, Black Power, historical trauma, and heteronormative restrictions (31).^{lxxx} Indeed, John Corr argues that the power of affect in Elizete and Verlia’s queer relationship “literally embodies revolution against militarized globalization. Their relationship makes possible reinvigorated

resistance and their mutual caring issues a powerful refusal of racialized and sexualized oppressions in the Black diaspora” (114). My argument, rather than treating queerness as aligned with sexuality, erotic pleasure, and an overt refusal of oppression, examines the portrayal of Elizete and Verlia’s physical embodiment of various queer times, to show how Brand’s novel challenges neoliberal notions of time, temporality, history, and cultural memory. Brand’s protagonists embody these aspects of queer time in a postcolonial setting, and all of these aspects are equally valid and challenging to neoliberal chronobiopolitics, chrononormativity, and historicism; she shows us how to imagine, through the warp and weft of literature, a temporality that recognizes different ways of living, loving, and being in the world. Verlia and Elizete have been raised within dominant historicism which uses chronobiopolitics to keep them in the “waiting room of history,” or within the dominant temporal schema. However, the novel “asserts the necessity of reconceptualizing how humans inhabit shared histories shaped by public discourses, economies,” and temporalities, and it pushes us towards conceptualizing new public spheres (Corr 121). Both women are able to develop their own method for disrupting chrononormativity and erupting into the now of history—Verlia through violence and forceful revolution, and Elizete through the practice of naming.

“Don’t Move.’ Whip. ‘Don’t Move.’ Whip.”

Verlia grows up on an unnamed Caribbean island where she is taught to accept dominant notions of time and to become a working cog within the chronobiopolitical schema—to accept historicism and all of its confines, including an acceptance of her

place within the waiting room of history. Verlia was “always waiting” and was surrounded by “people who do not know what will happen next, who wait for signs and providence and mysteries” (Brand122). She is taught to wait for something to happen instead of forcing historical time to make room for her. This creates a present, past, and future that is filled with waiting and, for Verlia, with regret that no action was ever taken:

She waits. They taught her that the present was a waiting room, an anxious place on the way to being without them. [...] She is always waiting, putting off this thing that should be said now... Only to have regret ride her. [...] She has been waiting to live. (131, 136)

Verlia exists within the racism and economic exploitation that remain in her island culture after independence and is taught to accept it until something else comes along.^{lxxxii} She is taught to be passive and to play her subordinate role in neoliberal chronobiopolitics as someone who is less important, less effective, and less temporally present than those in the “West.” For this reason, “she’d go away from these people who could not predict the future even if it were a minute from now or this very second” (Brand122). Indeed, Verlia decides to disrupt her temporal heritage and to immigrate to Canada where she can begin to emerge from the waiting room.

Verlia travels to stay with an aunt and uncle who live in Sudbury, outside of Toronto, but she soon realizes that they, as Afro-Caribbeans in a predominantly white suburban location, are waiting just like the people on the island from which she came. Indeed, they are waiting for racial acceptance within a white supremacist society and are attempting to blend in as much as possible through their willing adoption of

chronobiopolitics, which regulates lives according to heteronormative time markers, such as marriage and childbirth. When Verlia moves in with them, they are pleased because their heteronormative aspirations are one step closer to being fulfilled; for, “in Sudbury, if they conform to some part of the puzzle, they are convinced that they will be rewarded with acceptance. Ordinariness. Man, woman, husband, wife, couple, parents, Black. They are counting on the first six words. They think that her addition will fill out some of the rest somehow... make them white in this white town” (Brand 141). Thus, it is not only the people on the island who are waiting for equal rights, racial equality, acceptance, and a higher standard of living, but also members of the Caribbean diaspora who are likewise bounded by chronobiopolitics. Verlia realizes quickly that in order to escape the waiting room of history, she needs to reimagine her own past, outside of the ways that the people on the island, and her aunt and uncle in Sudbury, have taught her.

While in Canada, Verlia is able to articulate her challenge to chronobiopolitics and historicism at large. She simply states that “she does not want to be harmless” (150). She does not want assimilation into white supremacist culture, and she does not want the waiting room of history. Instead, “She wants to be the kind of Black girl that is dangerous. Big-mouthed and dangerous. That’s what she came here for” (157). At this point, Verlia sees Canada as providing the opportunity for her to leave the waiting room of history and to become dangerously present within dominant white culture. Her first step to doing this is to change her past from that of waiting to a history full of political action from strong, black figures. This rewriting of the past is signified by Verlia’s decorating her bedroom, not with family photos, but with newspaper clippings of

successful endeavors in the fight for black rights: “She hates nostalgia, she hates this humid lifeless light that falls on her past, it’s too close for her no matter how many years she spends away. [She longs for] no ties, nothing hanging around your feet. [...] She wants it bare, everything bare. No photographs, no sentiment, no memory. [...] Her clippings are her new past. Bits of newspaper are her history, words her family” (Brand 182, 156, 164). While her history of waiting on the island doesn’t entirely leave her, Verlia attempts to rewrite her past as that which can fuel her eruption into the political present. In this way, she shows that the past is not set in stone, that it can be challenged, disrupted, and rewritten, according to who is telling the story.

It is important to note here that Brand, in writing this section of the novel, participates in rewriting her own bit of history. Brand, in her non-fiction articulations, claims that capitalist culture produces a kind of cultural forgetting, which allows the neoliberal state to absorb resistance movements. It is this kind of cultural forgetting that both Verlia and Elizete fight against, using disruptive notions of temporality that challenge neoliberal chronobiopolitics. Brand states in an interview,

Capitalism co-opted many of the ideas of the 1960s and 1970s movements, and the ancestry of those ideas were lost and somehow absorbed into the big capitalist machine. [...] They took over the narrative, that big, unwieldy, not necessarily connected narrative. A sense of defeat took over how what happened to us was described for the next generation, and the next generation fell into a deep despair. [...] In Verlia, I am retracing and recapturing that moment of human and political awakening, which has been gobbled up and consumed by this awful machine.

This moment has been secreted away from the subsequent generations of people, and capitalism has a way of making it look confusing—it wasn't; it was coherent—and capitalism has a way of making resistance look futile—it wasn't; it was a serious dream, and still is. There still exists a need for a place for people to live without dread. (Olbey 92-94)

Thus, we see Verlia rejecting the white-washed present of her aunt and uncle, and instead filling it with newspaper clippings from the Movement, rewriting her own history to include those people and events who resisted capitalism's homogenization and co-optation. She challenges white supremacist culture and chronobiopolitics by attempting to erase her past history of waiting and replace it with a past full of newspaper clippings telling about radical and revolutionary actions taken by people of color. By doing so, she demonstrates for the reader that there are multiple histories to be remembered if one can erupt out of the waiting room and into a new present. Further, Verlia is assembling fragments or bits of newspaper clippings into a coherent narrative for herself as a social and political being. Brand is thus also speaking to the present time where a sense of fragmentation and dispersion leads to a sense of futility in terms of politics. Indeed, Verlia's act of assembling fragments of newspaper stories is also a response to certain extreme postmodernist tendencies to valorize fragmentation and dispersal.

“Verlia, Flying”

Brand shows, in *In Another Place, Not Here*, how Verlia, once she has rid herself of historicist temporality and created her past anew, is able to become fully alive in queer

time as a revolutionary in the Black Power Movement. It is at this point that Verlia erupts into the present, not as an individual, coherent unit that develops over time, in accordance with historicism, but as an assemblage. Once Verlia becomes part of the Black Power Movement in Toronto, she becomes temporally different than the chrononormative members of her island, her extended family, and even some parts of the Movement. Indeed, revolutionary temporality is qualitatively different from the temporality of everyday life, as there is a kind of historical change that is implicit in a revolutionary aspiration versus the kind of quotidian survival that one should be content with under chrononormativity. Verlia joins a terrorist cell, the Committee for Revolutionary Struggle, for which she works underground, outside of state-recognized institutions and politics. She decides to “go underground, agitate and strike blows against the racists and the imperialists” (189). When questioned by her girlfriend, Abena, who is also part of the Movement but who seeks out nonviolent, state-based recognition as part of her way to instigate change, Verlia responds by challenging Abena’s conforming to chrononormativity by asking, “When the hell is the time? You have to leap sometimes don’t you? Sometimes you have to be ahead? We all don’t get it at the same time, do we?” (186). By addressing matters of time, Verlia directly challenges those who abide by chrononormativity and state-based recognition. Instead, she chooses to go underground and become part of a terrorist cell, changing her own temporality until she becomes what Puar calls a terrorist assemblage—that which cannot be recognized by the state, which is temporally resistant and inherently challenging to historicism and national belonging. For Verlia, this is “sane. Saner than waiting for the world to happen to you” (179). She

emerges from the waiting room of history and erupts into the present until her “skin is electrified Black, burning,” where time is moving quickly and changing so rapidly that it cannot be pinned down to a single unified identity, and thus cannot be co-opted by the state.

