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Secrets of the Bush: Abortion in Caribbean Women's Literary Imagination

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by

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ABSTRACT

Secrets of the Bush: Abortion in Caribbean Women's Literary Imagination

by

Leah Meagan Fry

Secrets of the Bush examines the role of abortion in contemporary literary production by women in the English-speaking Caribbean. In works of fiction, poetry, drama, and creative nonfiction by Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Olive Senior, Nalo Hopkinson, Michelle Cliff, Grace Nichols, Lorna Goodison, Loretta Collins Klobah, and the Sistren Theatre Collective, women attempt to terminate pregnancy using bush teas made from abortifacient plants. My central claim is that representations of herbal abortions are a means of imagining how women negotiate reproductive justice in a region controlled by biomedical and neoliberal economic agencies of the Global North. My title plays on the double-signification of "bush" as a wild space of nature as well as slang for women's pubic hair to underline how the literary texts represent abortion using coded language. This idea is especially resonant in the ambiguity surrounding scenes of abortion in these texts, suggesting unnamed but enduring arts, and a marked reticence about fully revealing these practices.

I employ a historical-materialist approach to draw on existing scholarship on contemporary historical fiction concerning slavery, known as the neo-slave genre, to address texts that pose

slavery as a starting point for interrogating reproductive justice in the contemporary Caribbean. I also engage with contemporary feminist activism and theory to explore these issues as they appear in literature. My project makes two key interventions. The first involves rethinking gender and sexuality in the Caribbean region so that it interrogates spatial and geographic modes of belonging. This brings in an ecocritical component to my dissertation, especially because recent ecocriticism has increasingly been concerned with accounting for racial and gender difference in how people relate to the natural world. My study of these literary texts suggests that women are bound together by their knowledge of anti-reproductive agents and their willingness to use them. The land is a site of this communal relationship. Abortions using botanical agents enact an alternative way of interacting with our world, and, paradoxically, a way of sustaining human cultures in an increasingly precarious climate. Second, I explore theorizations of Caribbean nationalization, bringing in a critique of discourses of creolization in history and social science disciplines. "Secrets of the Bush" contributes to African American and Caribbean literary studies of motherhood and nation.

LIST OF FIGURES

I. Introduction

I, me, I am a free black woman. . . .
It must be known now how that silent legacy
nourished and infused such a line
such a close linked chain
to hold us until we could speak . . .
loud enough to hear ourselves . . .
and believe our own words.
— Christine Craig, "Poem"

On March 12, 2009, Sistren Theatre Collective presented "A Slice of Reality," a fifteen-minute performance before the joint select committee of the Jamaican Parliament. Eight women (Althea Blackwood, Pauline Blake, Sonia Britton, Carlene Campbell, Lana Finikin, Patricia Riley, and Joanne Stewart) performed sketches that were accompanied by Sistren's drummer, Julian Hardie.[1] In one short piece, two women discussed a teenage girl named only "X" who has secretly had an abortion; this was followed by a monologue protesting the fact that a well-known wealthy man repeatedly raped a mentally disabled woman.[2] Sistren ended the performance with a refrain spoken

[1] Heron, Toppin, and Finikin, "Sistren in Parliament," 53.

[2] Ibid., 46.

by all of the women onstage: "Woman you have your own life ina yuh hand . . . we a nuh murderah."[3] These lines were a direct rebuke to the joint select committee, which was formed in 2008 to debate constitutional reforms to abortion policy in Jamaica.

This short 15-minute performance sheds light on a problem that has dogged Jamaican women for decades: the postcolonial nation's failure to fully accommodate their needs and rights. The term *postcolonial nation* encompasses a wide range of states across the globe. Some nations, like Canada, are former settler colonies with significant political and economic power on the global stage. Others, like Jamaica, are former colonies that, despite their political independence from colonial powers, continue to suffer structural inequities due to a global governmental and economic system—neoliberalism—that rewards the capitalistic exploitation of natural and human resources.[4] Despite these differences, postcolonial nations share one thing in common: they are historically colonized spaces that seek to define themselves as independent from the colonizers. But as Hershini Bhana Young writes, "the democratic promises made by newly independent postcolonial governments have shriveled in the sun as racial, sexual, and gender inequalities, inherited from colonialism, become more firmly entrenched."[5] Jamaica's 2009 debate on abortion policy reform makes clear the ways in which "sexual and gender inequalities" persist, even after formal

[3] Ibid., 46. This translates as: Women, you have your own lives in your hands. We are not murderers. See Cassidy and Page, *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, 1, 219, 234, 322, 489.

[4] For an exhaustive list of the ways in which Caribbean countries continue to suffer under this regime, see Sen and Grown, *Development*, 28–29.

[5] Young, *Haunting Capital*, 15.

independence in 1962. Religious fundamentalism and rigid adherence to colonial law continue to further "entrench" women's inequality.

At its heart, *Secrets of the Bush* explores the problem of reproduction in the Caribbean geography. Abortion, contraception, rape, and miscarriage all play significant roles in contemporary Caribbean women's literary imagination, and as such, highlight that women's reproductive experiences are mediated by and respond to the demand for reproductive sexuality by the state. This state, as Sistren's performance argues, is merely itself a shadow of former imperial power. It mimics and reproduces power relations—particularly in racialized, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies—that have been entrenched in the Caribbean plantation economy for centuries. By writing, or performing, about reproduction and women's attempts to abort it, women of the contemporary Caribbean seek to create a better, more just world. In this way, my project works as a study of several interrelated strands of inquiry related to reproduction, history, economy, and justice. What holds each line together is this question of justice. I will outline each particular chapter in the pages that follow, but first, I would like to trace Sistren's performance as a particular example of future-oriented, justice-driven, reproduction-focused women's literature.

Because it is a well-known group, Sistren brought significant media attention to the event. Furthermore, the title of the collective's piece, "A Slice of Reality," made explicit that their performance would reject a fantasy: the idea that women are committing murder when they abort fetuses. Such rhetoric had been prominent in the joint select committee's meetings leading up to March 12, as religious fundamentalists dominated the 2008 and 2009 debates over abortion reform. The Coalition of Lawyers for the Defense of the Unborn and the Christian Lawyers Federation had been strenuously arguing against any amendments to Jamaican abortion law, which officially

recognizes the 1861 Offenses Against the Person Act, a Commonwealth Caribbean statute that mandates lifetime imprisonment for any woman convicted of purposefully aborting a fetus.[6] In countries that were formerly British colonies, colonial law sets the precedent for present-day abortion law. In this project, I use the increasingly popular term *Commonwealth Caribbean*, which delineates those islands that once were considered part of the British West Indies and reminds us of the legal and economic ties that these islands still share with Great Britain. For example, in addition to the Offences Against the Persons Act, which was created specifically within the Commonwealth Caribbean, a 1938 ruling in England, *Rex v. Bourne*, holds sway in the former colonies. This law established that doctors could perform abortions in cases where a woman's emotional or physical health was in danger.[7] Still, this 1938 statute remains ambiguous on the legal protections for women and doctors should they pursue abortion. Religious groups in 2009 ignored this 1938 ruling, following instead the logic of the 1861 case: abortion was equivalent to murder and should be punished accordingly.[8] Imperial powers like Great Britain and France introduced laws that made abortion illegal, and when, in the mid-twentieth century, these islands were made independent nations, the laws themselves did not change.[9] The laws established during colonial times constitute a grab-bag of restrictive policies around women's reproductive rights, where groups can pick and choose which outdated law to use to make their particular argument. Changing abortion policy is

[6] Offenses Against the Person Act 1861.

[7] Maxwell, "Fighting a Losing Battle?," 99–100.

[8] Heron, Toppin, and Finikin, "Sistren in Parliament," 50.

[9] Francome, *Unsafe Abortion and Women's Health*, 133.

thus part of a decolonizing vision in which colonial laws must finally be banished from the postcolonial nation and *new* laws that respond to the needs of citizens must be created.

Sistren's performance was merely one part of a strong movement mobilized in favor of changes to abortion law in Jamaica. Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era (DAWN) led a regional coalition of nonprofit and non-governmental women's organizations, including Sistren, that lobbied for an end to the ban on abortion in Jamaica and across the Caribbean. The reform campaign included appearances on television news programs, newspaper and magazine op-eds, mass mailings, and other grassroots strategies. The rhetoric of this campaign heavily relied on statistics from the World Health Organization on unsafe abortions (20 million women a year across the globe) and unplanned or unwanted pregnancies (70 million a year globally).[10] One of the strongest media pushes came from DAWN, which argued in a September 29, 2008 piece in the *Jamaican Observer* that "safe and legal abortion is a woman's human right."[11] The rhetoric of human rights emerged as part of a broader argument across the region that safe and legal abortion plays a critical role in women's economic, social, and sexual wellbeing.

This political mobilization in 2009 demanded that women's voices be recognized. Sistren presented a compelling case: without safe and legal abortions, women must choose between unsafe procedures and unwanted pregnancies. But this recent grassroots push seems to be in tension with the representation of abortion in recent Jamaican and other Commonwealth Caribbean literature. In fiction, poetry, plays, and essays, writers represent herbal methods of abortion as a robust and abiding practice across generations. Plants like *six sixty-six*, *maidenblush*, *whitehead bush*, *aloe*,

[10] DAWN–Caribbean chapter, "Safe and Legal Abortion Is a Woman's Human Right."

[11] Ibid.

okra, and *pumpkin* appear more frequently in Caribbean women's literature than medical abortions. Furthermore, these plant methods are framed as "safe" insofar as women help one another through the process. Although this suggests that grassroots activism does not find a home in literature, representations of plant-based abortions in literature are shaped by and participate in the activist and political sphere. Literature about abortion is political precisely because reproductive rights are steeped in colonial history and contemporary political struggles. Indeed, Sistren's argument depended on a historical understanding of women's political and economic standing in the postcolonial nation in the same way that writers like Michelle Cliff understand plant-based abortions as part of a long legacy of women's reproductive knowledge and health care in the Caribbean.

While groups like Sistren called for protected medical abortions for all women in Jamaica, Commonwealth Caribbean literature from the 1970s to the present argues that women will always have plant-based abortion as a tool of survival and a means of connection to the troubled past. Plant methods of abortion can help women understand the landscape and its place in human history. As Cliff writes, "the land is redolent of my grandmother and mother."[12] Knowledge of these plants allows women to see themselves in relationship to a legacy, since plantation slavery, of women using plants to resist the capitalistic and patriarchal exploitation of their bodies. Cliff's argument suggests that women can connect with one another in a relationship of exchange between older generations and younger ones. This is an, albeit, idealistic idea that ignores the role of family conflict, class, or intraracial tensions.[13] The particular force of *possibilities*, though, should not be ignored, as

[12] Cliff, "Conference Presentation," 70.

[13] Class is a particularly important factor in determining which women have access to medical abortions and which ones must rely on plant-based methods. This idea is related to *stratified*

literature is a primary form through which writers grapple with inequities and problems in the world. Indeed, Sistren's 2009 performance suggests that any narrative of plant-based abortions fails to fully account for women's experiences in the Caribbean. The tension between literature and activism highlights the diversity of women's perspectives on abortion and reveals the metaphorical nature of abortion in literature. Each chapter in *Secrets of the Bush* mines this aporia and complexity, arguing as the project develops that abortion is a central facet of the Commonwealth Caribbean literary and activist imagination.

Putting abortion in conversation with literary production is, perhaps, paradoxical. If abortion is a means of ending the cycle of reproduction, and literature is conceived as a fundamentally *productive* art form, literary representations of abortion a central role in understanding contemporary Caribbean women's struggle for equality in the postcolonial nation. Representations of women aborting fetuses using plant ingredients point out the fundamental flaw in Caribbean national narratives of belonging, in which *reproductive citizenship* operates as a guiding principle. As postcolonial scholar Anne McClintock argues, British imperialism engendered a particular vision of the family and reproduction within the British nation and its Commonwealth. McClintock writes, "Controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic."[14] British imperial success, therefore, depended on a robust "race of empire-

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reproduction, a term that Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp argue is essential to understanding how class influences which women are empowered to reproduce and which ones are encouraged not to. Ginsburg and Rapp, *Conceiving the New World Order*, 3.

[14] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 47.

builders" (i.e., white future leaders). In the same way, women in the Caribbean, both during and after the decolonization movements, were placed in a relationship to the male body politic (the Caribbean nation) that mirrored Britain's expectations of women. To put it bluntly, women were supposed to be domestically bounded, reproducing vessels. This model of reproductive citizenship rather fails to account for all types of sexual desire. As Caribbean theorist Kamala Kempadoo argues, procreation is not "natural." It is a cultural preference that shapes expectations for women and can limit women's political and social mobility.[15] Writers from the Commonwealth Caribbean imagine plant-based abortion as a means of rejecting the Caribbean nation's inheritance of colonial paradigms of citizenship. Thus, the argument *for* abortion, whether plant-based or medical, is an argument for change to the status quo and a new vision of belonging in the Caribbean nation-state that includes all women, whether non-gender conforming, (cis), trans, or queer. Hence, as I stated earlier, literature about reproduction in the Caribbean is fundamentally about imagining and creating a just, more free world.

Sistren's performance in Parliament serves as a pivotal moment in the history of Caribbean women's political activism and literature. A group that was founded decades earlier was invited to perform for Parliament in 2009, reaffirming its continued relevance to the conversation on abortion and women's rights. The formal invitation also suggested that women were experts on the problem of abortion—they deserved to be invited because the choice to abort a fetus resides within them and not in the politicians before them. Sistren's drumbeat, coupled with the women's "patwah" and narratives of economic and gender struggle, infused the parliamentary hearing-room with a distinctly

[15] Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean*, 192.

underrepresented class: working-class women.[16] Heron Taitu, Danielle Toppin, and Lana Finikin reported afterward that several members of the committee were visibly uncomfortable with Sistren's performance, although it was unclear whether it was the patwah or the subject matter that embarrassed them.[17] Such reactions are hardly surprising, as the Jamaican Parliament, like governmental bodies across the globe, reinforces a heteropatriarchal, elite vision of Jamaica that ignores women's perspectives. We see this in not-so-subtle ways—in the ratio of female parliamentarians to male parliamentarians and in the number of men's toilets to women's toilets in the Parliamentary buildings—as well as in more subtle forms of gender bias: it took the joint select committee over a year to invite a women's organization to present before them about abortion.[18]

The reaction to "A Slice of Reality" outside of Parliament was more positive. Lana Finikin, the current executive director of Sistren, remarked that the performance received broad media attention and generated a flood of e-mails to the organization; the public had realized that "Sistren is still around . . . still alive, and will be around for another 32 years."[19] Sistren's "A Slice of Reality" stirred up support from those who had grown tired of the fundamentalist religious rhetoric about

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[16] I use the term *patwah* in keeping with Sistren's reclamation of the word *patois* from derogatory associations rooted in imperialism. Theorist Edward Kamau Brathwaite is well known for his term *nation language*, yet this term has been problematized by women's groups. Sistren reclaimed and "re-spelt" the word *patois* in their scripts and mission statement. See Donnell and Welsh, *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, 11.

[17] Reddock, "Women's Organizations and Movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean," 55.

[18] Ibid., 52.

[19] Ibid., 54.

abortion. Yet even in 2016, a decision on the abortion policy review has been delayed several times. If a joint select committee reconvenes to discuss abortion policy, new members will need to be selected, and the process of debate will begin anew. This 2009 event suggests that the conversation about citizenship and belonging in Jamaica is far from over. It also reinforces, in this literary critic at least, the conviction that Caribbean women's literature has long been tapped into an important and ongoing problem in the way nations perceive women's function as citizens. The fixation on abortion access in contemporary Jamaican politics reveals lays bare the lie that women's issues are peripheral to the nation's survival. Representations of abortion in literature suggest that national health and wealth depend on women's access to safe medical services. The recurring trope of abortion also both foregrounds the importance of women making choices about their own bodies. Finally, abortion in literature fundamentally questions the role of constitutional law in postcolonial nations, especially those laws that are put in place solely as mirrors of imperial rules that sought to control people's minds and bodies.

Late-twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century writing by women of the Commonwealth Caribbean contributes to a much broader conversation about the direction of postcolonial nations' politics in relationship to Great Britain and neocolonial influences like the United States. This question of neocolonial influence has been an ongoing issue in the Caribbean literary canon, which has itself been shaped by British, US, and elite Commonwealth academic circles. *Secrets of the Bush* argues that women's literature has been relegated to a particular narrative about the Caribbean literary canon in which women were not theorizing belonging before the 1970s. Yet as the recurring idea of plant-based means of abortion suggests, women have been writing about and

imagining their way to equality and new forms of citizenship since the Caribbean first emerged as a colonial space.

A. Women Within the Caribbean Literary Canon

The Caribbean literary canon is understood in two major waves. The first springs out of the labor riots of the 1930s, which helped foment nationalist movements across the Caribbean. These nationalist movements were bolstered by two movements, Négritude in the French colonies and Pan-Africanism, which had roots in the English-speaking Caribbean. As Caribbean colonies agitated for independence from Britain and France, a literary canon emerged that was centered around male writers responding to the challenges of Caribbean history, identity, and politics. Names like V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, and Sam Selvon are familiar because they have been written into a particular narrative about Caribbean literary production that has only more recently begun to accommodate women like Una Marson, Jean Rhys, Paule Marshall, and Louise Bennett.[20] These male writers became established literary figures in the 1950s and 1960s. The narrative about Caribbean literature then develops to account for a second wave: women writers of the 1970s and 1980s, like Jamaica Kincaid, Grace Nichols, Merle Hodge, and Lorna Goodison. Such writers became famous at the same time that Sistren and other women's groups were forming in the Caribbean. Thus, in the same way that nationalist movements in the mid-twentieth century fomented literary production by male writers of the Caribbean, women's activism fed a surge in women's literary production.

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[20] For more on rewriting the Caribbean literary canon, see Edmondson, *Making Men*; Donnell and Welsh, *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*; and O'Callaghan, *Woman Version*.

Furthermore, the political and economic climate of the Commonwealth Caribbean in the 1970s encouraged the formation of women's groups, especially in Jamaica, where a democratic-socialist prime minister, Michael Manley, gained power and funneled funds into the public sector. This decade was the start of what is called the second wave of feminist activism in the region,[21] which began with Viola Burnham's founding of the Caribbean Women's Association (CARIWA) in 1970 in Guyana, the establishment of the Women's Bureau in Jamaica after Lucille Mathurin-Mair and Mavis Gilmour presented a paper, "Women and Social Change" to the People's National Party of Jamaica, and the creation of Sistren Theatre Collective in 1977.[22] In 1978, Sistren performed *Bellywoman Bangarang*, a play about the struggles of pregnant teenage girls who cannot provide for their future children. After this first play, Sistren became well known for two other works in the 1980s on labor and reproduction: *Ida Revolt inna Jonkonnu Stylee* (1985), a play about the 1938 labor revolt in Jamaica which, Sistren argued, was started by a woman named "Ida," and *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (1987), an anthology published by the Women's Press in London.

While the 1970s were a watershed decade for emerging women writers, the 1980s were in hyper-drive. International circles began to recognize literary production by women. My study begins with this important time because the increased attention to literature produced during 1980s and 1990s by writers from five island-nations within the Commonwealth Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago is a particularly rich time in

[21] Antrobus, "Feminist Activism," 40–48.