Brand describes Verlia’s body as being associated with constant, quick movement. In this way, she presents Verlia as an embodiment of a terrorist assemblage, challenging historicist notions of what a black woman’s body can be and unbinding the physical constraints of chrononormative temporality. As Hortense Spillers states, “If I didn’t exist, I would have to be invented,” referring to the massive signifying responsibilities that dominant culture gives to the black female body. Spiller argues that the black female body takes on the burden of signification so much so that dominant (North) American culture could not exist without it. Spillers starts with the history of the slave trade, where the black African female body was unnamed by the journey through the Middle Passage and then named anew by the white slave traders on the North American coast. Since then, the black female body has been the repository for centuries of sexism and racism, and all of the dominant heteronormative conditioning propagated by American culture. Indeed, as Brand concurs in her essay “This Body for Itself,” “In a world where Black women’s bodies are so sexualized, avoiding the body as sexual is a strategy...is as much an anti-colonial strategy as armed struggle” (27). Brand goes on to note that the stereotypes and sexualization of the black female body persists with Black male Caribbean writers who “write the Black female either as the redeemer of the violated or the builder of the binary pedestal of mother or virgin, [so that] the burden of

the body is as persistent an image in Caribbean women's literature as it is in Black women's lives" (36 and 39). I argue that by understanding Verlia as an embodied assemblage, we can see her resisting such signification by occupying a temporality that never remains fixed, that is constantly shifting and in flux. Verlia is described as always "moving, moving, moving all the time without moving," implying that she is capable of subverting dominant temporality and linear progression (7). It is, furthermore, possible to understand the first three "movings" as suggesting that Verlia moves peoples, things, and events around her while not actually being mobile. One way of understanding Verlia in this sense is that she is the hub of a revolutionary wheel that motivates or moves those around her while appearing motionless herself. She can move time without physically moving, and she does this as an assemblage. Elizete describes her saying,

I like it how she leap. Run in the air without moving. I watch she make she way around we as if she was from here, all time moving faster than the last thing she say. If I didn't like it she would frighten me. [...]It was her speed...the way she could make the junction still standing in front of you, the way she could move fast in she head. [...]She brand new and come from another life. She not here, she dreaming of things we don't dream. (7, 9, 10, and 15)

Associated with constant movement, leaping, flight, and, most importantly, speed and time moving quickly, Verlia embodies the terrorist assemblage and directly challenges the colonial history of signification that has overburdened the black female body.

Verlia also challenges the waiting room of history once she returns to the Caribbean and begins a revolution, where she becomes a queer terrorist assemblage who

is “not merely racialized and sexualized, [as] the body must appear improperly racialized (outside the norms of multiculturalism) and perversely sexualized in order to materialize as the terrorist in the first place” (Puar 38). The reader sees Verlia’s being improperly racialized in her involvement with the Black Power Movement in Canada, branches of which were considered domestic terrorist organizations by the United States government.^{lxxxii} Indeed, Verlia becomes part of a “terrorist” cell, the Committee for Revolutionary Struggle, that supplies weapons to other cells worldwide. Verlia serves as “the (queer) terrorist [who] regenerates the civilizational missives central to the reproduction of racist-heterosexist U.S. and homonormative nationalisms,” in that she is racialized and perversely sexualized, which provokes the United States to act aggressively in order to contain her (Puar 38). She describes her racialization while living for thirteen years in Toronto, saying that “there are two worlds here in this city,” one that is “white and runs things,” and “other world [that] grows steadily at its borders. [...] She knows that you can live in a city which is divided [by race] even though there are no gates, no observable blockades” (180-181). Indeed, Verlia is separated from white people in Toronto because she has become a dangerous Black woman—so much so that “she lives in this city for years without talking personally to a single white person or having one talk to her” (181).^{lxxxiii} Brand does not present Verlia’s acceptance into a tolerant, multicultural North America. Instead, Verlia is “improperly racialized” and

confined to the non-white sections of Toronto and cast away from the dominant white culture.

Furthermore, she is perversely sexualized, not only by dominant hetero/homonormative culture, but by the Black Power Movement as well. As Brand notes, patriarchy did not end at the color line but extended into the Movement, often in extreme forms. Referring to her personal experience in the Movement, she writes, “In my generation the pimps...inverted the Black revolution, exploiting women [who were] Black like them, telling them that they were Black men and the world was against them and we Black women had a duty to help them to get over, as desperate as we were to find a place to get over ourselves” (*Bread* 111). While the black women in the movement were subjected to patriarchal domination, Brand notes that they were also seen as traitors, by both men and women, if they did not conform to heteronormativity (*Bread* 130). Verlia shows this discrimination within the Movement, as she describes how she is brought up adopting a heteronormative lifestyle. Brand writes about Verlia saying, “Yes, she had sex with men until one day she couldn’t have it any more, just couldn’t” (204). Verlia starts sleeping with Abena, another woman in the Movement who is more moderate than Verlia. While the two women remain together for years, their relationship is not acknowledged by the heteronormative Movement members. Indeed, once Verlia moves from Toronto to aid the revolutionary movement in Grenada, the Movement members warn her away from being sexually involved with Elizete, so much so that she is scared (223). Elizete describes Verlia being frightened of their nakedness together—showing how she has been culturally conditioned by dominant heteronormative culture

(75). In this way, Verlia becomes the terrorist figure, one that is improperly racialized and perversely sexualized and one to be destroyed by the United States military during the revolution in Grenada.

Though Brand never directly names the island where the novel's revolution takes place, critics have identified it as the Grenadian revolution which took place on October 19, 1983, Grenada's "Bloody Wednesday."^{xxxiv} However, as Corr notes, "Brand's novel deviates from historical accounts of Grenada's socialist demise by slightly disrupting the temporality of events." Brand stretches out the events of that day over a few days in the novel, created a kind of "temporal distortion" within the text itself (124). By doing so, she provides opportunities for her characters to also distort dominant temporalities. It is at this point in the text that Verlia fully embodies the queer terrorist assemblage, casting away centuries of signifying practices in order to exist in a temporality that is constantly and rapidly moving between the past, the present, and the future, creating what I argue is a moment of queer time that resists historicism and chrononormativity. While fighting to turn the plantations in Grenada into cooperatives and to organize the people for revolution, Verlia becomes involved in a United States military attack on the few scattered "comrades" attempting to overthrow the government. The comrades are hiding in a cemetery without weapons to compete with the superpower. While recalling the attack, Elizete describes Verlia as being the person "whose speed she loved, who was all liquid [and who] leap[ed] into another life [as] the Yankees crack the air, crack it wide open with plane and helicopter" (113 and 115). Once the Yankees begin firing at Verlia, they chase her until she has no choice but to run off the edge of a cliff. According to

Elizete, the “cliff opened like a door,” and Verlia’s speed allows her to fly away (112).

Elizete recalls,

Verlia in flight. [...] One minute I see her standing there on the edge of the cliff and the minute I turn my head she was gone. She was always hard to hold on to, always she would leave me in the middle of a conversation or in the middle of a word... She would move so fast to the junction she would vanish. She would slip into air quick, quick any time I turn to meet her. She never learn to take the world as it is. She never want to make do with what there was. (23)

Verlia’s quickness entails that she embodies queer time—a temporality that moves so quickly that others cannot keep up nor understand her. Thus, I argue that the ending of the novel should be read metaphorically, as Verlia’s queer, quick time allows her to leap and fly away from the world as she knows it. This flight references the historical traumas of slavery, as Verlia resembles Elizete’s slave ancestor, Adela, who “climb up the silk cotton tree up there and fly all the way back to Africa” (23). Aligning Verlia’s flight off of the cliff in the face of neoliberal hegemony, as represented by the U.S. military, Brand creates a queer assemblage that harkens back to the flying Africans during slavery.

Verlia’s last stand “embodies the thousands of injustices imposed on thousands of bodies [in the present] and forms continuity with the countless injustices imposed on countless black and indigenous bodies in centuries before” (Corr 125). Furthermore, her leap off of the cliff projects Verlia, along with her revolutionary ideals, into the limitless future where infinite possibilities for queer resistance reside. Her flight “insists that the body is not merely a passive site upon which history is inscribed or across which signifying acts

play out, but is a living source of hope for an anti-racist, anti-capitalist politics” (Corr 114). As a terrorist assemblage, Verlia is “a cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity,” one that disrupts chrononormativity and “Western” historicism and allows us to consider new ways of viewing the political and the public sphere (Puar 222). By referencing the past and the future in the present moment of her leap, Verlia’s character offers up a queer temporality that allows for slips in teleological time, as she is no longer grounded by dominant temporalities and histories.

“She Who Name I”

While Verlia is associated with speed, flight, and the temporally queer assemblage, Elizete is consistently aligned with the ground, with slowness, and with repetition. In this way, both women disrupt neoliberal notions of progressive, historicist temporality. As Verlia remarks, “Elizete, you is bigger than me by millennia and you can hold me between your legs like rock hold water,” commenting on Elizete’s association with slow, or still, time (5). Indeed, if we imagine Verlia being associated with air and water, as she leaps off of the cliff and into the sea below, we can imagine Elizete as the earth, slowly turning in repeating cycles. However, unlike Verlia, who grows up waiting for action to be taken and for her life to begin, Elizete grows up on a Caribbean island (Grenada) where time is cyclical, and where the same ways of living and dying in the world have been repeated since slavery. The same hard labor, patriarchy, violence,

capitalist exploitation, and captivity exists in Elizete's time as it did for her slave ancestors. Thus, she states,

I was born to clean Isaiah' house and work cane since I was a child and... Isaiah feed me and all I have to do is lay down under him in the night and work the cane in the day. [...] All it have for a woman to do is lie down and let a man beat against she body, and work cane and chop up she foot and make children and choke on the dryness in she chest and have only one road in and the same road out and know that she tied to the ground and can never lift up. (4)

This life is a replica of the life of her ancestors who were once slaves on the island, and Elizete can trace her lineage to her "great-great-great-ma," Adela, who was one of the first slaves captured from Africa. Indeed, the people of Elizete's village in Grenada even perceive their dead relatives existing as spirits in the present, as they continue to repeat their ancestors' pasts in the present. Brand writes, "So they saw everything. Heard everything, abandoned distance, abandoned time and saw everything. They saw nothing could be done. That is how they lived with the dead. [...] They lived in the past or had no past but a present that was filled, peopled with the past" (43 and 44). Elizete's people thus exist in cyclical time that disrupts dominant notions of teleology but, nevertheless, does not challenge neo-colonialism, imperialism, heteronormativity, or capitalistic exploitation. Instead, they work the land and submit their bodies to their overseer, as if they were still slaves.

However, while the people around her continue to repeat time without changing it, Elizete is able to create change and resistance within this repetition through the process

of naming. Elizete, like her people, sees Adela's spirit existing in the present, and she conjures Adela's memory in her everyday life. She states that when Adela was forced onto a ship that brought her to Grenada, she forced herself to forget her past life in Africa. Brand writes, "Cool, cool it slip her memory and just vanish," which allowed Adela to survive her horrific experiences as a slave. Upon arriving at Grenada, Adela "decide that this place was not nowhere and is so she call it. Nowhere. [...] A caul draw over her eyes. Whatever [the white men] bless on she curse. And that was she inheritance" (18 and 19). In this way, Elizete articulates her past as a struggle between remembering and forgetting—between what should be taken from the past and what should be carried into the future. Adela decides to forget the past—she has even forgotten her original name—and thus prevents her children, who are the result of rape and whom she tries to abort, from knowing the white man's culture and what they did to her and her fellow Africans (35). Though Adela's "voice hover[s] on their hot cold lips," and is constantly a part of their present, Elizete states that it is "she who name I [and] she forget" (37). In this declaration, Elizete explains that she is the bearer of Adela's legacy, and this legacy, which results from the trauma of slavery, is one of unnamings, not knowing, and forgetting. However, Elizete, caught in the repetition of history, is able to change it by actively naming the things around her. But instead of repeating the names of white, European culture, she supplies her own. Elizete states,

...All I could think was how the names of things would make this place beautiful. I dreaming up names all the time for Adela' things. [...] Tear up cloth flowers, stinking fruit tree, draw blood bush, monkey face flowers, hardback swamp fish.

I determine to please she and recall. Slippery throat peas, wet sea fern... I say to myself that if I say these names for Adela it might bring back she memory of herself and she true name. (24)

Existing in cyclical time, where the traumas of slavery keep repeating, Elizete attempts to break free by claiming her world, through naming, for herself and her ancestors. Like Chakrabarty's example of "the peasant," which is not an individual or a collective but a figure that represents a whole set of marginalized communities, Elizete tries to erupt into the historicist present. As Brand states in an interview, "I gave that poetic Black language to Elizete [a peasant character] from the beginning... [She] has developed an [original] speech through which to speak her life" (Olbey 91). By doing this, Elizete maintains the temporal repetition, but she queers it by making it unknown and unrecognizable to dominant culture through the process of naming. As Huebener states, "Naming is a vocalizing of belonging, an incorporating of the named into one's life story, a making explicit of a particular connection. [...] A familial relation with her surroundings turns Elizete into what Adela was not: a named, seeing, feeling person with a sense of relatedness and belonging [in the present moment]" (618, 619). Naming is how Elizete erupts into what Chakrabarty refers to as the "now" of history. Thus, Elizete has the first voice in the novel, and she uses it to construct the world anew, through naming, in a cyclical temporality. In this way, Elizete is a "discursive agent for [new] Caribbean public spheres," as she challenges dominant epistemologies and discursively creates a public sphere, as she meets Verlia and travels abroad to Canada, which is "marginalized from...and thus opposed to the true centers of power" (Dalleo 2 and 4).

Naming allows Elizete to claim a place within historicist history, albeit a place of resistance, critique, and, ultimately, creation.

“Ghostly, Ghostly this Hope”

After Verlia’s leap off of the cliff and into the water below, Elizete travels to Toronto as an illegal immigrant, attempting to recapture some of her lost lover. While there, she struggles to survive and is prevented from national belonging and citizenship in the neoliberal state due to her race and geographical homeland. She is described as feeling “crazy, without a country” (109), and she lives near the Canadian National railroad and a donut shop, across from the mall and a hotel called Gladstone (46). She is homeless and has become familiar with prostitution (47). Each day she travels the city, looking for signs of Verlia, and “each day it would take her longer to find her way back to the mall” (53). In this way, Elizete exists in what Jack Halberstam refers to as “queer time,” an alternative temporality that “lies outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2). Queer time makes clear “how respectability and notions of the normal [are] upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality,” which is “organized according to the logic of capital accumulation” (Halberstam 4 and 7). People who live in queer time “are limned by risks they are willing to take... those people who live without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs, outside of organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else” (10). Elizete is unconcerned about her own safety, longevity, capital accumulation or lack thereof, and

any markers of chrononormativity. As Brand states, “She was working the edges. [...] She’d landed in this maze of streets behind the mall, passing by, passing all the houses where something was going on, a life, a regular beat, a gospel she had not learned” (49). Instead, Elizete collects the goods and commodities that white culture wastes from the garbage (48); she lives, ironically, in a mall, and she remains in Canada illegally. In this way, she exists in queer time, outside of neoliberal chronobiopolitics.

Like Elizete, there are many other illegal immigrants who haunt the streets of Toronto, living in the edges, outside of chronobiopolitics, as “she live[s] in one pocket of this city among a people eventually accepting themselves as odd” (96). Brand pays particular attention to the struggles of female illegal immigrants who are consistently subjected to the patriarchal order. In this way, the novel shows how Elizete, though she occupies queer time, remains within a cyclical temporality, as her life as an illegal immigrant in Canada contains very similar hardships to her life in the cane fields of Grenada. Elizete is raped by her employer, an act that she can do nothing about given that her illegal status entails her lack of individual freedom and the right to legal redress (89). The illegal immigrant women allow themselves to “let that belly grow,” in order to get their “papers” that confirm their right to be in the nation of Canada, reminding readers of the papers that slaves were meant to carry at all times. As Brand proclaims, “‘Immigration!’ What a word. That word could kill, oui. That word could make a woman lay down with she legs wide open and she mind shut” (80). They have sex with immigration officers in order to gain some safety and protection from the law. Furthermore, Elizete’s experience in Toronto mirrors the tales of the flying Africans who

once escaped, like Verlia, the pains of exploitative colonialism, capitalism, and slavery. However, these tales are perverted in Toronto, as the reader witnesses Afro-Caribbeans leaping and flying from the windows of buildings when faced with immigration officers. One illegal woman tells Elizete the story of how she leapt out of a window and lost her baby when immigration came. She states, “Somebody shout ‘Immigration!’...Me and my belly take off...Miryam and me fly out window the same time. Glass chipping like ice, sticking to we flesh. ...What is a window in front of that word. ...Miryam was asleep anyway so she didn’t feel the bone come through the skin when we drop.... Glass, broken white bone and tear up skin and me with blood between my legs” (80-81). Like the flying Africans during the time of slavery, and like Verlia’s flight off of the cliff, these women leap out of the window to escape their oppressors. In this way, they exhibit a cyclical time where the lived existence of African and Afro-Caribbean women is filled with the same traumas and hardships as their slave ancestors.

Thus, Elizete is surrounded by people who do not exist in accordance with dominant culture and chronobiopolitics; as an illegal immigrant she is outside the regulatory mechanisms of life and death. Brand writes, “They’re not here! By the time they walked these streets they were scraps and bits, shavings. Already their stories were becoming lies because nobody wanted to listen, nobody had the time” (60). Existing in queer time, outside of the dominant order, the illegals cannot be recognized. Instead, they exist as spirits who haunt the nation-state, just as the spirits of the slave ancestors haunt the cane fields in Grenada. “Thus we need to simultaneously recognize the present black body, traumatized and creatively surviving, even while we must recover those...

submerged, and transformed corpi who haunt and destabilize the Enlightenment with its narrow rationalism and troubling spatial and temporal sequestration” (Young 4). Indeed, Brand’s illegal immigrants “thought that the time would come when they would live, they would get a chance to be what they saw, that was part of the hope that kept them. But ghostly, ghostly this hope, sucking their jaws into lemon seed...” (59). These illegal immigrants are living in queer time, haunting capital. Brand thus pushes notions of queer time into a liminal space—a space that cannot be concretized or actualized because it is between life and death. Different from Freeman’s conception of the abjected and melancholic queer body, Brand’s immigrants institute a hopeful and bittersweet haunting that exists in between the boundaries of life and death. In this way, they allow for the articulation of new counter-publics that exist outside of national belonging, citizenship, teleological time, and historicist temporality, and they allow us opportunity to articulate a public that exists in queer time, working the edges and haunting neoliberal chronobiopolitics.

Memory Mambo

In her novel *Memory Mambo*, Achy Obejas plays with a similar rewriting of time, historicism, and teleological progress, by providing the reader with multiple accounts of events that happened in the past, thus showing that history and cultural memory are never set in stone as individual units moving through time, but are up for debate, questioning, and retelling. Obejas tells the story of a Cuban family who fled their native country for the United States once the Cuban Revolution began. However, no one in the

protagonist's, Juani Casas's, family can agree on their collective history. While Juani, who was brought up in the United States, searches for an accurate account of what really happened, her Cuban family's cultural memory remains uncertain and in flux. As Juani laments, "Everybody in our family's a liar...Memory mambo...One step forward, two steps back" (194). I argue that Obejas, like Chakrabarty, presents us with a narrative that both critiques historicism and acknowledges its usefulness in our contemporary culture. By doing so, she allows us to remain critical of teleological, progressive time, while admitting that, because of colonialism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, such temporality is part of our everyday existence.

In an example of the Casas family challenging historicist temporality, much like Verlia does when she creates her past out of newspaper and magazine clippings from the Black Power Movement, Juani's father narrates his experience traveling to the United States with his wife as part of the Cuban diaspora, through his relation to duct tape, which he claims to have invented. According to her father, it was "the great tragedy of his life because, if the Americans hadn't stolen it out from under him, he'd have been rich, and we'd have been much happier [instead of] running the Wash-N-Dry Laundry/Lavanderia Wash-N-Dry in Chicago" (24). While Juani's father brags about his inventiveness and ingeniousness at having created the formula for such a strong adhesive, this self-congratulation hides his personal insecurities about having left Cuba as "the son of one of Havana's oldest and most prosperous families" in order to run a Laundromat in the United States. His claim that the American CIA stole his idea reveals his animosity towards his new country, which includes his inability to acquire wealth and standing; the

racism that pervades, which is embodied by Juani's mother who closely monitors the skin color of every family member, as she, very problematically, wants her "kids to be colorless and beautiful); and his inability to return to his homeland (32). For these reasons, her father's story changes with every telling, depending on his audience and his mood at the time (29). However, each telling ends with the lament, "If only the *yanquis* had not stolen my formula," which allows Juani's father to articulate, in the form of a family fable, the hardships that he has had to endure as a Cuban diasporic subject in the United States. Juani inherits this kind of ambiguity surrounding historical events and cultural memory which, I argue, thrusts her into a queer temporality without a conception of historicist time. Individual events that occur in the past are up for retelling and reinterpretation for Juani, so that there is never a solid unit progressing through time. Instead, there is blurriness, lies, non-truths, imaginings, and denials that make up her and her family's history.