[22] Reddock, "Women's Organizations and Movements in the Commonwealth Caribbean," 59–60.

debates about the direction of postcolonial politics. I also discuss Haitian author Edwidge Danticat's fiction alongside texts by women from these islands in part because her relocation to the United States puts her in conversation with the concerns of writers like Jamaica Kincaid or Michelle Cliff, who also migrated at relatively young ages to the United States. This cross-island focus allows me to mirror the coalitions that women have built across the Caribbean. As organizations like CARIWA and the Women's Bureau began to foster public dialogue and consciousness around women's issues, the United Nations announced 1975 as International Women's Year and the following decade, 1976–85, as the UN Decade for Women. During the UN-designated decade, many more women's activist organizations were formed across the Commonwealth Caribbean. The following timeline illustrates the broad network of organizations:

Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Women (1970) – Trinidad and Tobago

Jamaican Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (1969)

Concerned Women for Progress (1981) – Trinidad and Tobago

Committee for the Development of Women (1984) – St Vincent and the Grenadines

Belize Rural Women's Association (1985)

Women Working for Social Progress (1985) – Trinidad and Tobago

Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (1985)

Development Alternatives for Caribbean Women (1986, now known as Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era)

Red Thread of Guyana (1987)

Women for Caribbean Liberation (1987) – Antigua

Women's Forum of Barbados (1988).[23]

The UN or Michael Manley did not play a dominant role in the formation of women's groups in the Caribbean; rather, the momentum of women's organizing that started in the late 1960s snowballed as a result of an international climate of recognition for women. As Barbara Christian rightly points out, African American and Caribbean women's writing "surged" in the 1970s in part as a response to the failure of the political movements of the 1960s to account for women's experiences and perspectives.[24] For example, legal struggles for women's rights were unevenly resolved in court and in the legislative branches of these island-nations. With the exception of Barbados, which passed the Medical Termination Act in 1983,[25] Caribbean nations failed to produce meaningful reform for reproductive rights.

The 1980s were also a time when abortion emerged as a common issue in Caribbean women's literature. This was partly in response to the "mother island" trope, which had become an important facet of the Caribbean literary canon by that time. The post-decolonization moment focused on recuperating lost narratives and histories and an authentic Caribbean voice. This recuperative gesture was intricately linked to the notion of inheritance and the maternal. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* (1973) and *Mother Poem* (1977) framed the nation as a maternal body that gave birth to Caribbean consciousness. George Lamming (*In the Castle of My Skin*, 1953), Aimé Césaire, and Earl Lovelace (*The Wine of Astonishment*, 1982) were also integral

[23] Ibid., 59–63.

[24] Christian, "Race for Theory," 340.

[25] Miller and Parris, "Capturing the Moment," 39.

figures in understanding the Caribbean nation as maternal. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this nation-as-mother narrative. But women writers recuperated a more complicated maternal inheritance. Grace Nichols's *I Is a Long-Memoried Woman* (1983) explored the role of gender in the history of plantation slavery. This text reframed the nation as a wounded and traumatic place where women suffered and continue to struggle for equality. We also see a more complex understanding of the maternal emerging in Lorna Goodison's early poetry and Jamaica Kincaid's fiction from the 1980s and 1990s, as I discuss in the chapters that follow.

The literary texts I study in this project use this maternal trope as a starting point for thinking through nation and belonging. Despite the diversity of perspectives on herbal methods of abortion in contemporary Caribbean women's literature, these texts all reject the reproductive imperative of citizenship in postcolonial nations. Abortion emerges as a site of resistance to this ideal as well as a means of envisioning a different future in which women might be valued, not for their reproduction, but for their intellectual, economic, and artistic contributions to society. In opposition to an essentialized notion of mothers as nurturing and willing bearers of the national body, these texts argue that motherhood takes place on a continuum, where, on one end, women embrace the notion of reproduction and nurturing, and on the other, women reject maternity. The seeming contradictions among and between women are themselves productive because they represent the complexity within any woman's identity, let alone her decision to reproduce or not. Abortion in literature by women from the Commonwealth Caribbean is therefore part of a project of imagining and creating a more equitable Caribbean that thrives on contradictions and possible avenues of choice.

This project is divided into two parts. The first (chapters one and two) centers on the role of history in defining postcolonial forms of belonging. This is a broad category that includes Afro-Caribbean stories about reproductive refusal during plantation slavery as well as the myth of indigenous disappearance in postcolonial versions of history. In other words, this first section is concerned with the archaeological impulse in Commonwealth Caribbean women's writing: uncovering and dismantling myths about women in the past to create a better present. The second part of this project, which includes chapters three and four, is about imagining a future free from neocolonial influence. This, too, is a broad category that allows me to explore the role of abortion in stories about gardening and herbal medicine, as well as representations of the complex ways in which women in the region are bound up in policing reproductive citizenship within the younger generations. Ultimately, the two chapters in this second part are about dismantling economic and political structures that continue to disempower women.

My first chapter, "The Botanical Markers of the Dispossessed: Reading the Signs of Enslaved Women's Reproductive Resistance in Contemporary Caribbean Women's Writing," mines the historical uncertainty regarding whether or not enslaved women aborted fetuses to resist the reproductive imperative of plantation slavery. Texts within the neo-slave genre like Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984) and Lorna Goodison's "Nanny" (1986) imagine abortion during slavery as a site of possibility. The provision plot—the garden that enslaved people were allotted according to colonial law—was a space where women could grow assorted plants for food and medicine. Some of these plants may have had abortifacient properties, and the provision plots linger in Caribbean narratives of history as sites where enslaved men and women could carve out small spaces of beauty, and perhaps even resistance. I argue that aporia—an irresolvable contradiction or problem—is a

productive hermeneutic for reading representations of abortion during slavery. Even if we can never know whether or not enslaved women aborted fetuses using the plants they grew on their provision plots, these gardens are important figurative and botanical markers of a revolutionary consciousness among women. My reading of this uncertainty runs against the grain of a dominant narrative from the 1980s and 1990s, in which writers and historians argued that there was clear proof of these material practices. Cliff, in both her 1984 novel and her 1992 novel *Free Enterprise*, claims that women used plants to abort fetuses from plantation slavery to the present. Prominent historians like Barbara Bush (1990) supported this idea. Meanwhile, Jennifer L. Morgan (2004) argues against any certainty regarding women using plants to abort fetuses. In her 2003 novel, *The Salt Roads*, Nalo Hopkinson represents women during plantation slavery as uncertain individuals striving toward freedom, but with a more difficult relationship to birth and provision plot plants than what we see in Cliff's work. I compare Cliff's and Hopkinson's representations of enslavement and birth to frame the rest of this project's investment in exploring and embracing contradictions about abortion and motherhood. The final section of chapter one highlights the critical importance of a touchstone historical figure, the Maroon leader Nanny, in late-twentieth-century Caribbean women's literature and in early twenty-first-century art. Works ranging from Sistren's 1980 play, *Nana Yah* to René Cox's *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* 2004 exhibition, show Nanny as an exemplar of reproductive refusal and resistance. Her knowledge about abortifacient plants is a key facet of her warfare against British troops as a Maroon leader in the Blue Mountains. In sum, chapter one reflects on how all these texts, despite their different relationships to the historical record, reveal how the past and present are "not at all discrete," as Deborah E. McDowell writes about the neo-

slave genre.[26] They establish a thread of continuity across historical barriers so that past injustices can be brought to bear on present ones, to create the conditions of a fair, equitable Caribbean.

In the second chapter, "Narratives of Dispossession: Carib Women's Abortions and the Fiction of Indigenous Extinction," I interrogate the ways in which Afro-Caribbean narratives about history often elide the reality of indigenous women's political, social, and economic struggles in the region. Their disenfranchisement reflects the broader failure to account for all women's needs in the postcolonial Caribbean nation. Jamaica Kincaid's 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* centers around a part-Carib, part-Afro-Caribbean, part-Scottish woman who grows up without a mother on Dominica. Dominica, interestingly, is one of the few places where Caribs remain as a discrete group. On the northeastern part of the island, a Carib Territory was established in the early twentieth century. Yet despite this gesture on the part of the colonial government of Dominica to acknowledge Caribs as inhabitants of the island, Kincaid's Xuela Claudette Richardson rejects her island by refusing to give birth. The predominant narrative about Caribs in the Caribbean is that they disappeared soon after the European conquest of the islands. Xuela testifies against this myth throughout her story, and her abortions in the text are marked by an explicit rejection of Dominica post-independence. I look at two other novels that explore Carib women's struggles in the postcolonial nation. Marie-Elena John's *Unburnable* (2006) ends with a descendant of Caribs throwing herself off of a cliff in a similar nation-rejecting impulse to that of Xuela in Kincaid's novel. Finally, Merle Collins's 1995 novel, *The Colour of Forgetting* centers on a Carib woman named, archetypally, "Carib," who testifies to the impending end of time on a fictive island, Paz. The novel ends with fear at an ominously rumbling volcano, which may erupt as Carib predicted. All three

[26] McDowell, "Negotiating between Tenses," 147.

novels posit reproductive refusal as a method of resisting the continued political disenfranchisement of Carib women in the Caribbean. But this resistance is not just about rejecting postcolonial myths about history and belonging. In all three novels, we are given a vision of a possible relationship between women and postcolonial nations, where reproductive citizenship is not a requirement for full belonging in the nation-state.

Chapters three and four constitute part two of this project, which is about the role of abortion in imagining the future. My third chapter explores two texts—Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden (Book):* (1999) and Olive Senior's 1994 collection of poems, *Gardening in the Tropics*—that argue for a longstanding form of knowledge about the Caribbean environment, one that allows access to abortion even when there are legal barriers to it. This is where the word "secrets" in my project's title comes into play. Plants become the means by which women achieve abortion or prevent pregnancy, but writers do not necessarily reveal which plants serve which purpose. These are secrets that are closely guarded among women as a strategy of resisting *bioprospecting* in the Caribbean. Bioprospecting is a neocolonial practice with roots in imperialism. The chapter's title reflects this idea: "'To Name is to Possess': Jamaica Kincaid and Olive Senior's Gardening Against Biocolonialism." In essays on gardening in Vermont as a descendant of enslaved people and on becoming a bioprospector herself at botanical markets and gardens, Kincaid interrogates the ways in which her gardening knowledge is a legacy of colonialism. Both she and Senior refuse to refer to abortifacient plants by their Linnaean names. To refuse to name plants according to colonial systems of knowledge is an *abortive* practice made interpretively richer by the refusal to name plants that cause abortion. In the final section of the chapter, I look at a more recent text by a Maroon herbalist, Ivelyn Harris, who in 2010 published *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*. This short text on the

medicinal plants of the Blue Mountains reveals both the common and Linnaean names for plants, and this critical difference emerges because Harris's book, published by a small medical press in Florida, is worlds apart from Farrar, Straus Giroux (Kincaid) or an independent press like Insomniac (Senior). Thus, the ways in which women explore the issue of knowledge is not monolithic, and these differences are shaped by complex factors such as class and publication venue. Despite this diversity of perspectives that I trace across these chapters, abortifacients—plant-based methods of abortion that persist from the past and remain available to women even within restrictive state apparatuses—become the symbolic grounds for opening up conversation about what kind of relationship Commonwealth Caribbean women have with neocolonial powers and international corporations, and what sort of future is possible if power structures remain unchanged.

In the first three chapters, women pursue abortion as a means of resistance to oppression and as a form of survival within difficult economic and political conditions. Chapter four—"Imagining the Future Potential of Caribbean Women's Lives"—shifts to look at cases in which women choose to give birth after considering abortion. Edwidge Danticat and Nalo Hopkinson explore this particular problematic in recent texts that put Caribbean women's writing on the US literary map: 1994's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was an Oprah Book Club selection, and Hopkinson's 2000 novel, *Midnight Robber*, has become a touchstone black speculative text. I argue that both novels fall within the *Afro-futurism* genre, a term coined by Mark Dery in 1994 to refer to texts by black writers that imagine a technological future that is free from the structural oppression of the past and present. In Danticat's novel, three generations of women undergo a virginity "test," a means of regulating young women's sexuality before marriage. Abortion plays a dark role in these women's

lives, as the protagonist's mother dies in an abortion-suicide near the end of the novel. Yet Danticat ends with a hopeful affirmation of possibility for the next generation. Hopkinson similarly speculates on the promise of the future in *Midnight Robber*, a name borrowed from Trinidadian folklore that refers to a Carnival figure who robs the rich and rewards the poor. The midnight robber in this text is a young girl named Tan-Tan living on a planet far from Earth, who is repeatedly raped by her father and at last murders him, running to the refuge of a species known as the *douen*. These animals reject abortion and argue that her pregnancy is a gift. Tan-Tan decides to see the pregnancy to term despite its roots in incest, and the novel similarly ends on a note of hope in the future generation. I include Hopkinson's and Danticat's novels in this project because they offer a particular vision of hope that comes out of individual women choosing whether or not to have an abortion. This choice is a fundamental part of the vision of equality that Sistren puts forth in 2009, and it is a central facet of the literary turn to abortion in Commonwealth Caribbean women's literature. Literature is a form that is inherently speculative and visionary; it is a hopeful enterprise and an ideal venue for working through questions that women face—sexuality, gender identity, and reproduction.

Caribbean women's literature emerges out of the forms of exploitation and struggle that are endemic to European imperialism within the archipelago. All four chapters account for a diversity of perspectives and visions that come out of the Commonwealth Caribbean. This idea of diversity is integral to 21st-century conceptions of feminism. Activists of the second wave of *Caribbean feminism* (the 1970s and 1980s) argued that they had been articulating a strategy of women's equality for centuries. This Caribbean feminism was fundamentally different from other feminisms because, as the former director of Sistren, Honor Ford-Smith, argues, Caribbean feminism "is one

of the oldest strategies of resistance in the region."[27] In other words, Caribbean feminism was deeply rooted in the landscape and its human history. Ford-Smith's analysis includes many forms of resistance, yet it also risks ignoring the geographic, racial, class, or gender-based differences among women in the region. These differences inform the types of resistance that women have access to, as well as the stories they tell about them. Since not all women who live in the contemporary Caribbean were enslaved, it becomes difficult to argue for a monolithic Caribbean feminism rooted in enslaved women's actions. In fact, Ford-Smith's idea is part of a much broader project of selecting ideas and histories that conform to a certain narrative of Caribbean feminism, while ignoring parts that would complicate this story.[28] As Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen writes, Caribbean feminism has been largely Afro-centric.[29] The region itself has been celebrated for its creolization, or the mixing of European, African, and indigenous people into a unique ethnic and cultural group. In the third chapter, I address the ways in which this discourse of creolization, a crucial part of Caribbean nationalism and the feminism that Ford-Smith promotes, ignores the particularity of indigenous Carib women's experiences in Dominica and Guyana. It also ignores Indian, Chinese, Lebanese, and other ethnicities that appear in the fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry that I examine in this project.

Yet as the celebration of Sistren's action before Parliament suggests, what Caribbean women do share is a complex history of colonial and postcolonial exploitation of women's bodies, what

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[27] Ford-Smith, *Two Experiments in Popular Theatre*, 5.

[28] Beckles, "Historicizing Slavery in West Indian Feminisms," 51.

[29] Baksh-Soodeen, "Issues of Difference in Contemporary Caribbean Feminism," 74.

Patricia Mohammed calls "an internal discourse which is specific to the region."[30] Sistren's performance before the joint select committee is one particularly visible form of resistance, as are protests, sit-ins, and media campaigns like those surrounding the 2008 and 2009 abortion policy reform movement in Jamaica. Literary production itself can participate in discourses of resistance. It also helps to form coalitions and encourage dialogue among women. In fact, by reframing women's experiences in the Caribbean as not essentially maternal—as not necessarily reproductive—Caribbean women's literature begins to offer an alternative. As Jamaican poet Christine Craig writes, the time is now for "free black" women to "speak out" and "hear" themselves. It is time to "believe our own words."[31] Friendship and coalition are what Caribbean literature and activism propose as women work to achieve a social transformation: equality and freedom in a new Caribbean, free from the colonial influences of the past and present.

[30] Mohammed, "Rethinking Caribbean Difference," 1.

[31] Craig, "Poem," 8–9.

II. The Botanical Markers of the Dispossessed: Reading the Signs of Enslaved Women's Reproductive Resistance in Contemporary Commonwealth Caribbean Women's Writing

Fa dis no no Backra pickney, no Backra nah tear me open fe gi me dis one.

—Sistren Theatre, *Nana Yah*

Okra
Mango
Aloe
Papaya
Pineapple
Pumpkin
Cerasee

The University of the West Indies–Mona campus sits on two former sugar plantations, the Mona and Papine estates, that are located five miles northeast of the Kingston, Jamaica harbor. At its founding in 1948, the university undertook a historical preservation project that would restore the ruins of the plantations to exist alongside modern academic complexes. Instead of demolishing the rotting sugar refinery foundation or the plantation bookkeeper's dilapidated shack, the university commissioned historians and archaeologists to conduct excavational digs as the campus was built around the traces of the estates. Now more than fifteen placards and memorials dedicated to the history of the plantations can be found throughout the grounds, amid aging mid-century buildings and crumbling asphalt roadways.

In the center of the campus, a stone pillar stands as a memorial to the enslaved men and women who worked on the estates. It testifies to the existence of "enslaved people alive on the Papine Estate in 1832." Two sides of the pillar showcase the names of the men, women, and children who were written into the plantation record.[1] This etched list opens up an otherwise hidden record of individuals to the public. The human reality of the plantation—slaves once lived on this land—is carved onto a pillar for passersby to read.

The third side of the pillar provides context for the location of the memorial. It sits on the former site of Papine Village, the living quarters of enslaved people who worked the Papine estate. Historians confirmed the location using survey maps from 1774 and 1834, as well as the undated one below.

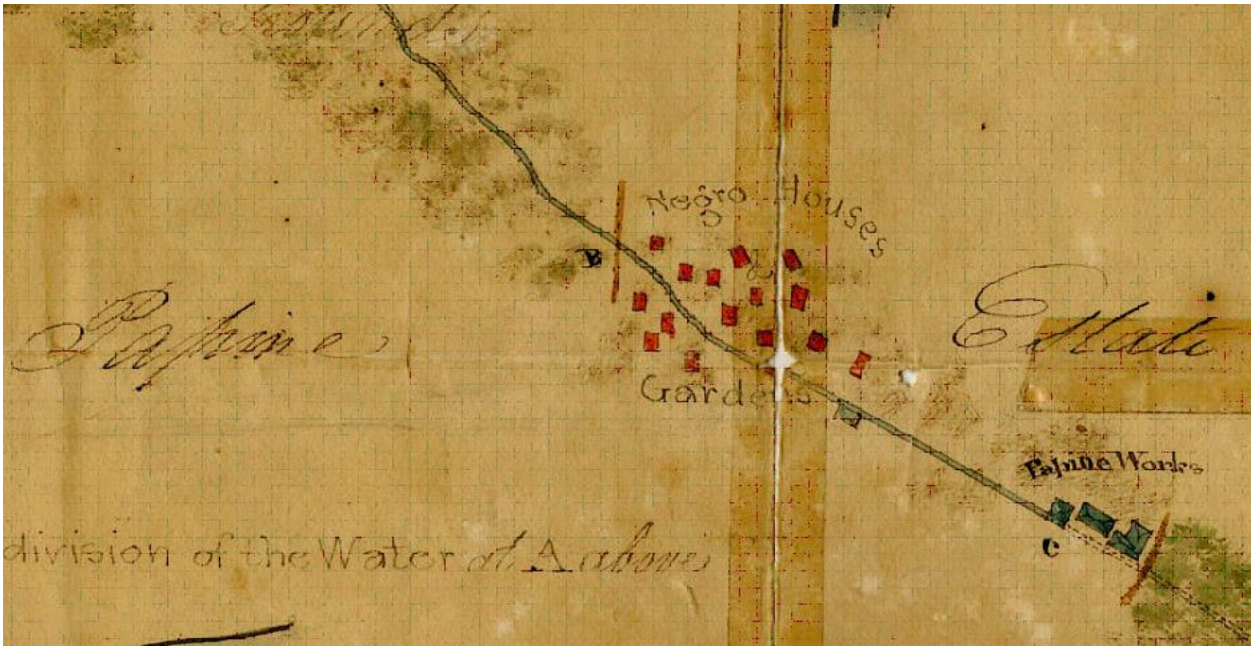

Figure 1. Undated survey map of Papine Estate, National Library of Jamaica.[2]

[1] Papine Village Memorial, UWI–Mona campus.

[2] Courtesy of Creative Commons, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/legalcode.

Near the middle of the map, red squares mark where the enslaved men and women lived. The writing above and below the squares demarcates the space for "Negro Houses" and "Gardens." These two spaces form the collective whole of Papine Village, a small settlement along the old aqueduct line that ran from the peaks of the Blue Mountains to the lowest point of the nearby Mona estate.

The former gardens played a key role in helping historians and archaeologists identify the location of the village on the university grounds. The houses do not remain, having long ago decayed, but "botanical markers—primarily nearby groves of ackee and mango trees" of the settlement still thrive in the spot.[3] The memorial pillar is planted in a spot where enslaved people manipulated the landscape to grow food and medicine using the same water from the aqueduct line that fed the sugarcane fields that they labored on for most, if not all, of their lives. The botanical world in 2015—nearly two centuries since the village was mapped—still lives and breathes the enslaved peoples' impact on the land. In my research trip to Jamaica in July 2015, ackee, the national fruit of Jamaica, and mango were two of the most abundant food plants on the island. These plants thrive because they were commonly grown on "provision grounds," subsistence gardens located near the "Negro Houses" where men and women cultivated fruits, vegetables, and herbs to

[3] Francis-Brown and Galle, "Papine Estate," UWI–Mona and The Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery.

feed themselves and to sell at the nearby market. Groves of ackee and mango trees are common signs of former provision grounds throughout the island.[4]

The memorial pillar testifies to the work slaves did both on and off the sugarcane fields; they cultivated robust gardens whose remnants still thrive today on the university campus and across the island. These were the "botanical gardens of the dispossessed," as Judith Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff write, the spaces outside of the planter's domain where enslaved people experimented with growing new species of plants and cultivating ones from their homelands.[5] Provision plots are now understood as revolutionary sites of possibility. The provision plot in contemporary Commonwealth Caribbean women's writing functions uneasily within slavery, especially when the provision plot plants allow for the foreclosure of a future in the form of a child. Enslaved women may have used abortifacient plants to abort fetuses, the future labor force for planters. The writers studied in this chapter work within this troubled space, exploring the ecology of the island as a material trace of a lost story about women's resistance.

The remnants of these plants that may have enabled reproductive resistance offer writers like Michelle Cliff, Lorna Goodison, Grace Nichols, Nalo Hopkinson, and the Sistren Theatre Collective a way of theorizing the past as a living ecological presence in postcolonial Jamaica. For these writers, women's history has been submerged within the ecology of the island, and it must be excavated in the same way that historians and archaeologists uncovered the past within the

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[4] Ibid. Although Francis-Brown and Galle do not mention why ackee and mango trees are especially telling markers of former provision grounds, a clear explanation lies in the fact that neither fruit tree is indigenous to the region and thus must have been *cultivated* in order to survive.

[5] Carney and Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 135.

University of the West Indies–Mona campus. This interest in uncovering the hidden past within the island landscape is part of a much larger Caribbean theoretical and literary enterprise of which Édouard Glissant famously writes, "Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history."[6] Glissant's study of the Caribbean experience in *Caribbean Discourse* departs from common visions of the pre-conquest Caribbean as a prelapsarian paradise of innocence; instead, the landscape testifies to a subterranean history that women writers grapple with today. For the past several decades, they have asked: Did women grow abortifacient plants to resist the reproductive imperative of plantation slavery? Once the British Atlantic slave trade was banned in 1807, the reproduction of slaves became crucial to the continuation of slavery. In order to keep enslaved populations stable, planters often incentivized birth—sometimes even offering a respite from labor if a woman gave birth to six slaves—and across the island improving prenatal care for women.[7]

But even with these new practices, birth rates remained significantly lower in the British West Indies than those in the US South.[8] Cases of lockjaw (today called tetanus) were common among newborn infants, and even planters and doctors at the time acknowledged that this might play a role in the low birth rates among slaves. Yet they also blamed venereal disease for the population decline, citing black women's promiscuous behavior for the spread of infections.[9] Edward Long, for instance, claimed that slaves need only end their debauchery, and they would achieve "robust good

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[6] Glissant, "Introduction," in *Caribbean Discourse*, 11.

[7] Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 126.

[8] This disparity vexed contemporary planters and now stumps historians.

[9] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 125–6.

health."[10] These charges of promiscuity have since been debunked; Orlando Patterson, a well-known Jamaican sociologist of slavery and West Indian economies of resistance, articulates how such accusers ignored and thereby supported the depraved exploitation of women's bodies by the white planter class.[11]

In addition to these medical explanations, there were also questions raised about the possibility that low birth rates reflected women's political resistance to slavery. Planters speculated that women, if they became pregnant, were aborting fetuses rather than giving birth. Long writes that many women "take specifics to cause abortion," while Hans Sloane, the famed botanist and physician who in 1713 purchased the Chelsea Physic Garden in London and designated it as a botanical garden in perpetuity, argued that abortifacients grew "very plentifully in the Caribes and Jamaica" and that "Whores being not ignorant make frequent use of [them] . . . to make away their children."[12] Long and Sloane's misogyny notwithstanding, this idea caught on with historians working in the last quarter of the twentieth century as interest in excavating women's experiences during slavery grew in academia. Today, opinions are mixed about whether or not planters speculated in total error.

This chapter on Caribbean women's history and reproductive resistance highlights the paradoxical nature of trying to uncover the past in a present that might never have existed if all

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[10] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume II*, 436.

[11] Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 42. For an exhaustive summary of the white planters' various explanations for the declining population rates, see Brathwaite, "Coloured and Black Action and Reaction in White Society," 193–211.

[12] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume II*, 436. Sloane, *Voyage, Volume I*, 248–9.

women aborted fetuses during slavery. Abortion forecloses a future—the continuation of the slave economy—yet this end would have come to pass only if it were part of a systematic, collective movement of women. Clearly this was not the case: not all enslaved women aborted fetuses. Furthermore, we can trace their robust ecological presence within the landscape and derive some general principles about their ecologically based agency. Enslaved women grew plants on provision grounds, and after slavery ended, their descendants established similar gardens and new property relationships. As the generations continued, the botanical traces of the past lingered. These botanical markers inspire contemporary Caribbean women's writing on the past. Contemporary Caribbean women writers imagine the subterranean past as an inspiration for present-day women in a postcolonial nation like Jamaica—the core island discussed in this chapter—which continues to curb women's reproductive rights[13] and to promote a male-dominated version of Caribbean history, as I will discuss later in this chapter. Provision grounds first created the basis for women's claims to land-based autonomy within and freedom from the plantation economy. The material traces of this ecological past testify to a hidden history that many Caribbean women writers try to uncover, in the hopes of creating a more robust understanding of the past and a more hopeful future for women.

In what follows, I map out a series of contradictions. The first deals with the perplexing literary project of uncovering a past from the position of a future that could have never existed. This paradox is a version of the problem that neo-slave narratives as a literary genre pose to our

[13] Jamaica observes the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act, which stipulates jail time for anyone who undergoes or performs an abortion. See Campbell, "Abortion . . . Let's Get Rid of Those Ancient Laws."

knowledge of Western slavery. *Abeng* (1984), *Free Enterprise* (1993), I *Am Becoming My Mother* (1986), *I Is a Long-Memoried Woman* (1983), *Nana Yah* (1980), *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* (2004), and *The Salt Roads* (2003) all align historically with the work of this literary genre, which emerged as an important paradigm for African American and Afro-Caribbean literature since the decolonization and civil rights' struggles of the 1960s. Ashraf F. Rushdy, a prominent literary scholar on the neo-slave genre, identifies this rising interest as an intellectual "change in the historiography of slavery."[14] Historical and anthropological research dug up new and buried knowledge from oral histories, previously unread documents, and archaeological ruins. The UWI–Mona historical memory project is a key example of this archaeological and archival trajectory.[15]

The second contradiction this chapter maps out relates to how theorists have understood the neo-slave genre as an inherently feminist literary mode. Angelyn Mitchell argues that the genre opens up space for historical revisions of dominant narratives of the past and for women's voices to emerge out of near-total silence. She especially privileges the liberatory potential of the neo-slave genre, a possibility that emerges as readers imagine enslaved women working toward freedom.[16] Provision plots grew out of a primarily economic incentive that was intended to help strengthen the system of slavery, yet they are now understood as revolutionary sites of change. I explore this contradiction and its implications for contemporary women's struggles for equality in the section that follows.

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[14] Rushdy, *Neo-slave Narratives*, 3.

[15] Brown, *Mona Past and Present*.

[16] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember*, 6.

A. Provision Plot Economies of Resistance

The provision grounds are a common theme in historical studies of enslaved women's experience in the Caribbean. I first want to establish the ways in which they have been discussed as part of a broader conversation about daily life on the sugar plantation, as well as how they played a role in the forms of tactical resistance that emerged within the plantation economy. Barbara Bush, a historian of Commonwealth Caribbean slavery, argues that the provision grounds were established largely because plantation owners were stingy about providing enough food for their slaves. Provision plots, where slaves would be allowed to grow food to supplement the scant supplies of the planters, were allocated to each "house." Most slaves in Jamaica relied on their grounds and were given "one and a half days a week" to cultivate them.[17] In fact, Jamaica was the first island in the British West Indies to adopt the provision ground system, and it was there that the provision ground reached its fullest fruition.[18] The grounds were protected by force of law. In 1678, the first of many Acts of Jamaica required plantation owners "to have . . . one acre of ground well planted in provision for every five Negroes and so proportionately for a greater or lesser number under the penalty of £10 for every acre wanting."[19] The legal precedent was set for planters to follow or face an economic penalty.

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[17] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 47.

[18] Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 217.

[19] Acts of Jamaica, 1677, CO 138/5.

Even if it was not always strictly adhered to, the legal mandate had unanticipated effects on the plantation system, a monocropping culture that depended on the unpaid labor of enslaved people. This system is called the *plantation economy*, a political, economic, and cultural structure that used monocropping agricultural practices and the exploitation of black bodies on plantations to profit and expand the British colonial project.[20] Historians like Bush read the provision grounds as small spaces of subversion within the plantation economy. These grounds certainly introduced a level of self-sufficiency among slaves, who were given some degree of autonomy in choosing which plants to grow and who had time away from the Jamaican sugarcane fields or the plantation great house to work land that was reserved for them. Bush writes, this "was instrumental in the development of a resilience and independence among the slaves."[21] Enslaved people were guaranteed reprieves from the demanding work in the fields and often worked together to grow crops. By 1800, the British West Indian slave code, which covered all Caribbean islands under British rule, "guaranteed slaves the right to market their crops."[22] A micro-economy began to take shape that was not dependent on monocropping. So, in addition to ensuring some measure of food security, provision plots enabled an extremely qualified form of economic mobility as well as ecological agency—they could shape the landscape and earn money outside of the plantation economy.

[20] Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 52.

[21] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 46–47.

[22] Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 53.

Such an idea took off in the work of Sylvia Wynter, the Jamaican critical theorist, and Sidney Mintz in the 1970s and early 1980s,[23] but it still holds critical value today. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, a contemporary postcolonial and environmental humanities scholar, argues that "[t]he provision grounds and internal markets contributed a vibrant, alternative economy to the monoculture of the plantocracy."[24] DeLoughrey's point about alternative market dynamics is a common one shared among historians and anthropologists, yet I have reservations about this categorization of a "vibrant" economy that is based on slaves laboring in *surplus* of the forced work on plantation fields. These "alternative" economies still operated within the capitalist system and did not dismantle the plantation economy of the Caribbean islands.

Enslaved people were made not only to work the sugar cane fields but also to labor to provide their material survival. If a planter complied with the law, he succeeded in saving himself money on food for enslaved people and keeping them occupied in whatever leisure time they might have had off of the sugarcane fields. This is quite far from an idealized subversive economy. Academic scholarship sometimes elides these realities in search of liberatory potential, or it de-emphasizes material suffering in favor of subversive politics. The ambiguous or contradictory aspects of enslaved people's lives should not be ignored. Commonwealth Caribbean women writers imagine the role of provision plots as venues for growing and tending possible forms of freedom within an exploitative system.

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[23] Wynter, "Novel and History" 95–102. Mintz, "Caribbean Marketplaces and Caribbean History," 110–120.

[24] DeLoughrey, "Yams, Roots, and Rot," 62.

The work on the provision grounds was gendered. Although some historians have argued that men and women shared the work of tending their plots,[25] it is more likely that much of the labor on the grounds fell under the purview of the domestic work that enslaved women performed off the plantation fields in the short hours between dusk and dawn. Among the many forms of black women's labor during slavery that "ultimately produced marketable goods for the slaveholder," the scholars of The Black Women and Work Collective at the University of Maryland–College Park list:

> plowing, hoeing, picking cotton, working in rice fields, serving as field hands, harvesting sugarcane, performing roadwork, feeding the farm animals, caring for livestock, childbearing, midwifery, splitting rails, sewing, managing the slaveholder's household, cooking, cleaning, spinning, candle and soap making, canning, laundering, and serving as personal attendant.[26]

Many of these tasks include what we would commonly consider to be forced plantation labor, yet other tasks—"childbearing, midwifery . . . sewing . . . cooking, cleaning . . . laundering"—are the work of daily living that falls so often to women. Jacqueline Jones argues that women on plantations did all the work expected of laboring men on the fields, in addition to domestic labor off the fields. My point here is that the work of creating a "vibrant" economy on the provision plot fell largely on women's overburdened shoulders, and to ignore that is to turn a blind eye to the demands made on women during slavery.

There are two dominant ways of interpreting the provision plot within the plantation economy, which extracted as much free labor as possible from black bodies for profit. On one hand, provision

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[25] Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 220–1.

[26] Harley, Wilson, and Logan, "Introduction," 1.

plots were sources of vibrant economies of resistance within slavery. On the other hand, provision plots demanded even more labor of women. As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, contemporary Caribbean women writers explore how enslaved women interacted with the provision grounds and may have carved out forms of resistance to the system of slavery. Nalo Hopkinson and Michelle Cliff, both Jamaican expatriates, represent these two ways of interpreting women's interactions with the provision plot. Hopkinson's vision upholds my critique of DeLoughrey, Wynter, and Mintz's celebration of the economy of resistance, while Cliff imagines a network of subversive women using the landscape to refuse the reproductive imperative of slavery. In other words, Hopkinson and Cliff map out two nodes of possible forms of action for women: survival within the system or anti-reproductive resistance to it.

Hopkinson, a Jamaican-Canadian writer, is primarily known for her "hybrid" science fiction/fantasy writing that subverts the traditions of these two genres by "creating a uniquely Caribbean voice and language . . . that celebrates . . . the Caribbean experience."[27] Her 2003 novel, *The Salt Roads*, contains three plot threads, but the central storyline takes place in mid-eighteenth-century Haiti. That island, of course, was a French colony during the eighteenth century, until the Haitian revolution succeeded in overthrowing the French government in 1804 after decades of guerilla warfare. Haiti, like Jamaica, was primarily a monocropping sugar colony and had a similar provision plot system for slaves.

The novel flows across several centuries: the story of Mary of Egypt from the fourth century AD, the Haitian plotline, and a nineteenth-century strand involving the French Symbolist poet

[27] Watson-Aifah and Hopkinson, "A Conversation with Nalo Hopkinson," 160–9. Simpson, "Fantastic Alternatives," 96.

Charles Baudelaire's lover and friend, Jeanne Duval, who is a descendant of Haitian slaves. These stories are unified across time and space by two features: Ezili, a family of Haitian lwas, and salt, the product of sweat (forced labor) and tears (suffering). Ezili appears throughout Hopkinson's text. A lwa such as one within the Ezili family is considered a divinity in obeah, which is "a set of religious practices designed to help persons in distress deal with foreboding circumstances, respond to tragedy, or fight for their survival and freedom."[28] Lwas are believed to be forces in people's lives. Ezili is the name for several female divinities, including Ezili Freda Daome, the spirit of love and femininity, Ezili Danto, the lwa of eroticism, Ezili Reda, Ezili je-Rouge, Grann Ezili, and Ezili Lasyrenn.[29] Ezili appears in each of these incarnations in Hopkinson's generically hybrid novel, and she is the common factor within three separate but related historical moments.

The Salt Roads is especially resonant when it grapples with the problem of reproduction for enslaved women. The main character, Mer, a midwife on the Sacré Coeur plantation, uses herbal remedies that are primarily grown on slaves' provision plots. Midwives were targets of planters' speculations about abortions on the plantation, but Hopkinson imagines a less anarchic version of the midwife figure, one whose primary task was ensuring the health of slaves. When Mer tends to a young pregnant adolescent, she asks if the girl grows beets in her garden because the root vegetables are high in iron and will thus help her through a healthy pregnancy. The girl, Georgine, does not know about the importance of an iron-rich diet for pregnant women, but she says she will start growing beets immediately: "I'm keeping a nice garden Sundays when I have the day off."[30] A

[28] Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, 229.

[29] Ibid., 76–77.

[30] Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 5.

"day off" is an oxymoron, and Georgine's "garden" is a provision plot, a place where she grows plants that can bolster her diet and that she can sell for a small profit because the planters do not want to provide her with enough food.

Hopkinson thus emphasizes that Georgine must work even on a day of rest from the field or house labor we would typically expect to be demanded of the enslaved people on plantations. Furthermore, the provision plot does not give Georgine enough food or revenue to live by, although she hopes that her husband will be able to make "a wage we can both live on" by working as a carpenter on the plantation and renting out his services to nearby plantations.[31] Georgine's marriage to a free white man gives her material benefits that most slaves do not have access to. Her husband performs specialized labor for pay, and he may one day free his children from bondage. Yet even so, she has to tend a garden to feed them both, and she has a very limited knowledge of plants that will give them optimum nutrition. Hopkinson's narrative thus complicates the ways in which scholars have romanticized the provision plot as a space of economic mobility and resistance. The young Georgine's garden yields key crops like pumpkin and cassava, but it is intricately woven within the political economy of the plantation. Georgine may only tend to the garden on her days "off," as though somehow her labor as a slave takes a temporary hiatus.