The one political identity that Juani adopts is that of "lesbian," or a female who sleeps with other females and adopts such a political identity in order to gain cultural and state recognition. She writes, "In this house of nostalgia and fear, of time warps and trivia, I'm the only one I know about for sure. I keep my own space, a journal, with the right dates, photographs with names and places written on the back. My lesbianism is not the cause of my alienation, but it's part of it" (79). By keeping track of emotions and events in her journal, Juani self-fashions her own version of history, similar to Verlia's placing newspaper clippings on her walls. Further, just as Verlia's relatives deny their oppression and attempt to blend into white culture, Juani's family forgets, improves, and

misremembers their cultural history. For this reason, both characters are left with scraps that they must piece together themselves, showing how cultural memory can be negotiated and recreated outside of the official historical record. For Juani, it is important to express her sexuality, even though it is culturally looked down upon and often violently suppressed both in Cuba and in the United States. Juani proclaims, “Even though I’m...in what is supposed to be the land of the free...every lover I’ve ever had has been closeted, has always instantly looked over her shoulder when we’ve kissed on a street corner or train station platform,” just like Juani’s cousin, Titi, who is a lesbian in Cuba, is taught that, as such, she is “not allowed to love” (76 and 75). Thus, Juani adopts a lesbian political identity in order to gain control over time and historical memory and to give voice to her sense of alienation within her family and culture. This is, again, similar to Verlia’s adopting the revolutionary political identity and creating her own history based on African American resistance. Both protagonists thus challenge dominant notions of history and cultural memory and demonstrate how an individual can begin to create a new sense of belonging, including different political identities, based upon their piecing together history’s scraps.

However, Obejas uses Juani’s adamant political stance as a “lesbian” to further critique Western historicism and teleological time, as her lesbianism represents an identity borrowed from middle class, white neoliberal culture in the United States. Obejas provides foils to Juani’s character, who force the reader to see the flaws of her decidedly lesbian political identity. One such character is Gina, Juani’s girlfriend, who is a “fierce Puerto Rican *independentista*” and is politically involved in the Puerto Rican

independence movement in the United States. In Gina's eyes, if a person is going to adopt a political identity, it should be to overthrow the neocolonial power and not to join ranks with white, middle class U.S. citizens who seek state-based rights. Gina states, "That's so white, this whole business of *sexual identity*...But you Cubans, you think you're white" (78). However, Obejas shows Gina's own flaws, in that she is closeted within the movement and will not acknowledge her sexual relationship with Juani in front of her fellow *independenistas*. In this way, Obejas reveals the flaws of any kind of political identity, while also providing examples for their importance, in what Edward Said would call a "contrapuntal critique," two different forms of critique mutually intertwined and building off of each other. By making Gina a Puerto Rican nationalist, Obejas draws a parallel between the Cuban revolution, which brought Juani's family to the United States, as they sided with the American government and the Cuban upper class, and contemporary events in Puerto Rico. The difference between the two women draws attention to the differences in diaspora, showing how not all members of diaspora are the same. Juani's upper class family willingly leaves their homeland to reside within the neocolonial power due to the national revolution in Cuba, while Gina is confined within the imperial power, fighting it from within, in order to instill a national revolution in Puerto Rico. This difference creates tension between the two women, as Gina is actively seeking to overthrow the imperial power in Puerto Rico, and Juani tries to gain recognition from her family and culture so that they will accept the people she loves. However, both character's political identities remain inherently flawed within the novel,

so that their stability is always in question. This allows the reader to see them as un-fixed and potentially unmoored from historicist time.

Juani's other foil in the novel is the hyper-masculine, heteronormative and homophobic, Jimmy, the husband of Juani's cousin, Caridad. Jimmy, as Juani's foil, demonstrates one negative possibility of what can happen when a person embodies a heteronormative and homophobic identity position—they can become harmful and inherently violent. Jimmy encourages Juani to lie, misconstrue, and forget about historical events. For example, when Juani and her girlfriend, Gina, get into a fist-fight, Jimmy creates a story about a burglar who attacked the two women, in order to allow Juani to save face. The fabricated story takes on a life of its own, until Juani herself becomes confused about what actually happened. Juani even writes Jimmy's lies in her personal journal, confusing the truth of what happened with his tall tales. In this way, Jimmy's fabrication takes agency and focus away from Juani and Gina, and the burglar story Jimmy concocts becomes more important than the fight between the two women. Thus, Jimmy is successful in distracting the women in their quest for self understanding and in their political struggles. Juani remarks, "Every time I began to jot down my story, it got confused with Jimmy's mess. I'd be right at the place where I hit Gina when suddenly, I'd look down at the page in horror: *And then the guy grabbed the chair and hit Gina in the back...* But I knew that wasn't what happened! *Or was it?*" (173). By ignoring the accuracy in their retelling of the past, Jimmy and Juani lie to their friends and family until they are not even sure what happened, thus shifting the responsibility for the violence away from the two women and onto an illusory third party. This lying about

the past creates such turmoil in Juani's mind, that she states, "I just don't know who or what to believe...ever" (182), and she is sickened by her capacity to lie to her family (195). It isn't until she tells the truth about the event and confronts Gina that she is able to gain a bit of peace. Juani states,

This is always my problem: These overwhelming feelings, this contained madness; to accept, for example, what just happened with Gina, but without accepting it. What I mean is this: to accept *enough*, to accept so as to make everyday existence bearable...And then to not accept—how could I accept this madness? To accept it, I think is to lose hope. (233)

Through her interactions with Gina and her experience with Jimmy, Juani realizes that lying to herself and others about historicist events can create strain in relationships and personal unrest. Thus, I argue, Obejas suggests through Juani's actions, that we accept historicism and historicist time *enough* while remaining critical, questioning the ways in which this time binds us. Juani thus deliberates about two levels of acceptance: the acceptance of certain violence and oppression as the grim reality she and Gina face, and the acceptance that such violence and oppression is naturalized and a matter of course. Ultimately, she refuses to fully accept the latter, and thus maintains her hope. Therefore, Obeja's offers a temporality that is tied to a linear or progressive logic — the logic of nationalism and the logic of a break-in or burglary gone wrong and turning violent. It is

this progressive temporality that she attempts to challenge in her personal journal and that Juani continually confronts through other characters.

Not only does Jimmy, as a foil for Juani, challenge her perception of temporality and historical happenings, but he consistently challenges the sexual boundaries set in the novel until the climax, when he is found molesting a young child. In this way, Obejas shows how if Juani chooses to ignore the pulls of all identity categories, and to float along without any sense of historicist time, where the details of what happened can never be confirmed, she may become a destructive, harmful person, like Jimmy. Though Juani has proclaimed herself a lesbian, and she adopts this political identity, she is repeatedly sexually aroused by Jimmy's flirtations along with his suggestively violent sexual advances. Jimmy's machismo allows him to, on the one hand, forbid his wife Caridad from associating with Juani and her "dyke" friends, and, on the other hand, to aggressively approach Juani in an overtly sexual manner throughout the entirety of the novel. Juani states, "I've never told Caridad this but that first time she left [me and Jimmy] alone in the living room at her parents' house, those twenty minutes it took her to get dressed and get her make-up on, Jimmy just sat there on the couch and stared at me, his legs wide open, his hand rubbing his dick until it was practically jumping out of his pants" (19). Though Juani proclaims her disgust to Jimmy's face, in reality she is turned on by their interactions, as she states, "I went home that night and got off a dozen or so times just playing that scene over and over in my head" (20). In this way, Obejas forces the reader to question Juani's adoption of a lesbian sexual identity, or to perceive such political identities as being permeable, as throughout the novel Juani is sexually aroused

by Jimmy's seemingly offensive comments and lewd actions. However, at the same time that Obejas challenges our perception of sexual identities, she also warns against letting our sexual adventures go beyond socio-cultural boundaries. While at the beginning of the novel, Jimmy proclaims that Juani would "do anything," implying that she would have sex with anyone in any manner, by the end of the novel we see that this is not the case—that Juani's sexual identity does not allow her to condone sexual violence of any sort. Thus, when Juani sees Jimmy molesting the young Rosa, she denies him the kind of fabricated narrative that he provided for herself and Gina. Though Juani is tempted to make up a story to protect Jimmy, and she wonders, "maybe it's all in my head," she ultimately recognizes the importance of forcing oneself to identify what actually happened in the past (224). When Jimmy is caught in his violent act, Juani flees, allowing herself to also flee from Jimmy's harmful influence. She states, "I'm out of there, out of that furnace of all their passions and tempers, out of that sucking spiral to hell, out of their darkness and fire. As I run...I feel fresh, clean snow on my face" (226). In this way, Obejas shows that Jimmy's heteronormativity and his flaunting of his masculine sexual identity eventually lead to him molesting the little girl; this particular kind of sexual identity eventually becomes regressive. By denying Jimmy's hyper-heteronormative sexual identity, Juani is able to gain peace of mind and to absolve herself from Jimmy's violent behaviors. The infernal references of the quotation imply that Juani has succeeded in running away from progressive, linear time that brings us to a final end (in either heaven or hell)—the dominant temporality associated with Christianity's teleology. In this way, Juani exists in queer time, outside of the dominant

order, and outside of heteronormative destruction. Ultimately, she demonstrates that we must be willing to accept historicism, as it is a part of our everyday lives and what governs our mental states, but we must only accept it *enough*. As Chakrabarty states, we must at once see our indebtedness to Enlightenment theories of humanism, historicism, and the political, while also remaining critical. Juani escapes “out of there,” which, I argue, refers to the kind of temporal container that was holding her, much like Chakrabarty’s “waiting room of history.” By denying both heteronormativity and Jimmy’s version of historical events, Juani creates a temporal fluidity which she employs to reconfigure the constraints surrounding her.