Although Hopkinson's novel does not represent an abortion during slavery, it archives the types of events that would have caused planters to speculate over women's reproductive resistance to the institution. Ultimately, Georgine's pregnancy ends in the birth of a stillborn child. Even when she begins to eat more beets following Mer's advice, Georgine cannot see a healthy fetus to term. The

[31] Ibid., 5.

newborn's "heart never beat once."[32] And for this, the mother suffers her husband's displeasure—the marriage was a strategic economic move for the man, Mister Pierre, which becomes clear when he says, "Nine months before you can breed me another, Georgine. I need a son to work with me."[33] Georgine, Mer, and Mer's close friend and lover, Tipingee, present mask-like faces to him. The birth scene thus makes legible a stark gender dichotomy between the labor of a man and that of women, but it also creates a community of women working within and against the desires of men. Georgine, Mer, and Tipingee did not conspire to produce a non-living, non-viable child, but Mister Pierre demands that the women, who are "lackwits," heal it.[34] According to him, their work is to ensure the birth of an enslaved child, and they have failed.

Hopkinson does not envision a sexual economy wherein women must abort a fetus in order to interrupt the reproduction of slaves. Georgine's deficient nutrition, as well as her youth, produce this failure. In attending to this nuance, Hopkinson illustrates how the planters sometimes erred when they speculated about women's subversion of the reproductive imperative of slavery after the British Atlantic slave trade ended. Indeed, women's fertility was not always within their control: Georgine wished for this child. She asks, "After all this, dead? . . . With her owner gone, Georgine let the salt water run freely from her eyes."[35] Her tears illustrate the suffering of women within the plantation economy: their grief over a stillborn child and their burdens as workers.

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[32] Ibid., 30.

[33] Ibid., 31.

[34] Ibid., 30.

[35] Ibid., 30, 33.

Yet Georgine's mourning is itself somewhat subversive, even though it does not conform to the historians' search for anti-reproductive sentiment among enslaved women. We gain insight into the reality of women's complex emotional investments; Georgine suffers to give birth for her "owner," yet she grieves when the fetus is not viable. Planters portrayed women as no more than "stock" like goats, chicken, or hogs, as part of a project of justifying black women's enslavement.[36] To counter these dehumanizing literary representations of enslaved women, Hopkinson offers us an emotionally complex woman whose relationship to reproduction is more complicated than is suggested by the pro- versus anti-reproduction dichotomy. This representation recalls Toni Morrison's Sethe in *Beloved* (1987) or Gayle Jones's Ursa in *Corregidora* (1975), two of the most famously complex women in late twentieth-century African American women's literature. Both characters are notable for the fraught ways in which they relate to reproduction and the plantation economy. Sethe's notorious murder of her daughter Beloved, an act of infanticide that was chronicled in an 1856 newspaper,[37] and Ursa's memories of her grandmother's stories about their families' forced incestuous past are touchstone texts. Hopkinson's 2003 novel offers a similarly nuanced portrait of women's experience within the plantation economy, where women are complex agents. They are not solely political resistors; they are also people with difficult emotional attachments to their children or to the idea of motherhood.

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[36] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 18, 27. See also Altink, "Bellywomen," 11–38.

[37] Morrison recounts, "I was amazed by this story I came across about a woman called Margaret Garner who had escaped from Kentucky, I think, into Cincinnati with four children . . . She killed one of them." Quoted in Mervyn Rothstein, "Toni Morrison, in her New Novel, Defends Women."

In addition to how she imagines a nuanced interaction between women and their possible future children, Hopkinson's representation of the natural environment is one that permits different forms of autonomy among women than we might expect from the planters' accusations against them. The provision grounds in the novel are not teeming with abortifacient plants. Instead, Mer uses her provision plot to help heal wounds or stomach ailments, while Georgine attempts to save her pregnancy by growing iron-rich foods in her own garden. Then, her stillborn is returned to a river, a symbol of fluidity and change. In this last example, the three women bury the child in the spot where Georgine's adoptive mother drowned. Georgine says, "It was she who looked after me when they brought me to this plantation."[38] By honoring this othermother's memory with the body of a stillborn child— the unviable new generation—the women link the past with the present, creating an archive of women's memory outside of the dominant narrative of the planters. With torches to light their digging and a shovel, the women secretly bury the stillborn. Mer thinks, "We had done a common thing. We had buried a dead child. Nothing strange about that."[39] Yet because it happens when Mer and Tipingee should return to work on the sugarcane fields, and because it articulates continuity in women's history on the plantation, this act is subversive.

The provision plot and the river thus become spaces of healing and memory, both of which create a community of women working on the plantation. This community reflects the diversity of the Ezili family, as the many women on the plantation show different attitudes toward family, reproduction, and work. Despite their differences, Tipingee and Mer, both older women, help this young woman, Georgine, navigate the demands of the planters and her husband. Their help comes

[38] Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 36.

[39] Ibid., 38.

in the form of plants grown on their plots, and in helping her bury her stillborn child. Despite the subversive quality of an alliance of women—planters did all they could to deny slaves the ability to meet in groups—there are still only extremely limited forms of agency available to women.

In *The Salt Roads*, Hopkinson's pragmatic vision of Georgine's limited knowledge of plants also comments on the everyday constraints on women's choice, knowledge, and hopes for freedom. Mer and Georgine are not famous historical figures. They are fictional women whose story unfolds alongside the last days of Makandal, a Haitian revolutionary who lived during the mid-eighteenth century. Haitian oral histories portray Makandal as a shape-shifter who led a slave revolt in Haiti in which slaves poisoned the water supply. The planned attack was not nearly as systematic as Makandal had hoped, and he was caught and executed.

Hopkinson places Makandal's failed revolt in opposition to Mer's healing practices. Whereas Makandal uses poisonous plants, Mer tends to her provision plot and grows medicinal plants alongside foodstuffs. When Makandal accidentally poisons a slave on the plantation with a poisoned dart intended for a planter, Mer yells for aloe from her plot, which will help purge the victim's stomach: "Run back to my garden. Bring back two fat aloe leaves."[40] Aloe, a plant that could also produce abortion, is here used as a purgative, not as a tea. Each time there is a moment of crisis on the plantation, Mer calls for someone to run to her garden. Her provision plot enables her to heal, which is always directed at tending to those who suffer, like her, within the plantation economy.

Mer's role as a healer does not, however, lead her to revolt against the plantation system. She is consistently apprehensive about Makandal's plans for revolution; Mer is interested instead in relieving the pain of others. She neither sells her plants for profit nor encourages slaves to participate

[40] Ibid., 201.

in rebellion. Hopkinson's portrait of enslaved women is not about vibrant alternative economies or simmering revolutionary potential growing on the provision plot. Instead, she represents the ways in which women on the plantation help and heal one another. She thus complicates how we view reproduction within the sexual economy of slavery, especially with regard to the possible forms of healing and abortion on a typical plantation.

I started this section on provision plot-enabled revolution with Hopkinson's measured vision of women's experiences within the plantation economy. Now, I turn to Michelle Cliff's 1993 novel *Free Enterprise*, which I mentioned earlier as an example of a text that celebrates successful anti-reproductive acts using the land. This comparison helps illuminate the paradox I noted in my introduction: how did provision grounds enable vibrant economies of resistance if they were born out of the same economic system that produced the plantation? The differences between Hopkinson and Cliff's texts offer two possible ways of understanding women's resistance on the provision grounds—women could establish communal relationships that archived their past and sustained their lives, or, in Cliff's version, women's anti-reproductive acts were made possible through the land. These two possible ways of understanding women's resistance matter because they highlight the persistent appeal of the past in recent Caribbean women's literature, as well as the contradictions that feed this interest.

Cliff, a Jamaican writer who has lived in the US since the 1970s, is best known for her 1984 and 1987 novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, respectively. Both novels center on Clare Savage, a young woman who comes of age in Jamaica in the 1950s and emigrates with her family to New York in the 1960s. Savage becomes a revolutionary who, at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven*, dies alongside her fellow anarchists in a failed attack on a Jamaican film set, which they see

as a symptom of Jamaican decadence and corruption. Cliff's first two novels critique Jamaican nation-building after 1962, as well as the growing neocolonial influences of the US and Great Britain on the island. In her 1993 novel, she looks back to a more distant nineteenth-century past.

Cliff takes up as her main character Mary Ellen Pleasant, a black abolitionist who spent much of her life in the American West. Unlike Mer and Georgine in Hopkinson's novel, or even Clare Savage in Cliff's earlier novels, Pleasant is a historical figure with a traceable past. She collaborated with John Brown in the 1850s, and after his uprising at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in 1859, she settled permanently in San Francisco and worked there as an entrepRenéeur and civil rights activist. A memorial to Pleasant, "The Mother of Civil Rights," stands at the corner of Bush and Octavia streets in San Francisco.[41] Cliff argues that Brown's move was a rash misstep, a precipitous attack in a vast network of planned raids and rebellions that were supposed to take place across the East Coast in 1859. In *Free Enterprise*, Pleasant reflects on the moment when a fellow conspirator waylays her on the road to Charleston, South Carolina with "fifty-two rifles concealed in the back of the wagon" and tells her that "Harper's Ferry was a fiasco, everyone was dead."[42] She asks, "Why did J.B. jump the gun?"[43] Pleasant's question prompts our own: what motivated Brown's noble, if mad, effort?[44] This cause-and-effect relationship between Pleasant's questioning and that of contemporary readers of Cliff's novel "reflects a critical distance from history," the accepted

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[41] Gauthier, "Historical Figures Transformed," note 4, 54.

[42] Cliff, *Free Enterprise*, 139.

[43] Ibid., 139.

[44] For a lively investigation of how John Brown was figured in song, literature, and drama after 1859, see Nudelman, *John Brown's Body*.

narrative of the past that tells us John Brown attempted a raid on Harpers Ferry with limited resources. In this version of events, he was part of a much broader network of anti-slavery actions that were to unfold, and Harpers Ferry was merely one location to be attacked. Also, women like Pleasant played an important role in revolutionary abolitionist actions. Indeed, we learn about this moment in Pleasant's life through a fictional letter from Pleasant to her friend and fellow conspirator Annie Christmas.

By reworking historical facts about Pleasant into a rich imaginative portrait of the abolitionist and feminist,[45] Cliff imagines Pleasant as a revolutionary figure who ultimately promoted women's health, healing, and survival in the nineteenth century. For example, she helps sex workers in San Francisco despite explicit advice not to do so. Pleasant is portrayed as a revolutionary woman who is accountable to no man. When she argues with Brown over the best economic system to pursue once slavery has been dismantled. He argues for a communist African-based utopia, but Pleasant maintains that capitalism and property ownership must not disappear when slavery does: "What was wrong, I asked Captain Brown, with slaves seizing that which they built, dug, cultivated, designed, maintained, invented, birthed…?"[46] Pleasant's language points out the ways in which slaves had labored—building, digging, and cultivating—on the plantation. She argues that the work enslaved people had already done could be shaped into vibrant economies, and could lead to the inheritance and property relationships that Sheller identifies as a product of the tenure system of apprenticeship. According to Pleasant, free market dynamics are the right of former slaves who have worked their provision plots and the plantation fields.

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[45] Gauthier, "Historical Figures Transformed," 43.

[46] Cliff, *Free Enterprise*, 143.

Cliff's novel is, therefore, much more than Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads*, explicitly invested in the possible forms of resistance that could be carved out on provision grounds. The narrator, who is only sometimes present in the novel—which is a mix of letters, first-person narration from Pleasant and her friend Christmas, and third-person limited omniscient—calls for a memorial to the "enterprising" women of the age of American expansionism in the western part of the continent during the mid to late nineteenth century. These women, including the historical Pleasant as well as any others who manipulated capital's interests for their own gain, learned how to use the landscape to help them rebel against the reproductive imperatives of American expansion and slavery:

> All these gals deserve a monument. To their enterpris-
> ing ways. To commemorate the diaphragms they crafted
> from eelskin (learned from their Indian sisters?), to the
> douches they brewed from alum, pearlash, white oak bark,
> red rose leaves, nut galls, the bittertasting teas expelling the
> child with ease.[47]

Cliff imagines quite the resourceful women here, and the tone of this excerpt, especially the word *gals*, is somewhat irreverent. This tone undermines the sexual economy of nineteenth-century America rather than the women themselves, who are commended for how they controlled their fertility using "diaphragms," "douches," and "teas" crafted from the landscape.

However, Cliff neither gives us an idea of where the women obtained the plant ingredients for these methods nor whether they cultivated them or not. There is also a hint at a women's alliance in the nod to "Indian sisters," a network of shared knowledge between indigenous women and African

[47] Ibid., 102.

slaves that Londa Schiebinger addresses in her discussion of the abortive effects of the peacock flower.[48] Cliff frames this reproductive rebellion by way of a tongue-in-cheek reference to "enterprise" as an economic venture as well as a contraceptive success story, where teas "expel" fetuses "with ease." This language is troubling for the way it reproduces narratives about how women of color, especially enslaved women, felt no birth pains as compared to the labors of white women. Jennifer L. Morgan argues that this dichotomy helped to dehumanize them: "Erroneous observations about African women's propensity for easy birth and breast-feeding reassured colonizers that these women could easily perform hard labor in the Americas."[49] A quick glance at nearly any planter text confirms this idea; Edward Long's *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2* notoriously describes how African "women are delivered with little or no labour; they have therefore no more occasion for midwives, than the female oran-outang, or any other wild animal."[50] Cliff's celebration of women's successful abortions elides this racism, while Hopkinson's novel testifies to how much labor goes into giving birth.

Finally, Cliff's call for a memorial is missing any sense of failed knowledge about the landscape in the way that Hopkinson imagines with Georgine in *The Salt Roads*. Hopkinson neither suggests that all women know that beets strengthen the blood and are iron-rich foods that pregnant women should try to consume, nor implies that the provision grounds enabled vibrant economies of resistance. Cliff, however, imagines an abundant variety of plants that women could use as contraceptives or abortifacients that were readily accessible in the age of expansion. What accounts

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[48] Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 129.

[49] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 36. See also Hartman, *Scenes of Subjugation*, 51.

[50] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume II*, 380.

for such starkly different visions of the ways in which these two writers respond to the sexual economy of slavery?

First, Cliff and Hopkinson's different visions of women's ecological-based reproductive agency during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be partly explained by the ten-year gap between the publications of their novels. The 1980s were marked by resistance narratives in Caribbean-related novels and historical monographs. By the time Hopkinson published *The Salt Roads* in 2003, a less overtly revolutionary reading of Caribbean women's history was increasingly the norm, as Morgan's work on reproduction and gender in the New World demonstrates.[51] With Hopkinson and Morgan's writing, we see more attention to multiplicity and ambiguity along the lines Glissant outlines in his discussion of the Caribbean landscape and history.

There had of course been challenges to the idea that women during slavery were able to successfully abort fetuses before 2003. The most notable of these is Marietta Morrissey's direct response in 1989 to Bush's historiography. Morrissey writes, "[t]he use of contraceptives and the practice of abortion, infanticide, and sexual abstinence are documented, but inconsistencies and omissions in the historical record suggest that Europeans may have overstated efforts by slaves to prevent childbearing and rearing."[52] Morrissey highlights her contemporaries' over-reliance on historical records that may not have reflected the reality of enslaved women's experience in the Caribbean. Morgan later addresses this critique of Morrissey's, listing tetanus, dengue, malaria,

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[51] Morgan, *Laboring Women*. See also Morgan, "Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder," 167–92.

[52] Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World*, 117.

extreme labor conditions, and near-starvation diets as all equally likely causes for low birth rates as abortion and other plant-based forms of birth control.

From this, we can derive two major trends in representing and theorizing women's reproduction within the sexual economy of slavery. The first appears in Hopkinson's, Morrissey's, and Morgan's representations of women's experiences of birth, fertility, and abortion as part of a complex system of tactical negotiations within the plantation economy. Cliff and Bush participate in the second trend: looking for reproductive revolution during slavery. Cliff and Hopkinson fundamentally differ in how they imagine women's relationship to labor and capital. The provision plot is bound up in the plantation system, and the profits slaves reaped from what they grew were only possible if they labored according to the dictates of British law. Cliff's *Free Enterprise* explores the success Pleasant achieved as an entrepRenéeur, who thrived within the venture capitalism of American expansionism. Hopkinson's Mer and Georgine, by contrast, do not gain any political or economic mobility within the provision plot system. Instead, they bury a stillborn child. In other words, Cliff imagines women turning labor within a system of capitalism to their favor, while Hopkinson argues that there are few tangible means of subverting the plantation economy beyond small acts of women's community-building and healing.

I am not suggesting here that Cliff is wrong about women's historical relationship to labor and capital during and after New World slavery. There is not any way to be wrong about an archive that does not "exist." Jenny Sharpe articulates this particular problematic in her summary of the literary-archaelogical method in Afro-Caribbean women's neo-slave writing. Oral histories and testimonies are shaped by time, and the stories writers tell about the past are largely reflective of their

contemporary moment. [53] Yet Cliff's representation of women's ecological agency starkly contrasts with Hopkinson's vision of women using the provision plot, and this tells us a lot about the ways in which women writers have understood land-based reproductive agency.

I have discussed at some length the difference between two Jamaican writers' versions of women's ecologically based reproductive revolt. I have also put into question, using Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads*, the idea that provision plots enabled vibrant economies of resistance to emerge within the plantation system. This is not to say that such economies did not sometimes come into existence, but that the labor paradigm that necessitated working on and off the plantation for food must be questioned as a site of reproductive refusal and rebellion. In the second section of this chapter, I turn to the most common depiction of land-based reproductive resistance during slavery: Nanny of the Maroons's ecological rebellion. Jamaican women writers imagine a radical anti-reproductive politics in Nanny, and her negotiation of the Blue Mountain landscape further troubles the idea of the provision plot as a locus of women's ecological resistance. For example, the memorialization project around Nanny as a Jamaican national hero, and as a forbearer of women's resistance on and off the provision plot, raises questions about the role of women's reproductive refusal during Jamaican slavery, as well as how historical celebrity or notoriety overshadows the work of everyday women. For this literary critic at least, these representations suggest that women responded to pregnancy in individual ways. Women like Mer, Tipingee, and Georgine may not have been radical Maroons or revolutionaries, but their work on the provision grounds helped them survive, sometimes control their fertility, and to heal one another. Their everyday lives pale in comparison to Nanny's politics as a Maroon, yet Nanny's possible form of resistance to British

[53] Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 14.

slavery is privileged as more liberatory and more inspiring to contemporary observers than "normal" enslaved women. These reflections highlight how radical ideology functions in contemporary literary production about the Caribbean past, and the ways in which the Jamaican national story elides the reality of many women's historical experiences.

B. Nanny, the Anti-Reproductive "Mother" of Jamaica

In the middle of downtown Kingston, Jamaican soldiers guard a city park dedicated to Jamaican "national heroes." Seven people are memorialized in the green space, once a horseracing track that was transformed by the British in 1905 into "George XI Memorial Park" and then renamed "National Heroes Park" in 1962 when Jamaica gained independence from Great Britain. The honored heroes in this space include former prime ministers Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley; the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and early twentieth-century civil rights campaigner, Marcus Garvey; Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, who were executed as co-conspirators of the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion; Sam Sharpe, the leader of the Jamaican Baptist slave rebellion of 1831; and a woman, Nanny of the Maroons. One woman in a group of seven is better than the fate of women in the United States historical memory, which, as major national memorials stand, has no central female figure. As a national hero, Nanny also appears on Jamaican currency, the five-hundred-dollar bill.

Of all of these heroes, only one is commemorated in a non-representational, abstract form. It should come as no surprise that this hero is Nanny, the woman. The other six heroes' likenesses are rendered as bronze busts, and those who died in the twentieth century are buried there, along

with all deceased former prime ministers and other cultural heroes like Miss Lou, the celebrated pioneer of patois poetry in Jamaica. Rather than representing her body, Nanny's memorial is made of three pillars, one decorated with a bronze abeng, and the other two with shields made to represent the Maroon soldiers she led in battle in the eighteenth century. The memorial has only been in place since 1999, although memorial placards date from the mid 1970s when Nanny was officially voted in as a national hero. At the base of the three pillars reads the following inscription:

> DEDICATED TO THE RT. EXCELLENT NANNY OF THE WINDWARD MAROONS DECLARED NATIONAL HEROINE OF JAMAICA IN 1975. FEMALE WARRIOR, REBEL LEADER AND TACTITIAN WHO BY FORCE OF PERSONALITY AND OATH OF LOYALTY BREATHED COURAGE AND CONFIDENCE TO HER FOLLOWERS. MAROONS CALL, THE ABENG RESONATES, INVOLUTE, ECHO, DRUM, RHYTHM OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

To read this inscription in full, I circled the central pillar three times. The script spins around the pillar as a challenge to the reader to put in the extra effort of uncovering Nanny's story, but at least it is written in capital script to help avoid any confusion about particular letters or phrasing. We learn several things from this inscription that guides my reading of Nanny as a hero of contemporary Afro-Caribbean women's representation of reproductive refusal using the land. She is considered a "female warrior," so her gender determines her status as a hero. A case in point: other successful Maroon leaders, like Cudjoe, are not considered to be national heroes. Second, her leadership was successful because of her personality and ability to inspire loyalty among followers: she "breathed courage and confidence" to them. Third, her memory lives on in two sites: the Blue Mountains, the

locus of Maroon struggle against the British, and in the "abeng," the primary instrument of Maroon communication.

Nanny's memorial sits at the intersection of political and institutional memory, decolonization, and gender politics in the postcolonial state. Jenny Sharpe writes that it was only after Jamaican independence that Maroon oral histories, like those about Nanny, were considered viable parts of the Jamaican national story.[54] In Edward Kamau Brathwaite's short publication that verified her existence, written on a commission from the Jamaican government, he argues that there are only three archival sources about Nanny: Philip Thicknesse's *Memoirs and Anecdotes* (1788), Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), and R.C. Dallas's *History of the Maroons* (1803).[55] Her institutionalization as part of an elite coterie of otherwise male heroes of Jamaica suggests that she is an exemplary, exceptional woman who could "serve as a role model for Jamaican women."[56] The United Nations named 1975 the "International Women's Year," and Prime Minister Michael Manley (1924–97) called for Jamaicans to propose a possible female hero to be remembered alongside Marcus Garvey and Paul Bogle. Nanny was the most popular proposal.

In addition to Nanny's remarkable status as the sole female national hero in Jamaica, her canonization as such maps out the politics of designating a Maroon rather than an enslaved person as a national exemplar for women. In Jamaican songs, stories, and films, Maroons are ideal revolutionaries. Their refusal of enslavement is juxtaposed with those who remained slaves. For example, in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1984), Jamaican women in the 1950s do not even know "who

[54] Ibid., 17.

[55] Brathwaite, *Nanny*, 5.

[56] Ibid., 17.

Nanny had been."[57] Their ignorance is framed by stories of slaves betraying Maroons—most notably, a slave named Scipio killed Kishee, one of Nanny's commanders.[58] Yet Cliff also emphasizes that these betrayals happened on both "sides": enslaved and Maroon. Slaves betrayed Maroons for monetary reward, but Maroons returned escaped slaves to planters: "Cudjoe signed a separate peace with the British governor, in which he was permitted freedom and promised to hunt down other rebels for the Crown."[59] Cudjoe, a Maroon leader in the western part of Jamaica called "Cockpit Country," a terrain that rivals the Blue Mountains in terms of difficulty to navigate, arguably negotiated with the British in 1737 at the cost of future slaves' potential freedom.

This is complicated theoretical terrain that still causes heated discussion among Jamaicans. I should note here that the question of complicity does not come up in Cliff's writing. It is, however, central to the ways in which Jamaicans envision Maroon resistance to the plantation economy. As Brathwaite writes, "The National Hero is not . . . only a political declaration (marker or icon of the struggle); he/she is also (and has to be, essentially) a folk figure: an expression of the collective memory of the people."[60] Thus, in addition to how the Maroon/slave dichotomy produces ambiguous or questionable readings of political and individual forms of agency within the plantation economy, the way Nanny is remembered also determines how women are viewed as active or passive historical figures. On a research trip to Moore Town, near Nanny Town in the Blue Mountains, I discussed her legacy with a Maroon descendant. He admitted that the history of

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[57] Cliff, *Abeng*, 21.

[58] Ibid., 20.

[59] Ibid., 22.

[60] Brathwaite, *Nanny*, 4.

Maroon complicity with the British is a blot on their past, but that they are still "proud to be free" and not slaves.[61] In the memorialization of a successful Maroon leader like Nanny, these uneasy tensions between Maroon and slave, rebellion and complicity, simmer below the surface.

Maroon culture emerged out of those Spanish slaves who fought the British takeover of Jamaica in 1655.[62] The Maroon numbers swelled as more slaves were brought to the island in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and an unquantifiable number of slaves attempted to escape plantations. Maroons hid in the Blue Mountains or Cockpit Country, rugged terrain that was difficult for the British to navigate, and waged guerilla warfare on the British for decades until three main groups of Maroons negotiated treaties with them in the 1720s and 1730s.

Despite their spatial and legal differences from the enslaved, Maroon and enslaved women shared some commonalities that inform why I am discussing Nanny in a chapter on enslaved women's ecologically based reproductive agency. Enslaved women were forced to work provision plots to ensure their survival, and Maroons like Nanny also grew plants that could feed dozens when they were under siege by the British.[63] Thus, both groups were forced into strategic self-sufficiency by the white colonizers. Yet Nanny emerges as the female national hero because her ecological agency—her mobility, freedom, and reproductive refusal—occupies an almost mythic space. Did she bounce bullets off of her rear end when the British fired on her troops? Did she grow enough food for her Maroons with a mere handful of magic pumpkin seeds she brought from Africa? If one is writing about Jamaican women and historical forms of labor, one will inevitably

[61] Interview, July 7, 2015, Moore Town, Jamaica.

[62] Brathwaite, *Nanny*, 7.

[63] Ibid., 10.

mention Nanny's manipulation of the landscape. As Sharpe writes, "Today Nanny appears in more fiction, plays, and poems than any other Afro-Caribbean woman who lived during the era of slavery."[64] She is consistently portrayed as a warrior who uses plants that she grows as well as ones that naturally appear in the Blue Mountains, and who thus possesses certain mysterious powers to wage ecological warfare on the British.

Historians have agreed on a couple of key premises about Nanny based on archival materials. She was an Ashanti slave, an African rather than a Creole woman. This background, which was a common one among Maroons in Jamaica, made it possible for her to take on a leadership role among them.[65] Proof of her leadership appears in two documents: a treaty and a land trust. The British negotiated a treaty with her in 1739, and they granted her a parcel of land in the Parish of Portland in April 1741.[66] Beyond these sparse details, she is a subject of speculation in fiction, poetry, plays, historical monographs, and oral histories.

Nanny's mythology can be separated into two categories: Nanny the magnificent warrior and Nanny the woman. The most dynamic representations of her are those that link these two Nanny trajectories. Grace Nichols, Lorna Goodison, Sistren Theatre, and Renée Cox all connect Nanny's womanhood to her warrior status, and her reproductive refusal to her success as a leader. I will work through the nuances of each of these in turn, building an archaeology of Nanny's reproductive refusal during slavery as it is imagined over the last thirty-five years of Caribbean women's literature and art.

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[64] Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 1.

[65] Meyerowitz, *Sacred State of the Akan*, 27, 38.

[66] Brathwaite, *Nanny*, 15.

Nichols, a Guyanese poet who immigrated to Britain in 1977, makes Nanny into the figurehead of a resurgence of the spirit of rebellion. Nichols won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1983 for *I Is a Long Memoried Woman*, a compilation of poems written from the enslaved Caribbean woman's point of view. The setting is not exclusive to Guyana—in fact, it is hard to say where exactly these women live in the West Indies. Nichols creates a constellation of women's poems that take place across the British-colonized islands. *I Is a Long Memoried Woman* is divided into five parts. The first four parts imagine the Middle Passage, labor in the sugar cane fields, and obeah-based healing practices. The final part is called "The Return," and it is here that Nanny appears as a beacon of hope for enslaved women as a "Maroonic woman / of courage / and blue mountain rises."[67] Nanny ushers in a Renéewal of hope for freedom in the poems that follow in the fifth section. This reflects the ways in which Nichols articulates her vision of Nanny and the role she can play in contemporary Afro-Caribbean women's writing on the past. Nichols argues that writers can mobilize Nanny to break "the slave stereotype of the dumb victim of circumstance."[68] Although this sentiment about Nanny's Maroon resistance comes close to reproducing the dichotomy between Maroons and purportedly docile slaves, it is useful as an insight into the many ways in which Nanny can be used as a poetic starting point for imagining women's strategies of resistance during slavery.

Nichols emphasizes Nanny's ecological warfare rather than her gender: she is an "earth substance woman / of science / and black fire magic."[69] This means that Nichols does not explore Nanny's reproductive refusal as Goodison or Sistren Theatre do, as we will see shortly. This does

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[67] Nichols, *I Is a Long Memoried Woman*, 79.

[68] Nichols, "The Battle with Language," 283–9.

[69] Nichols, *I Is a Long Memoried Woman*, 79.

not in any way reflect poorly on Nichols's representation of Nanny; it merely demonstrates Nichols's unique interest in Nanny's power as a figure from the past. Her language identifies her as an obeah-woman, who, as Nathaniel Murrell writes, possesses vast knowledge of medicinal plants and obeah "magic," a set of practices surrounding the pursuit of justice using supernatural means.[70] According to research conducted by anthropologist Leeann Thomas Martin in the early 1970s in Accompong, Jamaica, Maroons prefer to use the term *science* instead of *obeah* for the work of Nanny and other Maroons.[71] This is partly because of the negative associations between obeah and evil that Murrell calls a residue of British colonialism, where anything that the colonizers did not understand as part of the Christian worldview was categorized as satanic ritual or pagan ignorance.[72]

Nichols thus incorporates a Maroon-based understanding of Nanny into her poem, one that claims that her ecological warfare was made possible through science. Sharpe theorizes that this Maroon use of the term "shows the signs of a body that . . . feed[s] off a colonial discourse of power."[73] I address the conflict between Caribbean women's botanical knowledge and European discourses of biocolonialism in chapter three of this dissertation, but here I would emphasize that the recuperation of a historical woman's ecological "science" is notable specifically for the ways in which it maps a legacy of botanical knowledge and ecological agency onto marronage in Jamaica.

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[70] Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, 242, 229.

[71] Martin, "Maroon Identity," 69.

[72] Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, 226.

[73] Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 3.

Nanny in Nichols's imagination is a scientist who may, if women remember her, teach contemporary women how to resist oppression and use the landscape to their advantage. Although Nanny is an inspiration in the fifth part of Nichols's poem cycle, this possibility for a magical return of revolution in the present appears quite bleak in Cliff's *Abeng*. The title of the novel calls attention to the failures of Jamaica, where people do not even know the source of the Maroon instrument. Clare Savage's mother, Kitty, has not learned anything from Nanny's history, although she has extensive knowledge of the plants of Jamaica and their medicinal uses:

> Kitty knew the uses of Madame Fate. . . . Sleep-and-Wake. Marjo Bitter. Dumb cane. Bissy. . . . Ramgoat-dash-along. . . . She knew about Jessamy. About the Godwood. . . . about Tung-Tung, Fallback, Lemongrass. About Dead-man-get-up. Man peyaba and Woman peyaba. About the Devilweed.[74]

Kitty, despite all this plant-based knowledge, does not link her familiarity with the landscape to a historical form of resistance rooted in marronage or the provision plot system. As Sharpe writes, "Kitty possesses the same knowledge of bush medicine as the maroons, except that she does not know how to turn her knowledge into a source of strength."[75] Kitty's failure is therefore part of a broader historical amnesia among Jamaican women. Like Kitty, women pass this partial knowledge down to their daughters. They know the uses of plants, but they have little sense of the historical roots of this knowledge. Cliff's novel aims to recover this lost lineage, and in its sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*, Kitty's daughter comes to understand more of her past.

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[74] Cliff, *Abeng*, 53.

[75] Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 37.

These women do not consider themselves "scientists" in the way that Maroons call Nanny a practitioner of science, yet their extensive knowledge of plants and their applications could fill a large pharmacopeia. Cliff argues that they are disempowered by their ignorance of history, and, I would add, their limited understanding of their medical expertise. Cliff's literary output is consistently interested in history as a source of knowledge and power. The limitations she mentions here are sometimes willful omissions among the women and their ancestors, and sometimes not. In Clare's father's family, they do not speak of their ancestral ties to plantation masters. This is all part of a "carefully contrived mythology" about the origins of their middle-class lifestyle. [76] Yet in Clare's mother's case, her poverty determines her understanding of the past. Cliff ties poverty to inadequate education, a direct legacy of the plantation economy. Indeed, she emphasizes that the end of slavery did not bring about any material changes in former slaves' lives. There was no upward mobility but rather a further entrenchment in poverty:

> There was no cash compensation. . . . No tracts of land for them to farm. No employment for the most part. No literacy programs. . . . All the forces which worked to keep these people slaves now worked to keep them poor.[77]

For the poorest people, their former provision grounds were no longer available, and they could not purchase land of their own. Cliff offers an amendment to Sheller's argument about inheritance and property: unless they continued working for minimal pay from the British planters during apprenticeship, the former enslaved would remain poor and cut off from self-sustaining agriculture

[76] Cliff, *Abeng*, 29.

[77] Ibid., 29.

and knowledge systems about the land. Poverty and a continued denial of land rights thus perpetuate historical amnesia.

Abeng portrays how Nanny's ecological agency has been forgotten, even if women remember the medicinal plants that she might have used. Nanny, unlike these women, is a "scientist" because of her resistance to slavery and the ways in which she manipulates plants to undermine the conquerors of the island and the planter class. Nichols's poem "Nanny" also illustrates this version of Nanny. She represents Nanny as a rebellious agent swooping along the wind to inspire enslaved women. Nanny has a powerful bearing—she appears "Standing over the valleys" and "giving / sound to the Abeng,"[78] the Maroon instrument of war that is memorialized in National Heroes Park. Nanny dominates the landscape according to this description. Lemuel A. Johnson, in his study of Caribbean women's fictional versions of Nanny, writes that she appears as "the complement to and anticipation of Toussaint and of Nat Turner; of Macandal and Christophe."[79] Unlike Mer and Georgine in Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads*, or Kitty in Cliff's *Abeng*, Nanny is a revolutionary figure on par with the male rebels of history. This positions her on the same scale as Cliff's enterprising women in *Free Enterprise*, who can manipulate the landscape to refuse reproductive labor.

I have discussed at some length Nanny's ecological agency, but her reproductive resistance is equally important to contemporary Caribbean women's visions of female power and refusal. For example, Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison imagines Nanny as intentionally sterile. Goodison links her refusal to have children to revolutionary consciousness and actions. Nanny's "womb was sealed /

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[78] Nichols, *I Is a Long-Memoried Woman*, 79.

[79] Johnson, "A-beng," 123.

with molten wax / of killer bees" and her "breasts flattened."[80] Using beeswax, a natural ingredient that is either acquired through bee-keeping or by scaling trees to raid bees nests, Nanny makes her womb into a fortress where "nothing should leave" her body.[81] Goodison's poem does not tell us how Nanny acquired this beeswax, but she emphasizes her ability to use the landscape to carve out a Maroon warrior identity. This body runs "equal / to the rhythms of the forest."[82] Instead of being overcome by the wild Blue Mountains, Nanny's body becomes as dangerous as the dense brush. However, none of this training or self-inflicted sterility happened in the Caribbean, according to Goodison. It all occurred before she was sold into slavery. Goodison thus links Nanny's origins as an Ashanti woman to her warrior status once she arrives in Jamaica, which is part of a tradition of attributing Maroon resistance to a common Ashanti lineage. Even more interesting, Nanny says,

> they circled my waist with pumpkin seeds
> and dried okra, a traveller's jigida
> and sold me to the traders
> all my weapons within me
> I was sent, tell that to history.[83]

Goodison does not indicate who "they" are, but it seems most likely that they word refers to fellow Ashanti warriors who have trained Nanny to be a sort of "weapon." The poem thus performs a history of how Maroons succeeded in Jamaica: they possessed seeds and plants that would help

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[80] Goodison, "Nanny," *I Am Becoming My Mother*, 44.

[81] Ibid., 44.

[82] Ibid., 44.

[83] Ibid., 45.

them heal and harm ("pumpkin seeds" and "okra," as well as "Chainey root, fever grass & vervain"[84]). Her body contains revolutionary potential, as okra was used as an abortifacient among African slaves and the pumpkin plant has also been shown to have abortifacient effects on fetuses.[85] By "revolutionary potential," I am pointing to the ability to refuse the reproductive imperative of the plantation economy. According to Sharpe, "Goodison's poem characterizes the black female body as a weapon capable of combating the violence of slavery."[86] But this body has been trained in Africa before being sold into slavery, and it therefore offers little tangible inspiration for forms of resistance that are indigenous to women of the Caribbean.

Furthermore, Goodison's poem maps out a troubling vision of Nanny's reproductive body: its revolutionary potential is geographically limited, and it is worked upon by hands that are not her own. In other words, she does not fashion herself into a warrior. The degree to which Nanny consents to bodily fashioning throughout this process of seasoning is up for debate. She appears divorced from her own body, a floating presence beholding her body from above. Nanny "became most knowing / and forever alone" because her body will not reproduce.[87] She also does not narrate her training in active voice—she does not say, "I sealed my womb with molten wax," but rather, "My womb was sealed." She did not volunteer to be sent into slavery, but "was sent." All of this suggests ambiguous consent at best and coercion at worst. Goodison has not commented on the

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[84] Ibid., 44.

[85] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 114. See also Bancroft, *Essay on the Natural History of Guiana in South America*, 52–53, 371–2.

[86] Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 32.

[87] Goodison, "Nanny," 44.

passive voice in this poem, but her use of it complicates the poem's message in a way that exposes the myth of Nanny to doubt, at least as far as her agency and revolutionary potential are concerned.