Conclusion

The multiple temporalities and times-out-of-joint that Brand and Obejas offer present counter-publics, as represented by Verlia, Elizete, and Juani, that exist in opposition to the “centers of power, but at the same time... represent the hopes and aspirations... of the populace” (Dalleo 4). As Corr notes, “Considering the violence currently being performed upon other nations’ sovereignties, global grassroots protesters, and the very concepts of truth and responsibility in the context of the American War on Terror, it might be argued that [such a] critique of [dominant temporalities] and of self-serving American global policing signifies with even more importance today than when [the novels were] published” (125). Indeed, Verlia’s queer terrorist assemblage, Elizete’s earthly repetition, and Juani’s challenge to stable identities provide us with new ways of imagining queer temporalities outside of chronobiopolitics and ways of transforming

historicist notions of the past, the present, and the future for the benefit of the “peasant” figure. By traversing the spaces between Grenada, Toronto, Cuba, and the United States, the novels are truly geopolitical, as they “align desire and affect with political struggle against racism, imperialism, and patriarchy while mapping both love and politics onto the physical geography of the Americas” (Mullins 1100). In this way, both novels create new public spheres that are “counter-public[s] marginalized from and thus opposed to (rather than a legitimizing check upon) the true centers of power,” that also serve to provide a basis from which to conceptualize new ways of being in the world outside of neoliberal hegemony.

Conclusion

In my discussion of new public spheres, new articulations of “queer,” and new possibilities for resisting the neoliberal trend, I have shown the ability of literature to affect politics, as the “written word can create a community...formed only by the random circulation of the written word” (Rancière 14). As Rancière states, works of art, including literature, are inherently involved in politics through a “distribution of the sensible,” which “create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (9). Queer Caribbean diasporic literature, by writers living and publishing in the United States and Canada, offers us new ways of conceptualizing queerness, political subjectivity, and community. It is because the “battle[s] fought yesterday over the promises of emancipation and the illusions and disillusion of history continues today on aesthetic terrain” that I turn to literature as a guide which can open up the world for us and teach us new ways of living, loving, and knowing (Rancière 9).

This quest is particularly pertinent today, as we see the neoliberal world order consume all aspects of our public and private endeavors, bringing our cultural activities under the rule of the capitalist market. Indeed, “the structuring force of neoliberalism produces an emphasis on culture (a non-competitive market niche), yet also provides the hegemonic model of what counts as culture; that which is remembered and recalled by consumers as appropriate and legitimate to a region, is shaped by both global factors and local history or tradition” (Scher 8-9). This is particularly true when it comes to Caribbean traditions brought to the United States and Canada as part of the diaspora. Many cultural artifacts and traditions, especially those that might resist the dominant

order, are co-opted and consumed by capitalist forces and forced into a white, hetero/homo-normative model that support that neoliberal state. As Duggan states, “The construction of neoliberal politics and policy in the U.S. has relied on identity and cultural politics. The politics of race, both overt and covert, have been particularly central to the entire [neoliberal] project [and] the politics of gender and sexuality have intersected with race and class politics at each stage as well” (xii). It has thus been my intention to resurrect the revolutionary power of these fictional works in order to unleash their awesome potential for radical change. This potential can be found in the new public spheres that such literary texts engender.

An important reason for conceptualizing new public spheres is to think beyond the prescribed neoliberal notion of individual rights and prosperity. As Dean Spade argues, organizations seeking state-based rights feed right into the neoliberal system of promising individual freedoms while ignoring social equality at large. Indeed, “by focusing on [individual rights] rather than on the creation or recreation of substantive and open democratic governance structures, the opposition cultivates methods that cannot escape the neoliberal frame. Neoliberal concern for the individual trumps any social democratic concern for equality, democracy, and social solidarities” (Harvey 176). This means that any change that takes place must occur not on the individual level, and not through state-based rights, but through coalitional, social movements—through the conceptualization of new public spheres where “public debate and community building might be located” (Dalleo 2). As a sense of “political depression” has plagued the United States since 9/11 and the initiation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been

“the sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or make us feel better” (Cvetkovich 1). For this reason alone, we might turn to literature to provide openings where we can envision how social relations and political practices might otherwise be constructed and performed. We see a turn to social movements that work to dismantle the system as a whole in the Occupy Movement which has grown in the United States and around the world. We also see it in transgender activists, who continue to challenge hetero and homo-normativities and the concepts of either/or political identities that can ultimately be consumed by the neoliberal state. Both politics and aesthetics are involved in reframing material, social, and symbolic spaces. As Rancière states, they are “two forms of distribution of the sensible” through which subjects may engage with power and intervene in its configuration” (26). Examining literature for new possibilities allows us to continue our pursuits for social equality outside of the neoliberal world order.

Queer Caribbean diasporic literature creates connections between North America and the Caribbean, showing us how neoliberalism picks up where colonialism left off, especially regarding matters of political identity, race, gender, and sexuality, making it so that “not every *body* can be a citizen” (Alexander 1). We see through such literature how “notions of sexuality are deeply inflected by colonial and imperial inheritances that have framed [neoliberalism’s] discourses and silences and continue to inform, more or less, the structures of feeling of a region’s people” (Smith 2). By examining the ways that race, gender, and sexuality intersect, overlap, and contradict in fictional works, we can begin to articulate new subjectivities that elude the neoliberal state and new queernesses that

cannot be co-opted by homonationalism and the capitalist marketplace. Edouard Glissant makes a very timely observation in *Caribbean Discourse* regarding the United States' neoliberal dominance, when he writes, "Today colonial domination no longer needs the support of a heroic ideology (the ideal of the "Motherland," etc.). It is content to control through a passive consumerism and demonstrate its inevitability" (88). It is this such inevitability that must be questioned, critiqued, challenged, and ultimately "queered" in a quest for social equality, and we might begin by focusing on the aesthetic productions from queer Caribbean diasporas.

Notes

Introduction

ⁱ See Harvey, Eng, and Spade for examples.

ⁱⁱ See theorists in critical ethnic studies, indigenous studies, and postcolonial studies such as Driskoll et. al., Eng, Muñoz, Morgensen, Puar, and Reddy for examples. Major interdisciplinary contributions have been the collections, *Post-Colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, edited by John C. Hawley (2001) and *Queer Diasporas*, edited by Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler (2000), along with Dennis Altman's critical text, *Global Sex* (2001).

Chapter 1

ⁱⁱⁱ James is a member of the Caribbean diaspora who was born in Jamaica and currently lives and publishes in the United States. Mootoo, however, is a member of the Trinidadian diaspora who lives and publishes in Toronto, Canada. My argument recontextualizes Mootoo's work from its place within Anglophone Caribbean writing from two former English colonies (Trinidad and Tobago and Canada) and, instead, focuses on how her writing challenges the United States's contemporary neocolonialism, imperialism, and neoliberal hegemony. Alongside England, the United States has had a profound investment in Trinidad and Tobago since they forcefully claimed a base in 1962, which was considered a "colonial imposition" ("Uncle Sam"). As their leading partner in trade, the United States currently receives 44% of their yearly total exports which are predominantly crude oil, natural gas, and petrochemicals; it supplies Trinidad and Tobago with 38% of their total imports (mostly in machinery, manufactured goods, and agricultural products); and it has a key investment in their political stability and economic functioning ("Background Notes").

Similar to Trinidad, Jamaica is also heavily influenced by the United States economically, in that the U.S. is currently Jamaica's most important trade partner, with \$2 billion of bilateral trade occurring in 2005. There are over 80 U.S. firms that operate in Jamaica and have over \$3 billion in annual revenues (U.S.). The history of Jamaican politics is also heavily influenced by the United States, specifically regarding the election of Michael Manley, who attempted to institute a democratic-socialism within the nation, but was pressured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), lead by the U.S., to adopt neoliberal policies based on the elimination of welfare programs and the privatization of the public sector, amongst other things, costing him a consecutive term. According to Thomas J. D'Agostino, "[The case of Jamaica reveals] the lack of real autonomy for Caribbean political leaders who, despite domestic political considerations, are compelled to follow strict policy guidelines in order to qualify for desperately needed funds. With little to no choice but to accept the loan conditions, [Manley] carried out austerity programs and suffered the political consequences. This also points to the extent to which the leaders of Caribbean countries located within the U.S. sphere of influence are subjected to external pressures" (118).

Furthermore, according to Denis Conway, who chronicles the Caribbean diaspora in the United States, the 1990/1991 population of Trinidadians living in New York City was 1,236,000, while the number of Jamaicans was 2,366,000 (349). Conway states that "the Caribbean's many diasporas have matured and evolved to become embedded multilocal networks in which an adherence to one national identity is less adaptable than a transnational identity," one of which is being a United States citizen or resident is one (351).

^{iv} Though Said's text has been the object of many critiques, criticisms, and adaptations (See Ahmad, Boone, Brennan, Chari, Clifford, Goldie, Lewis, and Porter), the usefulness of the theory

as outlined above is immense in the context of increasing globalization, transnational imperialism and neocolonialism. Perhaps one of the more insightful critiques of Said is given by James Clifford in a section of his 1988 critical text, *The Predicament of Culture*. In the chapter entitled “On *Orientalism*,” Clifford takes issue with various methodological techniques used in Said’s work, such as the fact that Said never concretely defines “Orientalism,” but qualifies and designates it from a variety of distinct and not always compatible standpoints; that Said’s arguments often mimic the essentializing discourse that it attacks; that there is no developed definition of culture; and that Said’s use of Foucault is limited and reductionist, to name a few (259, 262-263, 266-270). However, Clifford also touches upon what appears to be the most essential contribution to *Orientalism* as a theory. In light of globalization, Clifford states that “when we speak of the West, we are usually referring to a force—technological, economic, political—no longer radiating in any simple way from a discrete geographical or cultural center” (272). Furthermore, “Personal and cultural identities are never given but must be negotiated,” according to Clifford, who closes his essay with a global perspective, stating that the norm of the twenty-first century is “a generalized condition of homelessness.” Clifford investigates how Said’s work can be employed in the future of globalization, and he concludes that the most useful way is to challenge and inquire about the strategic uses and limitations of cultural identities. Thus, he concludes his chapter by asking, “What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century, to speak... [of] a native land? What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity? What does it mean to write as a Palestinian? As an American? ...From what discrete set of cultural resources does any modern writer construct his or her discourse?” (273-276). Clifford poses these questions in reference to *Orientalism*’s contemporary usefulness as a theory as well as to the challenges that globalization brings to traditional conceptions of cultural identities.