Without discussing this problem of consent in Goodison's poem, Sharpe highlights the complexity of Goodison's Nanny: "The removal of the warrior woman's primary and secondary sex organs heightens her maternal and survival instincts. Her gender roles cut across the boundary that an ideology of separate spheres enforces: Nanny is mother and warrior in one; her training consists of learning the arts of herbal healing and of waging war."[88] Yet Sharpe does not expand on the contradictions inherent in the idea of a sterilized "mother" who never gives birth. The poem thrives on this ambiguity, the conceptual gap that maps how Nanny's maternity has appeared only as a foreclosed possibility, her sterilization a necessary part of her transformation into a warrior. Goodison exposes Nanny's vulnerability as a woman to practices of gender-domination both within and outside of the British West Indies. Indeed, she suggests that Africa was not a haven for women, where Ashanti women like Nanny, who might have had more power than other women, were still treated as inferior beings. Like Mer in Hopkinson's novel, who underwent female castration before being sold into slavery,[89] Goodison's vision of Nanny does not suggest freedom from oppression.

Goodison's poem invites a vision of Nanny as a real woman who suffered before she was free. It also suggests that even though reproductive resistance may have been made possible through ecological manipulation, it could also have been a coercive process that women did not necessarily consent to. Nanny's sterility was likely not her choice. And, because the archive is so limited in what it says about Nanny, we have no knowledge of whether or not Nanny had children. Yet Goodison,

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[88] Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 32.

[89] Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 97.

along with Cliff and Nichols, does not imagine her to have been a mother. This must not be a coincidence. Oral histories portray her as a metaphorical mother to her people, a symbol of nurturing and protection. Nanny's maternity extends only symbolically, as when Goodison describes how Nanny's "whole body would quicken / at the birth of everyone of my people's children."[90] The language of "quickening" is the same for describing a fetus's first movement in the womb. Nanny becomes the symbolic mother of her people without mothering her own children.

Her symbolic motherhood positions her on the same scale as Columbia and Britannia, the metaphorical mothers of the US and Britain. Yet Nanny *existed*—and she is stripped of much of her vitality and complexity as a former living person when she is incorporated into the national mythology. I address the problem of maternal national figureheads in much greater detail in chapter two of this dissertation on Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), a novel that maps the vexed contradictions of maternity and nation, politics and reproduction. Here, in this chapter on the literary memory of women's ecological agency in the contemporary Caribbean landscape, Nanny's sterile warrior body operates as an impossible inspiration for women. Her ecological agency is remembered as a gimmick, an elision of reality (Brathwaite), or, worse still, coming from an unknown source (Cliff). Despite all this, Nanny's presence is, just as Sharpe writes, as potent as ever in contemporary Caribbean women's writing. I have so far discussed how Nanny appears in Goodison, Cliff, and Nichols's work. In the final pages of this chapter, I want to broaden out my scope to look at two other cultural forms that have taken on Nanny's maternity and revolution as a subject: theater and photography. These two forms shed light on the complicated ways in which contemporary art and literature grapple with the historical legacy of women's

[90] Goodison, "Nanny," 44.

reproductive resistance on the island through the figure of Nanny. Ultimately, these cultural forms say more about the inspiration Nanny offers to women in the present than they do about Nanny and other women of the pre-abolition Caribbean.

C. Sistren Theatre and Renée Cox: Embodying Nanny in the Present

The Sistren Theatre Collective in Kingston, Jamaica produced *Nana Yah* in 1980, a play that depicted Nanny as a successful warrior leader of men and women. Sistren's first play, *Bellywoman Bangarang* (1978), drew from the members' own experiences, while *Nana Yah* took on a rigorous archival research method. The collective was created and run by predominantly working-class women who wanted to represent their lives to the public and create social change for women in Kingston.[91] Nanny's position as a recently inducted national hero had much to do with Sistren's choice of heroine for the play. Keith Noel writes that *Nana Yah* "is not overtly a protest play" like earlier Sistren productions, yet it participates in its mission of imagining better lives for women in the community, as I discussed in the introduction to *Secrets of the Bush*.

For *Nana Yah*, the actors and the invited director, Jean Small, conducted research on Ashanti communities at the Institute of Jamaica and visited the Maroons of Accompong, a village northwest of Kingston. They then transformed what they learned through their research into a narrative about Nanny's life, going so far as to depict Nanny in battle in the Blue Mountains. One of the women on-stage says at this moment in the play, "Talk bout warrior, dat deh woman was a warrior fe true. . . . She betta dan any man. As a matta ov fack we doan even bodda talk bout she husband fa him doan

[91] Noel, "Art as Protest," 30.

feature at all." (Talk about a warrior, that woman was truly one. She was better than any man. As a matter of fact, we don't even bother talking about her husband because he doesn't matter at all.)[92] Nanny is like Nichols's ecological warrior, better than any man, and, because she is superior to men, she does not need a husband. Yet this is where Nichols, Goodison, and Sistren's depictions of Nanny diverge. Even if it is not a "protest play," *Nana Yah* clearly presents a positive version of Nanny's story that is quite unlike Goodison's ambiguous poem. *Nana Yah* maps Nanny's escape from slavery to her arrival in the Blue Mountains, where she must establish her fighting prowess. In a dramatic scene, Nanny draws a knife and fights with Cudjoe's men until Cudjoe says, "Alright. Me see you can fight." *Nana Yah* represents Nanny as an equal to men as a warrior and stakes a claim for her legitimate right to be considered a national hero on par with Marcus Garvey or Paul Bogle. The play ran merely three years after Nanny was proclaimed a national hero, so it helped solidify Nanny-as-hero in the Kingston consciousness.

As Jean Small recalls in an interview in 1986, the play "attempts to lay a foundation on which female activism can be built by presenting a woman in history in such a way as to connect her to modern day Jamaican woman [*sic*]."[93] The women performed a version of Nanny's story that they imagined had many common links to contemporary women's lives: gender struggle, discrimination, and self-actualization. As Lillian Foster recounts in an interview with Keith Noel in 1986, the play "let both me, as an individual, the rest of the cast and people out in the audience, see themselves and learn that women can be independent within themselves. They must fight for themselves; fight for

[92] Script of *Nana Yah*, quoted in Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery*, 31.

[93] Jean Small, interview by Keith Noel, 37.

their rights and be firm as Nanny did."[94] The character is visited by several allegorical "spirits," including one named "Abortion," who represents, according to the script, "loss of name, rape, or abortion."[95] Abortion, when it encounters Nanny, the preeminent non-mother warrior, says, "Fa dis no no Backra pickney, no Backra nah tear me open fe gi me dis one."[96] The allegorical figure articulates reproductive refusal within the plantation economy: This is not a white man ("Backra")'s child ("pickney") in her body, and no white man will take a child from her and make it a slave. Instead, she will abort the fetus. In this moment of confrontation between Abortion and Nanny, the sexual economy of slavery collides with Nanny's mythical refusal of motherhood as a Maroon warrior. The women on-stage embody these characters, performing reproductive refusal within the present and helping women see that refusal to be dominated is possible.

Twenty-four years later, Renée Cox's *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* (2004), a series of self-portraits, broadened the audience for a performative, embodied Nanny, as the political figurehead for Jamaican women. Cox, who was born in Jamaica but now resides in New York, undertook a photo shoot in rural Jamaica in which she dressed in various outfits as the historical Nanny. She is a highly regarded photographer who has become famous for her controversial self-portraits that often employ religious symbols or cultural iconography as part of a critique of social, sexual, and religious norms. In 2001, *Yo Mama's Last Supper* drew ire for its reimagining of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1494–99), in which a nude Cox sits in Christ's place surrounded by black disciples.

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[94] Lillian Foster, interview by Keith Noel, 45.

[95] Noel, "Art as Protest," 63.

[96] Ibid., 63. For translation information on the words in quotation marks, please see Cassidy and Le Page, *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, 18, 151, 174, 196, 314, 348.

Cardinal Egan of New York City's St. Patrick's Cathedral called Cox "pathetic" for her abuse of Christian iconography.[97]

Three years later, she turned to Jamaican iconography, reimagining Nanny of the Maroons. In one photograph, she wears a British redcoat uniform, and she wields a scimitar.[98] In another, she sits on a front porch with several children in contemporary dress. Samantha Noel argues that there are two main strains in this series: the contemporary Nanny and the warrior Nanny from the eighteenth century. "The Land of Look Behind," a vista of the Jamaican mountain landscape, situates Cox within a mythical past vision of the island. The title nods to Cliff's 1985 collection of essays and poetry and to a 1982 Jamaican music documentary that was directed by Alan Greenberg, which featured footage of Bob Marley's funeral and interviewed the dub poet Mutaburaka and other Rastafari celebrities.[99] Cox's portrait participates in and plays with the ideology of these nostalgic artifacts, looking back to the past as an archive of a better time. The sun gleams out of the right corner of the frame, shedding light on a green landscape that could as easily have existed three centuries ago as ten years ago. There is a timeless quality that Cox cultivates in this photograph, but this quickly shifts to a strange juxtaposition of the past within the present, where Cox's clothing suggests a more contemporary setting in the landscape.

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[97] "Egan on 'Yo Mama' Artist."

[98] Renée Cox's website gallery offers anyone who could not attend her 2004 show at the Pérez Art Museum Miami a glimpse of her Nanny series. http://www.Renéeecox.org/#!gallery/c20vi (accessed 15 September 2015).

[99] Cliff, *Land of Look Behind*.

Whether Cox is in a cotton blouse and skirt that look like they are styles from the eighteenth century ("Nanny Warrior," "Banana Road," and "River Queen") or in styles of a more contemporary fashion, Nanny as a model of maternity and Jamaican independence runs through all of these photographs. In "Mother of Us All," Cox sits among several children on a porch in contemporary dress. Yet because this photograph is part of the Queen Nanny series, we are meant to think of Cox not as a woman with children but as the preeminent female hero of Jamaica who continues to inspire children today. Indeed, Samantha Noel argues that Cox sought to answer "the question '[i]f Granny Nanny were around today, who would she be?'."[100] Cox's project thus aligns with Sistren Theatre's version of Nanny in *Nana Yah*, where the play is written in present tense despite its emphasis on past events.[101] Both critically reflect on how the past can inform the present through the figure of Nanny, who is often referred to as a "Granny." As Valerie Lee writes, "the granny's life is not depicted as a past historical occurrence, but as an evolving cultural icon."[102] *Granny Nanny* as a term situates Nanny as a black midwife, a spiritual female healer from the past. Lee emphasizes that *granny* was a perjorative phrase that black women reclaimed as part of their project of recuperating narratives of the past into an empowered present and future.[103]

Taken together, these visions of the historical Nanny put little emphasis on her ecological knowledge beyond the pumpkin seeds she legendarily used against the British or the okra she may have used to help heal Maroon women in her capacity as a midwife. There are no depictions of

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[100] Noel, "Putting on a Bold-Face," 168.

[101] Smith, "Invoking the Spirit of the Warrior Woman," 85.

[102] Lee, *Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers*, 2.

[103] Ibid., 5.

Nanny in a garden, growing food, even though Maroons were accomplished agriculturists who needed to grow food to survive. Cox, however, does envision Nanny in a river and carrying banana crops, so she casts Nanny as part of the landscape, almost as though Nanny can be dug out of Glissant's historical, multiple Caribbean panorama.[104]

The ways in which Nanny is remembered determine in turn how Jamaican women form their understandings of belonging and citizenship in the Jamaican nation. Honor Ford-Smith, the former artistic director of Sistren Theatre and a poet, writes that Nanny is part of "a female tradition" of resistance to domination that endures into the present.[105] Ford-Smith's sentiment captures the ways in which Nanny is used in literature to muster women's resistance and resilience. Yet Nanny is kept apart from any female tradition by virtue of her Maroon status. She cannot be placed in the same category as Mer or Georgine, or Kitty or Clare Savage. Her history as a leader of Maroons aligns her most with Mary Ellen Pleasant, the abolitionist of Cliff's *Free Enterprise*. Women like these are exceptional in the sense that they are remembered as individuals, and there are stories about them that remain to this day. Yet neither Pleasant nor Nanny tended the provision plot, and perhaps neither of them grew ackee, mango, or okra.

There are thus limitations to the level of productivity or relevance that representations of Nanny or Pleasant can have to the lives of contemporary women. They are figures about whom we know very little, and their situations were not similar to those of the majority of women who lived during their lifetimes. However, in any investigation of the past when the present is less than ideal, the former ways of dealing with conflict can offer insight into how to navigate the present. In the case of

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[104] Ibid., xxix.

[105] Ford Smith, "Caribbean Women and Social Change," 152.

contemporary Caribbean women seeking to write their history, the past can be traced in fits and starts within the landscape. Even if that past is multiple and open to interpretation, botanical markers still offer an archive of women as primary growers of food and medicine on the provision grounds. The most fitting testimony to everyday women's ecological lives during slavery resides in the plants that are still cultivated on the islands. In Cliff's sequel to *Abeng*, 1987's *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare Savage returns to Jamaica after her mother, Kitty, has died. She and her anarchist friends—it is the early 1970s in Jamaica, and decolonization has mostly failed—dig up "Cassava. Afu. Fufu. Plantain."[106] As Sheller writes, "These survivor species are notably Caribbean . . . and African in origin and name . . . suggesting the provision grounds, language, and cultivation practices of the enslaved connecting to the ancestral and indigenous and taking mangrove-like root beneath and throughout the protective foliage of the dense forest."[107] These are the same plants that enslaved women may have grown on their plots, and Cliff implies that these anarchist young men and women uncover the past in the course of a revolt against Michael Manley's democratic-socialist government's failure to create a Jamaica free from neocolonial domination. The final scene of the novel, when Clare and her friends die in a failed attack on a movie set, depicts the gross misuses of Nanny and Maroon history in the name of entertainment. Clare and her fellow anarchists camp out above the film set and see two figures that stand out among the rest of the film cast and crew:

[106] Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, 11.

[107] Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 193.

One, a woman, the actress called in whenever someone was needed to play a Black heroine, any Black heroine, whether Sojourner Truth or Bessie Smith, this woman wore a pair of leather breeches and a silk shirt—designer's notion of the clothes that Nanny wore.[108] This black actress who gets all of the "rebellious woman" roles is dressed in sumptuous fabrics, a far cry from the camouflage Nanny would surely have worn as a guerilla warrior in the Blue Mountains. Her many roles elide the differences between Nanny, Truth, and Smith, differences of space and time, politics and family. Next to this actress is a "former heavyweight or running back, dressed as Cudjoe, tiny humpbacked soul."[109] Nanny and Cudjoe speak romantically to one another, whereas in history, they probably never met. Worst of all, there is a supernatural "monster" (a homeless man who is ordered to climb into a tree to jump down on the two actors) that is preparing to attack Nanny, and the actor who plays Cudjoe is slated to "rescue" her.[110] Before the anarchists can act on their plans, helicopters fly into the valley and open fire on all involved: the film set and the anarchists in their hiding places.

Clare's vision of a better Jamaica does not come into fruition through anarchic revolution. Her death in the bush, long after she discovered that she is sterile and cannot reproduce,[111] is witnessed by no one but birds. Angela Davis, writing on black women's struggles for political equality in the late twentieth-century US, reminds us of the ways in which enslaved women were linked to the landscape as a tool of oppression, and that this persists as an ideology of domination to this day.

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[108] Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, 206.

[109] Ibid., 206.

[110] Ibid., 207.

[111] Ibid., 169.

She writes, "[t]he real oppression of women today is inextricably bound up with the capitalist mode of appropriating and mastering nature."[112] Helicopters, expensive and loud machines, and the men that occupy them rain down bullets on political idealists and women. Clare's body is subsumed within a wild landscape, as though she has been conquered by the forces behind the helicopter attack and has returned to the land, her proper province. Cliff thus suggests the futility of political revolution as well as the continuity of historical forms of domination of women.

Despite this ambiguous ending to Cliff's novel, the proliferation of women's literary and artistic interest in reclaiming "nature" from the paradigm that Davis identifies tells us that the land has a deep history that lies beneath the soil. Women during slavery could cultivate small spaces of healing and community on the land, or they could even have used certain food plants to refuse the reproductive imperative of slavery. In the next chapter, I look at the ways in which Caribbean wome writers critique a postcolonial narrative about the past that excludes certain women: those of indigenous descent from the Caribs and queer women. If this first chapter looks at women who grapple with the past, the next one reckons with who is forgotten in these narratives. The limits of our knowledge should not prevent us from speculating on possible sites of resistance. As Barbara Bush argues, "Absence of hard evidence should not be taken as proof that the practice did not exist."[113] Following this logic, contemporary Caribbean women writers explore the botanical traces of the past, mining it for inspiration for women in the present. We may never know with any certainty what happened on the provision grounds, or in Nanny's Blue Mountains, but the contemporary

[112] Davis, "Women and Capitalism," 164.

[113] Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, 142.

Caribbean literary and artistic archive continues to inspire women to refuse gender oppression and seek better lives.

III. Narratives of Dispossession: Carib Women's Abortions and the Fiction of Indigenous Extinction

What makes the world turn against me and all who look like me?

I own nothing.

— Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Let them sing on her—she wanted her own song, it was her birthright.

— Marie-Elena John, *Unburnable*

The Carib Territory occupies the northeastern side of Dominica, a small, 750-square kilometer island in the Lesser Antilles.[1] It was originally designated as a land reserve for the Carib people and their descendants in 1903 by the British colonial government in Roseau.[2] Following the establishment of Dominican independence from Britain, the Carib Reserve Act of 1978 granted 3,700 acres to the Carib people in perpetuity, a guarantee that the acreage would be theirs as long as Dominica remained.

[1] Smith et. al, *Volcanic Geology of the Mid-Arc Island of Dominica, Lesser Antilles*, 3.

[2] Although Karifuna is the indigenous name for the Caribs before they were conquered by Europeans. I use the term *Carib* to stay consistent with its use in my primary literary texts. Smith, "Placing the Carib Model Village," 75.

Yet Dominica is a volcanically active island. Volcanic and geothermal hotspots simmer and smoke across the island.[3] They loom over towns as reminders of their destructive potential. A 2011 paper in the *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* argues that "continued chemical monitoring of the thermal discharges . . . is particularly important . . . [because] seven of the potentially active volcanic centres [*sic*] lie in the southern half of the island within 10km of the capital, Roseau."[4] The political and economic hub of Dominica, Roseau, is threatened with extinction. How good, then, is a legal guarantee of permanence—the Carib Territory—from an island nation that is still being shaped by volcanic forces?

In her 1996 novel *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Jamaica Kincaid explores the contradictory promise of permanence on Dominica through the lens of a mixed-race woman living in the early twentieth century. Xuela Claudette Richardson is of part Carib descent, but she never visits the Carib Territory. She wanders the island, dislocated from any sense of belonging to her mother's ancestors. Likewise, in the Grenadian writer Merle Collins's novel, *The Colour of Forgetting* (1995), a woman named Carib wanders Paz, an allegorical island in the Lesser Antilles. Carib's nickname reflects not that she is a "descendant by blood" of those who once lived on the island, but that she often stands on "Leapers' Hill," a place where "the brave Amerindians" leapt to their deaths rather than surrender to the British conquerors.[5] Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey reads Carib as a "corporeal symbol" of the past and future.[6] Carib's archetypal name confirms that this is on one

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[3] Smith et. al., *Volcanic Geology of the Mid-Arc Island of Dominica*, 3.