^v I use the term “heterocolonial” to refer to the heteronormative, patriarchal system implemented by colonial authorities, and the ways in which sexuality is an inherent part of colonial and imperial domination. Much in the same way that the term “postcolonial” does not imply that the effects of colonialism no longer exist, despite the temporal prefix, the term “heterocolonial” carries through into the present time of imperialism/neocolonialism.

^{vi} This is not to say that the historical situation of slavery is equivalent to the sociopolitical and economic regimes in place under neoliberalism in the 20th and 21st centuries. My purpose is not to “refuse to examine the historical situatedness, rationalities, and realities,” but to disrupt the Orientalist archive and to imagine new possibilities for resistance and critique (Crichlow 12).

^{vii} In other words, I refer to *Orientalism* as an inherent part of dominant Western knowledge systems, including neoliberalism.

^{viii} Unlike slave plantations in the United States, there were relatively few white people in relation to blacks in Jamaica, and James adeptly portrays the consistently volatile state of the colony. He writes, “There be thirty-three negro for every white in Jamaica. And when most of them negroes be Ashanti, there goin’ be more hataclaps in the colony than in hell itself. 1702: Rebellion in the east county, not far from Montpelier. 1717: Twelve rebellion in the east and west, so much so that the king send more militia to the colony and they didn’t leave. 1722: Slave rebellion in Montego Bay so bad that the governor have to send for the Mosquito Indians to fight the negroes. By now, the negroes take to feeling to the hills and joining the Maroons. Maroon take residence and beat the British so much they turn fool. 1734: Rebellion. The backra sack Nanny Town. 1738: Rebellion. 1739: Rebellion. 1740: Rebellion. 1745: The plot to kill all whites. 1746:

Rebellion. 1771: Militia discover a new slave plot and find there be five hundred negroes plotting. 1777: Rebellion. 1782: Rebellion” (261).

^{ix} The term “octoroon” historically refers to people of mixed race, and implies that they had one eighth of a non-white race (usually African in the United States and Caribbean) in their blood. Such terms were generated to preserve and enhance white supremacy.

^x The Haitian Revolution was a slave revolt which lasted from 1791 to 1804, and ended in the founding of the first free slave republic.

^{xi} The League of Night Women consists of Homer, Hippolyta, Callisto, Gorgon, Pallas, and Iphigenia. Lilith initially rejects the group and its plotting, but keeps returning to their meetings and does not betray them to the white plantation owners.

^{xii} According to Maureen Warner Lewis, “An early religious practice in Jamaica was called *mayal* (commonly spelt “myal”). This involved possession and dance rituals, and was openly practiced during periods of severe economic or ecological crisis. First recorded in the 1760s, it “enacted a ritual of death and rebirth,” a symbol of the purification of the individual and society from forces of evil. One such force was obeah/obia or maleficent magical practices. It is possible that *mayal* derives from Koongo *mayaala*, “person or force exercising control.” Furthermore, it appears to resemble a Koongo religious ritual by which the *nganga* or traditional priest “root[s] our, challenge[s] and destroy[s] all those who engage in ...anti-social practices” including negative sorcery. It is instructive that, to our knowledge, since the seventeenth century there have been periodic widespread public revivals of *mayal* cleansing. The best known took place during 1860 and 1861, but it had occurred in 1760, in 1840 and resurfaced again in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (106).

^{xiii} For another example of how Orientalism can be employed in a discussion of different geographical settings, besides those of the “East” and Britain, France, and the United states, see Molloy.

^{xiv} It important to note here that not only does Trinidad and Tobago remain under the influence of U.S. hegemony, but that its own state practices are consistently homophobic in practice. As Wahab states, “Embodied homosexuality (as a site of power/knowledge) is offered up by the state-popular as a target through which to discipline sexual transgression and submerge discourse, thereby protecting the moral conditions that make viable the consensual life of postcolonial society [in Trinidad and Tobago]” (497).

^{xv} While noting that the geography in the novel is imaginary, my argument assumes that the island of Lantanacalara in the novel refers to Trinidad, that the Shivering Northern Wetlands refers to England, and that the different cultures presented are Indo-Trinidadian and British, based on historical referents in the novel (See Forbes).

^{xvi} This project is carried over to postcolonial nationalism. According to Hong, “Nationalism [in Trinidad] depends on the differentiation of Indian and African, in a manner that creates essentialist ‘ethnic’ identities based on the abjection of female and queer sexualities, whether African or Indian” (79). See also Alexander, Gopinath, and McClintock for more on heteropatriarchal nationalisms.

^{xvii} For example, Sarah Morton, the wife of Presbyterian missionary in Trinidad, John Morton, “in a tone of extreme disapproval, recorded her experiences with Indian women” by stating, “The loose actions and prevailing practices in respect of marriage here are quite shocking to the newcomer” (qtd. in Reddock 42-43). Both the knowledge about the Indo-Trinidadian and governing colonial institutions constructed the Indian laborers according to the Orientalizing view of the colonizer, as loose and morally bereft, while writings such as Morton’s initiated the creation of an archive of knowledge, which, according to Said, perpetuates Orientalism.

^{xviii} Mootoo does not mention any indigenous inhabitants of the island directly. Although Tyler is originally from Lantanacamara, his ethnicity is unspecified.

^{xix} Mary Condé also uses the term “willful ignorance” to refer to the community. She states that after Mala’s house burns down, the black cloud hovering over the community is the “visible metaphor for Paradise’s willful ignorance” (qtd. in Fox 5).

^{xx} See Gopinath, Puar, and Eng for more on heteronormative nationalist discourses.

^{xxi} See Dalley, Harris, Prevost and Weber, and Randall for more information regarding the history of U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean region.

^{xxii} Later in the novel the reader is presented with another form of colonial/capitalist domination over nature, when the policemen invading Mala’s garden want to cage and sell the rare peekoplat birds that nest in her trees. As this desire coincides with the destruction of the garden, Mala’s safe space, the reader is meant to distance themselves from the consuming, dominating ideology of colonialism that allows these men to desire capturing and selling these exquisite birds (187).

^{xxiii} In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon refers to the colonial elite as those who, after decolonization, conform to the institutions, politics, and economic practices left by the colonizer. This class thus perpetuates the oppression of the colonizer, though they were once the colonized.

^{xxiv} Many critics have also referred to Mala as “mad” or “insane,” thus reinforcing the Orientalist knowledge which, I argue, Mootoo purposefully exposes and deconstructs in the novel. This observation further proves how Orientalism, as a system of knowledge and power that can define and thus contain the “Other,” and the colonial closet are perpetuated (See Forbes, Fox, and Hong for examples).

^{xxv} Sarah Philips Casteel, Grace Kyungwon Hong, and Heather Smyth all refer to the garden as a utopic space. My argument disagrees with this reading.

^{xxvi} I use the term “queer” with the understanding that it originates in the “West” and, as Thomas Glave notes in a footnote to his essay “Whose Caribbean? An Allegory, in Part” (2005), the term may not always be employed cross-culturally to address those who are nonnormative (188). However, like Hong, I employ the term in the context of the Orientalist system that classified and categorized the colonial subject, so that “queer” is defined “as that which is in excess of categorization,” or in excess of what can be known by the dominant epistemology (97).

^{xxvii} See Boone and Chari for pertinent critiques of *Orientalism* regarding male-to-male sexual activity and sex tourism, and its complicity with Orientalism.

^{xxviii} See Glave for more on naturalizing queerness in the Caribbean region.

^{xxix} See Alexander and Gopinath.

^{xxx} Forbes states that the characters are denied a “return to innocence,” thus negating the possibility for utopia, in that “that possibility is suspended at the level of yearning, not only because the [cereus] blooms last for one night only, but because the moment of Mala’s most profound identification with this universe is also the most complete inscription of her absence from human society and the absence of human society from her” (135).

^{xxxi} Tyler first encounters the plant when he is in the Shivering Northern Wetlands, and it is familiar to him when he returns to the island (22); Mala’s cereus blossoms entrance the town and cover up the smell of rot and decay from her house (138); and Otoh and Ambrose use the plant clipping as a way to appeal to Mala’s sympathies and gain her friendship (22).

Chapter 2

^{xxxii} See Bennett, Bryant, Coole and Frost, Daston, and Dean. In the 21st century, many critics are rethinking the tradition of materialism, specifically that promoted by Aristotle and later by Kant.

According to Coole and Frost, common themes amongst new materialist theories in the humanities and sciences include a posthumanist concept of matter as exhibiting liveliness and agency and the reevaluation of human beings' relationships to the material world in light of biopolitics and global economics.

^{xxxiii} I follow Chen's definition of animacy, as she states that it has no single definition and thus remains a queer term. According to Chen, animacy is commonly understood as "a quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" (2). It is also a term that is dependent upon a person's cosmology, as some cosmologies perceive animacy in stones, animals, and other things that, in the Western tradition, are not obviously animate per say. The purpose of having animacy as an openly defined term is to broaden its meaning, question how it has traditionally been understood, and to "rewrite the conditions of intimacy, engendering different communalisms and revising biopolitical spheres, or, at least, how we might theorize them" (Chen 3).

^{xxxiv} For instance, he lists the ways in which disciplinary techniques combine with regulative methods: through the sexualization of children, the hysterization of women, birth controls, and the psychiatrization of perversions (*The History of Sexuality* 146-147).

^{xxxv} Puar wants to rethink queerness not as a binary or as part of individualized identity, which can be appropriated by the state, but as an assemblage, because, in the twenty-first century, queer and other sexual national subjects are folded into biopolitical management of life, and queerly racialized "terrorist populations" are folded out of life, out toward death.

^{xxxvi} For instance, Puar states that queer Arabs and Muslims are doubly indicted for the fundamentalist religion they adhere to, or escape from, and for the terrorist bodies that religion produces, and they are either liberated or can only have an irrational, pathological sexuality or queerness.

^{xxxvii} While Glissant might refer to Cliff, Mootoo, and Rodriguez's portrayal of the land as "marvelous realism," I have purposefully avoided classifying the narratives as such in order to avoid categorizing them according to a particular genre. Instead, I intended to develop a queer, or perverse, reading of the texts in order to explore what they offer regarding new sexual encounters, new desires and intimacies, and new ways of approaching the boundaries between animate and inanimate, human, and objects. See Márquez's novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as an example of marvelous, or magical, realism.

^{xxxviii} Elizabeth Deloughrey argues that one cannot discuss the history of the Caribbean without incorporating the landscape and power, and she looks at how contemporary Caribbean writers Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua) and Olive Senior (Jamaica) discuss the natural world as that which is always already embedded within human subjectivity, culture, and history, as Glissant states (299). While this argument may seem to mirror my own, Deloughrey does not discuss queer intimacies, animate objects, or ways of desiring the land that resist traditional Western humanism. Instead, she focuses on the landscape's animacy in regards to its involvement in diaspora, power, and history, while arguing against the nature/culture binary. On the other hand, my intervention treats land not as territory but as landscape-lived experience, living space, and living bodies.

^{xxxix} The landscape as a fully animate character that stirs, satisfies, and produces human sexual desire is not a new idea, as it has served as the metaphorical basis for colonial conquest for centuries, and such relations between masculine conqueror and feminine landscapes are long lasting metaphors that persist to this day. Resisting this narrative, I argue that the three writers I examine rhetorically re-produce the land as a *true* character, and not as a metaphor.

^{xl} In this chapter, I borrow Pratt's use of the term "European" to mean "a network of literate Northern Europeans, mainly men from the lower levels of the aristocracy and the middle and upper levels of the bourgeoisie." I also adopt her definition of "Nature" to mean "all regions and

ecosystems which were not dominated by ‘Europeans,’ while including many regions of the geographical entity known as Europe” (37).

^{xli} The first five categories that Pratt lists are as follows:

- a Wild Man. Four-footed, mute, hairy.
- b American. Copper-colored, choleric, erect. Hair black, straight, thick; nostrils wide; face harsh; beard scanty; obstinate, content, free. Paints himself with fine red lines. Regulated by customs.
- c European. Fair, sanguine, brawny; hair yellow, brown, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by laws.
- d Asiatic. Sooty, melancholy, rigid. Hair black; eyes dark; severe, haughty, covetous. Covered with loose garments. Governed by opinions.
- e African. Black, phlegmatic, relaxed. Hair black, frizzled; skin silky; nose flat, lips tumid; crafty, indolent, negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice.

The final category is that of “monster” which includes dwarfs, giants, and “man-made” monsters, such as eunuchs (32).

^{xlii} Blood quantum rules are currently used to designate some Native American tribal memberships today, which has negative results regarding citizenship status and land ownership. These rules have also negatively affected and racialized other peoples, such as Asian Americans, specifically regarding their right to obtain U.S. citizenship status. See Hickman, Spruhan, and Villazor. Also see McClintock for a detailed account of how the middle class English male was “placed as the pinnacle of evolutionary hierarchy” (55).

^{xliii} While Viveka is clearly established as a gender queer character in the text, as she often feels like and pictures herself as male, I use the female pronoun to refer to her, as does Mootoo.

^{xliiv} It is in this section that Mootoo references the work of V.S. Naipaul and his portrayal of characters that are mimic men, and who are always on the boarder of colonizer and colonized. Indeed, at one point in the novel, Mootoo’s protagonist, Viveka, proclaims that she is becoming a Naipaul scholar (263).

^{xliv} This is not to say that Mootoo presents queer desire and subjectivity as not being able to survive while in Trinidad and, thus, glorifies the West as a place of safety and freedom. Indeed, the character Anick makes it very clear that she suffered discrimination because of her love affairs with women while living in France and Canada. She states, “French does not equal enlightenment... It does not mean freedom. Get that into your head. It would be easier for my parents if I married a man from Morocco, Algeria, or from Senegal or Trinidad, than if I choose to live with a woman” (346).

^{xlvi} Gayle Salamon elaborates on materialisms, stating that “our bodies are inextricably intertwined with both our selves and the worlds in which our bodies are situated,” and she considers Merleau-Ponty’s claim that “bodies become material only through relations with others” and explores “the consequences that this might have for theorizing transsubjectivity” (5). I see my argument in this section as being parallel to Salamon’s, in that I argue that the fruit, and the land, become animate when they are someone’s sexual object choice. This relationship that is

established can never be separated from the character's cultural positioning—in this case as a Filipina “dyke” residing in Toronto, Canada.

^{xlvii} Not only does the narrator come to Canada to be rich, as she states, but she also plans on showing off her monetary wealth upon returning to the Philippines. She states, “When I return home someday, I’ll be so rich all the women who trampled on me once, will line up to be taken to dinners in five-star hotels. To all the women who made me cry, I will have my sweet revenge. You made the wrong decisions. Ha. Ha. Ha” (110).

^{xlviii} Much work has yet to be done discussing the intersections between queer theory and postcolonial theory, and it is part of this project to expand upon this area. As William Spurlin states, it is a “problem that queer studies...have shown little interest in cross-cultural variations of the expression and representation of same-sex desire; homosexualities in non-western societies are, at best, imagined or invented through the imperialist gaze of Euroamerican queer identity politics, appropriated through the economies of the west, or, at worst, altogether ignored” (185).

^{xlix} Katrina Roen explores the particular issues that non-white, gender liminal subjects have when they identify primarily by their race or ethnicity, rather than by their gender. She suggests that “theorizing transgender and queer more specifically to address race, indigenoussness, and colonization might provide more discursive pathways for indigenous people struggling to live in gender liminal ways. For this purpose, it is vital to theorize queer so that it is more relevant and open to people for whom gender/sexuality identities come second to racial identities, and to theorize queer so that it is open to cross-cultural interpretations of the relationship between sexed embodiment and lived gender” (662).

^l This is not to say that produce and food consumption is outside of biopolitical regulation.

ⁱⁱ Stitt suggests that H/H’s decision to identify as female without undergoing a sex-change operation is a “rejection of the biological body” (68). However, Harriet clearly states that the only reason she has not had the operation, is that she simply cannot afford one. Cliff writes a conversation between Clare and Harriet:

“Harry?”

“Harriet, now, girlfriend...finally.”

“Then you have it done?”

“No, man. Cyaan afford it. Maybe when de revolution come...” (168)

Harriet desires to become physically female, which further aligns her with the nation and the land.

Chapter 3

ⁱⁱⁱ It is important to note that Sedgwick begins her essay “Queer and Now,” from which this quote was taken, with commentary about teen suicides, stating that “up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbian; that a third of lesbian and gay teenagers say they have attempted suicide; that minority queer adolescents are at even more extreme risk” (1). This important observation, made in 1991 and still relevant today, points to the fact that although there has been an increase in hate-crime legislation and gay and lesbian rights, there is still important critical work to be done in the personal realm, the everyday lived experiences of those who identify as queer in our homophobic culture.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ See Cvetkovich, Duggen, Eng, Freeman, Gopinath, Puar, Reddy, and Warner for examples.

^{lv} Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, calls what I refer to as homonationalism and neoliberal ideology in North America the “pedagogical” and “performative” aspects of postcolonial nationalism. In the chapter entitled “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the

Margins of the Modern Nation,” Bhabha defines the pedagogical as “people in an *a priori* historical presence” and the performative as the “people constructed in the performance of narrative, [and the nation’s] enunciatory present marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign” (299). He emphasizes the interstitial spaces where the “performative” aspects of national culture occur, in contrast to the “pedagogical” imperatives of state-sponsored (homo)nationalism and neoliberal governance. My argument parallels Bhabha’s in that I am looking at the personal and first-person narration as a space that lies between or in relative autonomy to the public and the private.

^{lv}In his recent book, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial*, Ralph Dalleo also adapts contemporary notions of private and public spheres, by arguing that there exists a Caribbean public sphere, “within which writers operate” that exists as both “material reality” and “imagined ideal” and which allows for writers to “imagine where public debate and community building might be located even as political, social, and economic realities circumscribe the range of possibilities available” (2). In this way, he adapts the neoliberal notion of the public sphere by establishing it as a space for imaginary production and community building with the power to supersede mundane reality and create a space for resistance and creation. Dalleo’s work is extremely important, and his goal mirrors my own, in that he articulates a creative reality outside of neoliberalism’s oppressive policies, specifically regarding members of the Caribbean diaspora.

^{lvi} See Altman, Arondekar, Gopinath, Hawley, and Patton.

^{lvii} The word *queer* will be used throughout this section as a verb and an adjective, while examining subjectivities in the two novels. By doing this, I hope to show how this word may be usefully employed to denote specific subjectivities that are essentially different than hetero-patriarchal subjectivities. My definition of the term comes from Tomas Glave, who footnotes in his essay, “Whose Caribbean? An Allegory in Part,” that “while the word *queer* also makes room for various behaviors and identities that would be viewed by many as unquestionably ‘non-heterosexual,’ it also includes behaviors often viewed as ‘subversive’ by many, such as that of ‘straight’ men who enjoy cross-dressing in their female partner’s undergarments, straight people’s use of body piercings, hair dyes, and tattoos, various or all sadomasochistic practices, same-gender participation in sexual fetishes by people whose sexual or romantic lives are otherwise ‘heterosexual,’ and so on.” However, despite this definition, it is important to note that Glave himself refrains from using the word *queer*, “because it is not yet in the Caribbean at large a word that has either been used much or considered for its potential” (188-189). I hope that this paper’s use of the word will refer to Lucy’s relationality as a diasporic subject—one that is both Caribbean *and* Western.