[4] Joseph et. al., "Gas and Water Geochemistry of Geothermal Systems in Dominica," 13.

[5] Collins, *Colour of Forgetting*, 4.

[6] DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 252.

level true, but she is also a person in exile who repeatedly laments the loss of life that attended imperialism, a detail that the present-day inhabitants of Paz seem not to remember. Xuela Claudette Richardson's and Carib's wanderings testify to the dispossession of the Carib people from the Caribbean archipelago, a condition which reflects broader problems of land, belonging, and memory in the region.

According to the stories of European contact with Amerindians, the Taíno and Caribs were wiped out by disease, war, and intermarriage. However, this narrative ignores the fact that Caribs remained on Dominica and St. Vincent for at least two centuries after the initial conquest of the Caribbean.[7] It was thus utterly essential that when the Carib Territory was first created, the Dominican government recognize Caribs as an existing population on the island.[8] In 1903, Henry Hesketh Bell, the British administrator of Dominica, called for a reserve to be created to "empower" and "compensate" the Caribs as a discrete group with rights to land.[9] The Carib Territory was designated as a communal form of land—all Caribs had equal claims to the property, just as the

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[7] Mervyn C. Alleyne collates much of this scholarship in his recent study of the history of ethnicity in the Caribbean. Alleyne, *Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*, 85.

[8] Charles Taylor explores the politics of recognition in his frequently cited 1994 essay, "The Politics of Recognition." The essay is itself a bit dated, but its central claim holds true to this day: recognition as a contemporary feminist and racial justice issue has deep historical roots in Enlightenment philosophy. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[9] Beckles, "Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations in the Seventeenth Century," 281.

Maroons of Accompong in Jamaica still share the land that they gained through a treaty with the British in 1739.[10]

The 1903 treatise created the conditions for Carib recognition, but legal battles about its legitimacy have persisted.[11] In September 1930, the Carib War began: Kelvin Smith writes that several Dominican policemen raided the Territory, then killed two men and wounded three others. A "crowd in response forcefully chased the police out of the Reserve." Then, "the island's Administrator . . . deploy[ed] . . . the warship *HMS Delhi* and a contingent of marines to the Reserve."[12] Rather than recognizing the legitimate claim Caribs had against the police, the Dominican government quelled any dissent with British-backed military force. The position of Chief was removed for twenty-three years.[13] The borders of the territory and its legal standing are still contested to this day.[14]

The Dominican example illustrates a much larger issue in the Caribbean: the recognition of indigenous people. Land, and its association with memory and geneaology, is at the center of this problem. The three novels examined in this chapter, Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother*, Collins's *The Colour of Forgetting*, and Marie-Elena John's *Unburnable* (2006), foreground the failed promise of land restitution for Caribs. *Land* is an important concept in indigenous rights struggles across the world, but it is also critical to the imperial and national projects that depend on

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[10] Martin, "Maroon Identity."

[11] Mullaney, "Carib Territory."

[12] Kelvin Smith, "Placing the Carib Model Village," 85n6.

[13] Ibid., 75.

[14] Mullaney, "Carib Territory," 71–96.

borders to maintain legal and political boundaries. The imperial project represented land as a resource-rich, exploitable commodity. Julie Evans et al. argue that "the primary aim [of settler colonialism] . . . was to get possession of the land by dispossessing the Indigenous peoples."[15] This dispossession was systemic and global.[16] The indigenous rights' movement gains power insofar as it links particular indigenous peoples' struggles to transnational systems of power. Caribs have participated in North American networks of indigenous people such as Canada's Assembly of First Nations, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.[17] Despite their geographic differences, these groups unify around the importance of land to their survival. In 2009, Emma Gallaas Mullaney interviewed Caribs who live on the Dominican land reserve. The majority of those interviewed argued that their right to land is about both accessing physical territory and the cultural traditions "embedded in the land."[18] These traditions include the vital forms of knowledge about the land itself, especially medicinal, religious, and agricultural practices, some of which are based in the soil and some in the sea. Although Caribs on the territory have designated land rights, they are denied full access to the island shore. They are landlocked, a particularly acute loss for those who once depended on the ocean for food and transportation.[19] We see the possibilities of the ocean shore in *Unburnable*, when a Carib who is exiled from the reserve builds a canoe to reach the Caribs living in South America, using the wind as a navigational tool and

[15] Evans et al., "Conclusion," 184.

[16] Ibid., 182–192.

[17] Forte, "Introduction," 3.

[18] Mullaney, "Carib Territory," 75.

[19] Honychurch, *Dominica*.

planting the seeds of a "Pan-Carib movement" with his arrival.[20] The ocean is integral to Carib identity and survival, but this man never returns.

The indigenous rights struggle is pan-Caribbean. It follows in the wake of the decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as Caribs also experience land restriction in Guyana, a South American country that shares its colonization history with the British West Indies. Caribs have been displaced onto the interior of the country, rather than its coastal region. This shared geographic marginalization suggests that newly independent nations like Dominica and Guyana inherited the land practices of the colonizers. Shona Jackson argues that the founding moment of modernity was not the plantation economy, as Paul Gilroy claims,[21] but the "displacement and objectification of Indigenous Peoples."[22] Because the exclusion of Caribs from the body politic, which is located in the coastal regions, continues under the new independent rule in Guyana, Jackson contends that little has changed since the replacement of the imperial rule of the nation with the new creole state. *Creole* is a word with multiple meanings, but in the Caribbean context it is largely used to designate the mixed-race populations of former enslaved people, East Indian indentured laborers, and European colonizers.[23]

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[20] John, *Unburnable*, 271.

[21] Gilroy corrects claims that Atlantic slavery was a "premodern residue" that was "fundamentally incompatible with enlightened rationality and capitalist industrial production." Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 49.

[22] Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 3.

[23] Brathwaite, "Timehri," 344. "Timehri" originally appeared in a 1970 issue of *Savacou*. Brathwaite, "Timehri," *Savacou* 2 (1970): 35–44.

Because countries like Guyana and Dominica reproduce the dispossession of Caribs, Jackson proposes that any anti-racist scholarship on indigenous people in the contemporary Caribbean "requires the difficult assessing of Creoles as themselves settlers because of the ways in which they maintain power within the postcolonial state."[24] The three novels I study in this chapter take on that work, arguing that at the core of indigenous dispossession in the twentieth century is the *reproduction* of the relationship between colonizers and Caribs in newly independent Caribbean nations. The women at the center of these novels are excluded by the twentieth-century Caribbean nationalist project, placed on the margins of the islands as aberrant Carib women who have nothing to contribute to contemporary, post-independence Caribbean society.

It is no coincidence that women are especially impacted by land struggles. On their shoulders rests an important obligation: to reproduce the nation, or, in the particular case of Carib women, to maintain the population so that Caribs can survive as a discrete group with rights to land. Reproductive citizenship is a founding ideal of the nation because it ensures continuity and permanence, two vital aspirations inherent in nation building.[25] Yet all three of the core characters studied in this chapter—Xuela, Carib, and Marie-Elena John's Lillian—are willfully childless. In the first two chapters of this project, I discussed abortion as an act of resistance to an oppressive power. All four chapters of this project are unified in the critique of imperialism as the overriding principle of dominance over women's bodies in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The first chapter looked at the literary-historical imagination surrounding enslaved women's acts of resistance to the reproductive mandate of slavery. The third chapter, which directly follows this study, explores the

[24] Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 3.

[25] Richardson and Turner, "Bodies as Property," 36.

forms of abortive silence around plant knowledge in the contemporary biocolonial world. The oppressors in these two cases are more well-trodden ground for writers and literary scholars. Yet this chapter, placed as a companion piece to chapter one's exploration of reproductive refusal during plantation slavery, demands that we take a closer look at an oppressor who is closer to the island home: the postcolonial nation-state.

Abortion becomes a strategy of refusing to condone the postcolonial national project that excludes Caribs from the body politic. This body, however, depends on Caribs for its sustenance. When enslaved women manipulated the landscape in their provision grounds, they used not only knowledge about plants from Africa but also information from indigenous women about plants exclusive to the Americas. Londa Schiebinger argues for this exchange of knowledge in her study of the use of the peacock flower, *flos pavonis*, as an abortifacient by both "Arawak and African slave women."[26] She uncovers the crucial intra-ethnic exchange of medicinal knowledge and practice concerning this plant. Indigenous forms of knowledge were vital survival tools for African slaves uprooted from their homelands.[27] Food crops like maize, potatoes, and tomatoes helped bolster their diets—which were usually quite lacking in essential nutrients, thanks to the plantation owners' restriction of food—and medicinal plants were equally important crops that enslaved people learned about and cultivated on their provision grounds. In chapter one, I discussed these grounds along the lines Judith Carney and Richard Nicolas Rosomoff offer: "the botanical gardens of the dispossessed," plots where abortifacient plants may have been grown alongside foodstuffs. Yet

[26] Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 2.

[27] Carney and Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 2.

focusing exclusively on Afro-Caribbean means of survival risks ignoring the importance of indigenous forms of knowledge to the Caribbean and the people who still use them.

It is easy to forget that Amerindians taught enslaved people about plants when the myth of indigenous extinction is alive and well among scholarly circles. This myth was circulated first by colonizers and then by the creole majority, which incorporates indigenous forms of knowledge about the land into its own structures of resistance to imperialism, at the same time that it circulates the myth of indigenous extinction. Amerindians are arguably the *most* dispossessed of their land and their knowledge. We see this in Carney and Rosomoff's assertion that "[m]any of the cultivation methods, plant usage, and forms of food preparation developed by Amerindians survived their annihilation."[28] Such rhetoric ignores the existence of Carib populations to this day. Furthermore, and even more alarmingly, Carney and Rosomoff argue that Africans were "custodians of those knowledge systems," which suggests both the extinction of Amerindians as well as their inability to protect or preserve their own knowledge.[29]

Reproductive refusal is thus part of a subversive project that seeks to undermine the fiction of indigenous disappearance that is so integral to the postcolonial narrative of Caribbean history. The myth of indigenous extinction intersects with abortion as a practice among indigenous women, for whom, as the statistics on Carib populations suggest, reproduction is an important tool of survival and gaining national attention. By not giving birth, these women "vanish" or "extinguish" their reproductive bodies. They perform and repeat their dispossession, making clear that this performance is part of a project of imagining a better future for Carib women, where exaggeration

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 4.

of possible responses to the state of things brings into clearer focus the inequities of the present. If something better is not imagined for Carib women, these texts suggest, they will have no future in the form of children, who will in turn have no chance to fight for land rights and a more equitable political, economic, and social life in the Caribbean nation.

In what follows, I mine the tensions and contradictions of Caribbean national identity, especially those surrounding the land rights of Caribs. I then explore the hypervisibility of Carib women, their sexual exploitation, and the meaning of abortion within the Caribbean postcolonial state. These sections open up a theoretical space for understanding possible futures for Carib women in the Caribbean, when the myth of the postcolonial nation-state is laid bare.

A. Creolization and the Disappearance Myth

The most commonly accepted narrative about Caribbean indigenous populations tells us that they disappeared soon after European contact. Susan Scott Parrish, a literary historian of natural history writing and the exchange of knowledge between Europeans and Africans, argues "coastal and tropical Indian populations had been decimated" in the Atlantic world.[30] The word *decimated* at its most literal sense means "To kill, destroy, or remove one in every ten of," yet Parrish is clearly using the term in its more figurative, modern sense.[31] I cite Parrish here because her work has been widely acknowledged as an important recuperation of African-based forms of knowledge during

[30] Parrish, "Diasporic African Sources of Enlightenment Knowledge,", 282.

[31] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "decimate," accessed 17 November 2015, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/48200?rskey=QjRsP8&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid.

slavery. Her scholarship fits within the trajectory of Caribbean studies in the mid to late twentieth century that sought to uncover the submerged knowledge of colonized people in the region: black, East Indian, Chinese, and, also, creole. Until the early twenty-first century, Caribbean historians and literary scholars claimed that indigenous people disappeared from the region entirely. Indeed, even contemporary studies of herbal medicine in the Caribbean exclude indigenous people from any discussion of specific forms of knowledge about plants.[32] Only in the last fifteen years or so have scholars begun to acknowledge that the story of indigenous disappearance is inaccurate.[33] When scholars elide the indigenous contribution to knowledge that happened as different cultures—European, African, and Carib and Taíno—came into contact with one another, they produce woefully exclusionary versions of history.

To be fair, these scholarly elisions are partly a way of managing or explaining a historical gap in knowledge about the people who supposedly disappeared. We still know very little about the Caribs before 1492: they may have inhabited the islands for no more than a few hundred years before Columbus's ships ran ashore in Hispaniola.[34] Archaeological evidence and oral histories tell us that the Caribs cut a path across the islands of the Lesser Antilles, working northeast from the

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[32] For example, the recently published *Jamaican Folk Medicine: A Source of Healing* lists historical examples of Africans, Europeans, southeast Asians, and Chinese people as source of traditional medical knowledge on the island. Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, *Jamaican Folk Medicine*, 34–56.

[33] Percy Hintzen claims that Amerindians disappeared from the region. Hintzen, "Afro-Creole Nationalism as Elite Domination," 9.

[34] Layng, *Carib Reserve*, 23.

coast of South America.[35] When Columbus arrived, the Caribs were pursuing their northward trajectory toward islands like Jamaica and Cuba, where the Taíno lived. The Taíno have been understood as the more peaceful indigenous group, compared to the warlike Caribs. Indeed, Olive Senior, a Jamaican-Canadian poet, anthropologist, and fiction writer discussed at length in chapter three of this project, argues that the Caribs "strongly resisted the Europeans from their first contact, unlike the hospitable Taíno, who at first welcomed the invaders, too late turning to resistance."[36] A poem from Senior's 1994 collection, *Gardening in the Tropics*, depicts the Taíno as innocents who give the Spaniards pineapple, a classic symbol of hospitality, as a gift of welcome to their island's shores,

> not knowing in
> your language
> "house warming"
> meant "to take
> possession of."[37]

Their ignorance is partly linguistic, and they are duped by the Spanish gestures of peace that hide the double meaning of their language (e.g., "house warming" means "to take possession of").

Caribs do not play a central role in Senior's poem collection, but by portraying the Taíno as innocents, she implies that European advances of peace did not so easily persuade Caribs. Yet even if it were true that Caribs were more warlike than the Taíno, they too suffered greatly from

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[35] Senior, "Carib," *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 97.

[36] Ibid., 96.

[37] Olive Senior, "Pineapple," *Gardening in the Tropics*, 66.

European imperialism. Their population was greatly reduced, they lost most of their land in the Lesser Antilles, and the historical record classed them as cannibals.[38] The Carib population, like those of indigenous groups worldwide, diminished rapidly with the onset of colonization. However, the Caribs held several islands of the Lesser Antilles until the British and French led assaults on St. Vincent, Dominica, Guadaloupe, and Martinique in the eighteenth century. Like the Maroons in Jamaica, they delayed the conquest of Dominica because of the extreme mountainous terrain of the island.[39] Despite their best efforts at holding on to their land, they ultimately lost out to the expanding plantation economy, which demanded an "absolute monopoly" of the Caribbean and all of its potential land.[40]

Those who were responsible for the formation of the plantation economy—Europeans—were also initially responsible for the stereotypes that were circulated about the Caribs, especially the idea that they were more dangerous than the Taíno. European explorers argued that the conquest was justified because the Caribs were "vicious cannibals."[41] The dichotomy between the two groups is supported on false grounds that have only begun to be dismissed by scholars. For example, in 1999

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[38] Scholars have speculated on whether William Shakespeare's Caliban (*The Tempest*, 1610–1611) was an anagram for the word *cannibal* or *Carib*. See Vaughan and Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban*, 27.

[39] Beckles, "Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations," 283.

[40] Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought*, 105.

[41] Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 35; Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought*, 64.

the Barbadian historian Hilary Beckles uncovered archival records that indicated that Caribs from neighboring St. Croix helped the Taíno resist the Spanish conquistadors in Puerto Rico.[42]

Between the colonization of the island by first the French and then the British in 1763,[43] and the dedication of the Carib Territory in 1903, we know very little about how the Caribs lived. However, the territory's emergence at the beginning of the twentieth century highlights a perplexing moment in Dominica's history when it became clear that recognizing the surviving Caribs on the island was an important act despite popular resistance to the idea. Beckles argues that Governor Bell's decision to dedicate land to the Caribs was not popular; the majority of Dominicans in power did not believe that they were a distinct group of people who warranted recognition.[44] Indeed, the Carib population should, according to the stories, not exist. Colonial administrators at the turn of the century argued that the Caribs had been totally "assimilated through miscegenation into the African genetic pool."[45] Bell's decision went against the grain of common opinion, and it is especially noteworthy for how it resists the logic of *miscegenation*, a racially loaded term that was largely replaced by the word *creolization* in the twentieth century. *Creolization* indicates a uniquely Caribbean process whereby "new societies were . . . rapidly created from an amalgam of European, African and aborigine elements,"[46] and it has been claimed as a positive effect of colonization. Scholars like Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Sylvia Wynter argue that creolization

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[42] Beckles, "Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations," 284.

[43] Ibid., 280.

[44] Ibid., 281.

[45] Ibid., 281.

[46] Senior, *Working Miracles*, 106.

created a unique cultural and ethnic history out of an otherwise bleak history of imperialism. Brathwaite discusses the "acculturation" effects of creolization, in which enslaved Africans established themselves as part of a new Caribbean cultural landscape. Meanwhile, Wynter proposes that enslaved Africans became the "new natives" of the Caribbean.[47] These readings of creolization were first prominent in the 1970s when histories motivated by the initial successes of Caribbean nationalism also celebrated the emergence of subversive subjectivities during slavery and into the present.

Yet the discourse of creolization washes over specific identity formations in pursuit of a homogenous trajectory of ethnic identity in the Caribbean. It suggests that Caribs do not exist as a distinct group of people.[48] We see this in Wynter's claim that Africans replaced indigenous groups as "natives" to the region. Bell's move in 1902 was thus an important step toward acknowledging Carib survival into the twentieth century, and it actively contradicted the prevailing narratives about how the vanished Caribs commingled with Europeans and Africans and lost any sense of a discrete group identity.[49]

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[47] See Brathwaite, "Timehri,"; Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*; Sylvia Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica."

[48] Not to mention the Chinese, East Asian, Middle Eastern, and other ethnic groups that have settled in the region since the institution of slavery ended.

[49] Of course, since Bell's decision, many have criticized it as a barely adequate gesture toward people who once owned the entire island. See Joseph, "Five Hundred Years of Indigenous Resistance."

Kincaid's novel takes place soon after Bell's decision, while Collins and John imagine the mid-twentieth century as a pivotal time of conflict between Caribs and creoles. The antagonism between these groups has been played down historically, especially because it is unpopular to claim that two marginalized groups who have been so damaged by European colonization could be anything but amenable to each other in the anticolonial struggle. To suggest, however, that there is never intra-ethnic conflict among marginalized groups is to ignore history and the dynamics of power. In her study of black performances of imperialism and nationalism in the 1930s, Stephanie Leigh Batiste explores the forms of black primitivism that were circulated among blacks in the United States to the detriment of Haitian reality. Notably, black primitivism rooted in the United States suggested a static Haitian identity. Batiste explores the ways in which black primitivism operated alongside the struggle for black equality in the United States, writing that "ideologies of power rooted in hierarchy and racism can at times coexist with agendas to assert racial equality and black humanity."[50] Creolization was similarly used to argue for a vibrant ethnic identity, a unique creation of the Caribbean, at the expense of Caribs who continued to live on Dominica. It was then mobilized to bolster the nationalist projects of the Caribbean.