^{lviii} For critics who analyze the novel from a postcolonial and diasporic perspective, see Braziel, Ferguson, Hughes, Lima, Matos, Renk, Scott, Sugg, and Tiffin as examples. For Caribbean studies, see Decaires Narain; for Western feminism see Nichols; and for queer theory see Holcolmb and Thomas. For critics who focus mostly on the mother/daughter relationship, see Bouson, Davies, and Donnell as examples.

^{lix} See Da Costa.

^{lx} This is not to suggest that anyone who is paid for sex is female and anyone who pays for sex is male. Rather, I mean to invoke traditional gender characteristics of sexual power where the person dominated is read as feminine and the person who dominates is read as masculine.

^{lxi} Though Lucy’s mother tries to prevent her daughter from becoming “a slut,” there are moments

in the text that disrupt this puritanical ideology, such as when Annie instructs Lucy on how to induce a miscarriage (69).

^{lxii} For more on this strict, often abusive, gendered upbringing, see Kincaid's short piece, "Girl."

^{lxiii} However, these sexualities cannot be viewed as "indigenous" or "authentic," in that they are inherently connected to legacies of colonialism, global capitalism, and hetero-patriarchy. In his book *Global Sex* (2002), theorist Dennis Altman examines how globalization is changing the way that sexuality is conceptualized in various locales. He presents a comparative study of sexualities and how they are affected by global consumer/capitalist culture, while considering how global politics, "modernization," and "hegemonic masculinity" police deviant sexualities around the world. In order to disrupt these forces, Altman attempts to examine what he refers to as "the local regimes of gender and sexuality," and he wants to use "the traditional," indigenous conception of sexuality to inform his work. Thus, for Altman, there can be both "global gay formations" and "local homosexualities" in simultaneous existence, often interacting with each other. Anjali Arondekar critiques Altman for assuming that it is only Western global forces that disrupt "indigenous" sexualities, and she states that "indigenous greed, or alternative market space, or consumer culture" in non-Western societies could also disrupt traditional sexualities (247). However, both Altman and Arondekar assume that there is an indigenous sexuality that is breached by capital, whether it is Western capital or, as Arondekar states, "an alternative market space." This chapter recognizes that it is crucial to both Postcolonial and Queer Studies not to elide "the specificity of local cultures" in light of the "very 'globalness' of these discourses which tends to 'homogenize 'Third World' writings and privilege postcolonial texts which focus on culture and cultural difference in terms of which peak to a fashionably metropolitan hybridity" (Decaires Narain 497). However, the idea that there is a "local" (read *indigenous*) sexuality that exists prior to a disruption by global or alternative capital forces is highly problematic, in that it sets up the search for an "authentic" sexuality. Thus, I will interrogate the space of "the local" and the sexuality represented through the local, in order to disrupt notions of an indigenous, authentic sexuality that is structured around the West/non-West binary. By examining the first-person queer, I will show *when* first person articulations are queer in relation to U.S. neoliberalism, and *when* they are also queer in regards to the character's home culture.

^{lxiv} See Nichols.

^{lxv} It is important to note here that Lucy refers explicitly to romantic love with a man, and not to other, more platonic forms of love, like that between a mother and child. For example, she repeatedly states that she loves Mariah, who serves as a second mother to her, that she loves Mariah's child, Miriam, and that she longs to "love someone so much that I would die from it" (26, 53, and 164, respectively).

^{lxvi} The importance of considering masculinity as a trait of both biological men and women is expressed in more detail in Judith Halberstam's important critical book, *Female Masculinities*.

^{lxvii} Yunior states, "It might interest you that just as the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, LBJ launched an illegal invasion in the Dominican Republic (April 28, 1965). (Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq.) A Smashing military success for the U.S., and many of the same units and intelligence teams that took part in the 'democratization' of Santo Domingo were immediately shipped off to Saigon" (4).

^{lxviii} For Díaz's portrayal of race in *Oscar Wao*, see Kunsu. See Saldívar for a discussion of colonial difference. See Batista, Hanna, Miller, Patteson, Scott, and Wessells regarding the

novel's incorporation of a variety of genres and forms. For a political reading see Mahler, and for an insightful queer reading of the text, see Sáez.

^{lxi} In her reading of the novel, Elena Machado Sáez also aligns Oscar's queerness with sexuality. My argument will expand the possibilities for "queer" outside of sexuality and gender.

^{lxx} Morlocks are ape-like creatures said to be descended from human beings but which have developed into a different species entirely. They first appeared in H.G. Wells *The Time Machine* (1895) and have since made appearances in many science fiction works.

^{lxxi} It is important to note here that Oscar's gender does not remain queer in relation to his mother, Beli, who treats him better than his sister, Lola, because he is male. When Yunior provides us with Lola's perspective, she makes it clear that Beli's sympathies were always with her son. Yunior writes, "[Lola's] mother only cries over Oscar, her son" (208), making it clear where her favor lies.

^{lxxii} "Otaku" is a Japanese term for an excessive nerd, and it is used as a contemporary term of pride and self-identification in the United States to mean someone who likes Japanese animation.

^{lxxiii} Thus it would appear that other members of the diaspora are not cursed like Oscar, because they conform to neoliberal ideology, including its heteronormative standards.

^{lxxiv} Patteson also focuses on Díaz's claim that "his intention is to draw attention to 'the dangers of the single voice' (5). While Patteson avoids a queer reading of the text, he draws attention to the dictatorial behavior of both Yunior as narrator and Díaz as author.

^{lxxv} As Yunior states, "I thought *I* was into females, but no one, and I mean *no one*, was into them the way Oscar was" (173).

Chapter 4

^{lxxvi} For critics who directly address these matters, see Berlant, McClintock, Sheller and Smith.

^{lxxvii} For queer theorists who address matters of time, see Edelman, Freccero, Halberstam, Luciano, Muñoz, and Puar for examples.

^{lxxviii} Similarly, Caribbean theorist, Eduard Glissant, also addresses the "peasant's," or "Creole's" important role in Caribbean politics and the Caribbean's place in relation to what Glissant calls "History." According to his collection of political and cultural essays in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1992), History, understood as the hegemonic mode of historicism used by Europe since the Enlightenment, is a tool of dominance used by "the West" to control and subordinate colonized peoples. Like Chakrabarty and Said, Glissant does not refer to a specific geographical location of "The West," but instead refers to it as "a project" of colonial/imperial powers. Thus, Glissant views historicism as a theoretical tool created for the purpose of controlling non-European peoples. He argues that one should refer to the Caribbean not with a linear historical lens, but with an eye that can see "fissures," and "ruptures." History in the Caribbean, for Glissant, is one that is constantly troubled, broken, and disrupted, and he uses the forced insertion of the slave trade as an example for the pain, trauma, and fracturedness that characterizes the Caribbean. Thus, the language that is used by the Caribbean writer cannot be a language that exhibits a political identity that persists through time and space. Rather, the Creole Caribbean identity must be thought of "in relation," within the specific spatial and temporal site of writing, thus directly challenging European Enlightenment history and political modernity.

Likewise, Simon Gikandi, in his book *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992), looks at how Caribbean writers create modernity outside of European historicism. Gikandi states that Caribbean writers insert themselves into the "now" of history through "Creolization," a process in which they simultaneously inhabit the various cultures,

histories, and politics of the many peoples—Africans, Indians, indigenous peoples, Europeans, Asians—that make up the Caribbean as a specific locale. Creolization, for Gikandi, disrupts traditional notions of linear, progressive time by incorporating both European written and African oral traditions within writing, as the written tradition is closely associated with the temporally progressive Bildungsroman, or coming of age story, and the oral is associated with circular and spiritual times. Further, Gikandi states that Caribbean writers’ practice of Creolization allows for the harmonizing of distinct political groups that are traditionally structured around race and class, as the practice does not see people or histories as distinct, individual units, but as forces that overlap, connect, and intertwine, creating fissures and gaps in dominant European methods of thinking about history and the political. This kind of writing creates a “discourse of alterity” in which the writer directly removes themselves from hegemonic culture, thus establishing themselves as what Chakrabarty might call the subaltern—those who do not identify with the national elite, the bourgeoisie, and historicism. Creolization’s “discourse of alterity” thus allows the Creole to emerge within the “now” of political modernity, while remaining outside of hegemonic discourses.

^{lxxix} For critics who address the novel regarding its portrayal of postcolonial space and matters of place, see Garvey, Huebener and Brand, Luft, Smyth, and Visvis. For critics who address the non-normative portrayals of love and politics, see Mullins and Corr. For articles that read Brand in light of the neoslave narrative genre, see McCalum and Olbey.

^{lxxx} Mullins notes that Brand refuses to describe her female characters as “lesbian” or “bisexual” in order to “direct our attention away from preexisting paradigms” (1106).

^{lxxxii} The island that Verlia grows up on may likely be Trinidad, though it is never mentioned specifically in the novel. If so, independence would have been granted from the United Kingdom in 1962, and the novel takes place around the late 1960s, early 1970s, when the Black Power Movement grew in the U.S., Canada, and around the world.

^{lxxxii} See Gurr and Martin.

^{lxxxiii} In *Bread out of Stone* Brand comments on her personal experience with the Black Power Movement of the 1970s on Bathurst Street in Toronto, which she describes as the “only oasis of blacks in the miles of the white desert that was the city” (69). Brand, like Verlia, notices that Toronto “has a life that white folks, at least the ones that run things and the ones that write letters to the editor, don’t know about and can’t talk about because they’re too busy reading their newspaper for the latest validation of their stereotypes” (79). It is this racism and vast separation between white and black cultures in the city that Verlia experiences first hand and that contributes to her “improper racialization.”

^{lxxxiv} Verlia’s experiences as a revolutionary mimic Brand’s own involvement in the Grenadian revolution (See Brand, *Bread Out of Stone*).

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