The conflict between Caribs and the majority black population in Dominica has historical roots in the circulation of myths about indigenous disappearance. Also, in places like Guyana, where Amerindians survived colonization in larger groups, there are historical tensions between the two groups that go back centuries. When V.S. Naipaul visited Guyana in 1961, he was told that the Amerindians betrayed enslaved people: "Everyone knows that Amerindians hunted down runaway

[50] Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors*, 10.

slaves; it was something I heard again and again, from white and black."[51] Although Naipaul's phrase, "Everyone knows," opens up a space of ironic detachment and speculation about the claim that follows it, his experience in Guyana confirms that intra-ethnic conflict and tension exist in the region and will not soon resolve.

Likewise, when Londa Schiebinger visited Dominica in the first years of the twenty-first century as she conducted research on the peacock flower, she witnessed antagonism between Caribs and the black majority. This was especially noticeable when she discussed medicinal knowledge about abortion with Carib and black practitioners of herbal medicine. A Carib woman shares with her a secret about a plant that can produce abortion, but a black herbalist later argues that the Carib woman is wrong: "While he spoke openly about abortion, this man of African heritage flatly denied that the plant the Carib woman had given me (which I showed him) worked as a contraceptive."[52] Schiebinger says that she has no explanation for this disagreement, yet Dominican history offers a clear reason for why the black herbalist would contradict the Carib woman. Caribs have been dispossessed of their knowledge, and their legitimate claims to land and belonging in the nation are contested. Schiebinger's short narrative about her experience in Dominica reproduces the hierarchy that is implicit in the disavowal of Carib knowledge. The black doctor has the last word regarding this medicinal knowledge about abortion. Schiebinger does not return to verify the plant's effectiveness with the Carib doctor, so the Carib woman is a silent participant in this exchange of knowledge. This suggests that indigenous women suffer most from the national project: they are silenced and ignored.

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[51] Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, 98.

[52] Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 241.

Because nationalism in the British-speaking Caribbean has a long and circuitous history, I focus exclusively on its forms that impinge on indigenous women's rights. The region was a hotbed for black nationalist theorizing and activism in the first half of the twentieth century, although the majority of it came from men. Black nationalism is closely related to two theoretical paradigms of the twentieth century: Pan-Africanism and Négritude. Although these two movements are distinct, they share a core interest in unifying people of African descent from across the globe. This inspired nationalist movements, especially in the Caribbean, in which political theorists imagined a nation that rightfully belonged to the descendants of those enslaved people who had generated so much wealth and who had labored for so long on the land. Some of the most vibrant thinkers on Pan-Africanism and Négritude have come out of the Caribbean: Edward Wilmot Blyden, who was born in Saint Thomas and authored numerous pan-African and pro-Liberian colonization texts in the nineteenth century; Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and a proponent of pan-Africanism, was born in Jamaica; and Aimé Césaire, the famous poet and thinker on Négritude, and Franz Fanon, author of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), were both Martinican. The first wave of popular Caribbean writing reflects this androcentric influence.[53]

In the 1970s and 1980s, women's writing in the Caribbean took off. Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh write that the increasing publication of Caribbean women's writing highlighted the growing trend in resisting "dominant male forms and . . . acts of cultural (African-Caribbean) cultural

[53] For an incisive study on the first-wave of androcentric nationalism and the second-wave of women's rights nationalism in the region, see Scott, *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization*.

homogenization."[54] Collins and Kincaid, and later Marie Elena-John, participate in this wave of women writing new versions of nationalism. They tackle the myth of indigenous disappearance, which has a particularly gendered valence in the region as it is predominantly circulated among the most well-known male writers and theorists.[55] For example, the Marxist historian C. L. R. James argues that indigenous people disappeared as a discrete group long before African slaves labored on the sugar plantations of Haiti in his remarkable study of the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). James points to the population drop in fifteen years, from "perhaps a million, to 60,000 in 15 years," as the motivating factor for looking elsewhere for "more robust" laborers.[56] The Caribs play a very small role in James's prologue to the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian revolution. Melanie Newton argues that James and other Caribbean mid-twentieth century male writers "reinscribed one of the Caribbean archipelago's foundational imperial myths [indigenous disappearance]. . . into some of their most visionary anticolonial texts."[57] These writers were key participants in the black nationalist or pan-Africanist movements. During the interwar period of the 1930s, these movements became especially strong, as self-government and political independence became increasingly important issues for creole political leaders.[58] However, the calls for nation building were founded on specific class and racial affiliations: they "came predominantly from the ranks of the middle-strata elite. They [the leaders] were also predominantly Black and

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[54] Donnell and Welsh, *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, 371.

[55] Sylvia Wynter is an exception to a total rule that only male writers circulated these myths.

[56] James, *The Black Jacobins*, 4.

[57] Newton, "Indigeneity and Decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean," 108.

[58] Hintzen, "Afro-Creole Nationalism as Elite Domination," 18.

coloured."[59] Percy Hintzen's point here elaborates on the very critique that women writers mobilized against the dominant nationalist ideologies of the mid-twentieth century: the androcentric, bourgeois class determined the national agendas of many Caribbean nations.

I started this chapter by emphasizing the contradictory promise of permanence and belonging in the founding of the Carib Territory on an island as geologically volatile as Dominica. Since the territory's founding, the Carib population of Dominica has grown to approximately three thousand strong.[60] At the start of the twentieth century when the reserve was established, there were around six hundred Caribs recorded on the island.[61] The Carib Territory thus enabled not only the survival of the Caribs on the island but also their exponential growth in the twentieth century. Despite this growth, and the promise of stability built into it, "the Carib Chief and Council have yet to secure full legal title to the land and continue to contest on behalf of the entire population both the terms of governance and their citizenship status with the central Dominican government."[62] Caribs are still seeking to be recognized as indigenous citizens of Dominica. These contestations between the territory and the Dominican nation reflect broader problems in defining national belonging in the Caribbean, even as Caribs perform the reproductive citizenship expected of them. Shona Jackson's Guyanese example is a perfect case to illustrate this idea: the interior is seen as *terra nullius*, "nobody's land"—except for the fact that Caribs live there. In settler colonies, the term *terra*

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[59] Please note that the phrase "colored" designates anyone of mixed-race descent in the Caribbean. Ibid., 18.

[60] Joseph, "Five Hundred Years of Indigenous Resistance," 214.

[61] Beckles, "Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations," 280.

[62] Mullaney, "Carib Territory," 71.

nullius was used for any land that went automatically to the colonizers.[63] The fate of people on that land—the "nobody"—is contested and imperiled to this day in Guyana, which has been independent of British rule since 1966.[64]

This is, of course, not exclusively a Guyanese problem. In *Unburnable*, the central hub of Roseau is the place where creoles, Lebanese immigrants, and lucky Carib youth congregate to gain economic mobility and political power.[65] John writes, "Words like *progress*, *education*, *anticolonialism*, *trade unions*—such words were beginning to circulate and resound, even to the outer reaches."[66] These "outer reaches" do not have access to electricity, paved roads, or telephones in the mid-twentieth century, but the children who live on the Carib reserve can have access to these technologies if they move to Roseau for an education. Iris, a young teenager of mixed Carib and African descent, is sent, despite her mother's initial protests, to a nun's school in the capital for this reason. The political space of the capital promises more than the Carib reserve does. The land is richer and ripe with "progress."

Similarly, in Collins's *The Colour of Forgetting*, the best land belongs to those who are members of the creole class. As the fictional island of Pax emerges as a newly independent nation, the politically strong black middle class roots out the poor. Even within families, children born outside of wedlock are forced off of their land. The Malheureuse family loses much of its land to

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[63] Evans et al., *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights*, 184.

[64] Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 11.

[65] See Jamaica Kincaid's strange ideological positioning regarding Middle Eastern immigrants as an example of the tensions between this immigrant population and creoles. Kincaid, *A Small Place*.

[66] John, *Unburnable*, 55.

two brothers who are part of the family but who claim that the illegitimate children (those who were born before their mother and father were married) have no claim to the land. Caiphus, the oldest of the generation, reads their father's will: "only lawful children and their descendants should inherit of this land."[67] "Lawful" means "legitimate," and as a newly empowered member of the landed elite, Caiphus decides to revisit and reinterpret his father's will as permission to dispossess his family.

Carib, a wandering woman with no land of her own, predicts this "land confusion" from the first pages of Collins's novel.[68] In fact, it is difficult to say which "Carib" prophesizes this. Her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother all bear the name "Carib," and each one performs the same function on the island of traveling prophet woman. Willive, a member of the Malheureuse family, says,

> And was the same Carib, the great-grandmother self, that walk through the night them times, shouting out, Blood in the land! And warning people to be careful. A nation divided against itself, she used to preach, shall not stand.[69]

The generations of this same prophet woman role are continuous and unchanging. Several generations of women in the Malheureuse family attest to this. The phrase "the great-grandmother self" indicates which version of Carib gave the original prophecy about the inevitable "land confusion" on the island once it became a "nation." This depiction of a woman named Carib, who could be any member of the Carib generation of women, is ideologically suspect on several levels. First, Collins suggests a static identity for indigenous women, one that the Canadian-American

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[67] Collins, *Colour of Forgetting*, 25.

[68] Ibid., 10.

[69] Ibid., 10.

writer Thomas King specifically debunks in his critique of Edward Sheriff Curtis's photographic expedition in the late nineteenth century in the United States, where Curtis looked for a static, unchanging, stereotyped "Indian" to photograph before all Native Americans disappeared.[70] The novel implies that the prophecy could have come from any of the Caribs across the span of the novel: four generations. Second, this indigenous woman preaches a common nationalist mouthpiece: "a nation divided against itself . . . shall not stand," which sounds strange coming from the mouth of someone who has been so excluded from the national project. Third, these Carib women do not lay claim to any land of their own. They appear only concerned for the wellbeing of others, the majority black population that marginalizes them. Collins's novel is ideologically inconsistent with regard to the role of Carib women in the postcolonial nation. It does, however, articulate the ways in which legitimacy and illegitimacy play out in land claims. The Malheureuse family is divided by its history of reproduction and the ways in which legitimacy—and legitimate claims to land—are defined by the creole class.

Kincaid's novel is also fundamentally about legitimacy and land claims. Xuela Claudette Richardson is ambivalent about the benefits to her Carib ancestry: "The Carib people had been defeated and then exterminated, thrown away like the weeds in a garden; the African people had been defeated but had survived. When they looked at me, they saw only the Carib people. They were wrong but I did not tell them so."[71] Xuela positions herself in opposition to "they," a collective that seeks to mediate and determine her identity against the grain of normalcy and "survival"

[70] King, "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind."

[71] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 16.

(African descent). This "they" represents a national body that writes the story of Dominica, which involves the extermination of the Caribs, who are linked to undesirable land ("weeds").

Through this simile, Xuela reproduces the idea that, as Susan Scott Parrish writes, indigenous people were "naturals," a word used in natural history writing for the idea that "they stood right on the divide between human and nonhuman, between knowing subject and known object."[72] Xuela reproduces such discourse each time she narrates her interactions with creoles. I will return to a more extended discussion of the meaning of Xuela's ambivalence about this idea of "naturals" shortly, but I want to note here that such a discourse is also reproduced in Collins's and John's novels. Carib in *The Colour of Forgetting* is closely associated with specific sites in the landscape. She is always seen at Leaper's Hill or walking along the island's roadways. Carib appears as a wild feature of the landscape, a raving woman, a "mad no ass, you know. It don't make no sense trying to figure out what she saying."[73] This narration robs Carib of any advanced facility with language: she is a body, closer on Parrish's scale to the nonhuman and known object than to the human and knowing subject that reads her body. Likewise, in *Unburnable*, Iris, Lillian's mother, is of part Carib, part black descent, but is treated as merely a desiring, wild body with no mental faculties: "[t]he precise point at which people said Iris lost her mind was subject to debate."[74] In both cases, these women are interpellated through the majority creole population: their bodies are read, discussed, and dismissed. In Kincaid's novel, Xuela distances herself from her Carib background—

[72] Parrish, *American Curiosity*, 229.

[73] Collins, *The Colour of Forgetting*, 6.

[74] John, *Unburnable*, 113.

her classmates "were wrong" that she was solely a Carib woman. It is as though to be fully Carib is distasteful, as though if she were to acknowledge her ancestry, she would become like Carib or Iris.

The discourse that places Carib women in the same category as known objects, "naturals" in the landscape, is rooted in the imperial project, but it remains strong in the postindependence nations of (fictional) Pax and Dominica. It ultimately helps to support their dispossession. Carib is never rescued from her wanderings; she belongs nowhere specific. Likewise, Xuela reproduces the myth that the Caribs have disappeared like "weeds" rooted out from the garden, cast out of the Dominican nation as unsavory features of its landscape. She does not dismiss this idea, and therefore she has an uneasy relationship to her ancestry. The discourse about Caribs that she reproduces is itself a reproduction of imperial ideology about indigenous people. It is a repetition with deep historical roots that circulates even when independence has been achieved.

My understanding of these repetitions—Xuela's disavowal of her Carib ancestry and Merle Collins's representation of four unchanging generations of indigenous women—is critically in line with Homi Bhabha's writing on the stereotype. The stereotypes that originally circulated with the conquest of the Caribbean can still have currency in the present. Such discourses allow certain histories—indigenous people survived the conquest—to be covered over by the dominant version of history. According to Bhabha, the stereotype demands repeatability "in changing historical and discursive conjunctures."[75] We see this play out in all three novels. For example, Xuela is obsessed with the idea that Caribs have disappeared from Dominica as viable actors in the national project. She imagines Caribs as, first, weeds, and then as fossils in the geologic record. Xuela relates these images to her decision to never give birth, as though the great, gaping chasm she sees before her is a

[75] Bhabha, "The Other Question," 66.

product of the disappearance of Caribs: "at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world. I came to feel that for my whole life I had been standing on a precipice."[76] This precipice is both spatial and temporal—she is the link between the Carib past and her family's future, yet she will not envision any continuation of Caribs through reproduction. All she sees is a void, "the black room of the world," awaiting her death. She is aware that Caribs still live on Dominica, but she dismisses them as a group that was "extinct, a few hundred of them still living. . . . They were like living fossils."[77] To some extent, the number she cites ("a few hundred") was true during the early twentieth century.[78] Yet Xuela's perception of the lingering Carib population as "living fossils" reproduces the idea that any remaining indigenous populations are static and unchanging. Also, the term *extinct* is most often used for animal or plant species, not groups of people, and this places Caribs on the "naturals" scale that Parrish discusses. Xuela's portrayal of Caribs forebodes a bleak future for Carib survival on the island.

Rather than highlighting each instance where the characters mobilize stereotypes about Carib women as "naturals," I explore in the next section the particular ways in which these stereotypes operate in relation to each woman's refusal of reproduction. The site of reproduction is where all of the stereotypes about Caribs coalesce and where the "processes of subjectification [that are] made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" emerge.[79] Such "subjectification" can be true for women of any nation for whom reproduction is mandated as an important component of

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[76] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 3.

[77] Ibid., 197.

[78] Layng, *The Carib Reserve*, 35.

[79] Bhabha, "The Other Question," 67.

their citizenship. The process of subjectification demands that women who do not reproduce be seen as aberrations, non-normative deviants. In the case of Carib women, their refusal of the reproductive imperative of the nation is especially poignant because they will not participate in the growth of nations that dispossess them.

B. Carib Stereotypes and Reproductive Refusal

As nationalism emerged as a dominant paradigm of the Caribbean, nation and gender became coextensive ideologies in the region. Edward Kamau Brathwaite famously envisions Barbados as the source of his identity in the preface to *Mother Poem* (1977): "This poem is about porous limestone: my mother, Barbados."[80] The limestone did not physically give birth to Brathwaite, yet he attributes his naissance as a Caribbean writer, artist, and scholar to his home island. Brathwaite's representation falls in line with a broader trend of describing the nation as feminine lifeblood and inspiration. Although the feminized nation is not a concept exclusive to this region—Britannia and Columbia are traditional female personifications of Britain and the United States—the Caribbean literary canon maintains the idea of a female island-nation. As Susheila Nasta and Belinda Edmondson argue, the paternalizing colonial project conceived of the Caribbean islands as feminine in order to maintain control over them. Yet the male-dominated mid-twentieth-century canon that developed out of the decolonizing project often reinforces this stereotyped vision by depicting the

[80] Brathwaite, "Preface."

land as a female entity that gives birth to the nation and that houses and nurtures national character and culture.[81]

Mapping gender onto nation has profoundly negative effects on women. In a seminal study of gender, sexuality, and beauty contests in Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad, Rochelle Rowe emphasizes the ways in which beauty standards in the Caribbean reflected the ebb and flow of the independence movements. Because female bodies have traditionally been treated as markers of racial difference, the performance of gender created new versions of nationalism and belonging, all depending on what political party was in power and whose rights were being contested and shaped by colonial and neo-colonial forces.[82] Skin color, hair texture and length, and "feminine" behaviors were all mutable, but the standards of beauty contests reflected emerging notions of who did and did not belong within the national imaginary.

These measurements of beauty have detrimental effects for all women, but they are especially acute for Carib women: they are supposed to have disappeared, but they are also supposedly easily spotted. They are caught between two competing ways of reading their bodies: they are "living fossils," or they "perceived by non-Carib men as desirable, because of their 'exotic' looks or light skin."[83] Their bodies are read as different, "exotic," by "non-Carib men," which is another way of saying creole men. As Mervyn C. Alleyne writes, "The imagined *indio* or Carib phenotype . . . now

[81] Nasta, "Introduction." See also Edmondson, "'Race-ing' the Nation."

[82] Rowe, *Imagining Caribbean Womanhood*.

[83] Gregoire et al., "Karifuna," 150.

carries a relatively high social and aesthetic value."[84] Alleyne skirts around a major issue, which is that the physical appearance of Carib women is read against blackness, to the disservice of both ethnicities. Furthermore, he conflates whiteness with the appearance of Carib women, and these two ethnicities are *not* synonymous. The novels I study make this clear. Whiteness confers economic, social, political, and cultural capital, while Carib women continue to experience discrimination. Also, the politics of skin color and hair is complex terrain, and Alleyne's phrase about "value" reproduces the rhetoric of slavery and the commodification of women's bodies that scholars like Jennifer L. Morgan have so incisively critiqued.[85]

This reading of Carib women's bodies has not significantly changed since Europeans arrived in the Caribbean islands and praised indigenous women for their beauty. Kathleen Brown writes, "Travellers [*sic*] often communicated the aesthetic and erotic appeal of Indian women's bodies and demeanor, frequently casting Indian women as seductresses, playthings, or beautiful and virtuous."[86] These terms are reproduced in *Unburnable*. Iris, the mother of Lillian, is described as possessing "uncommon beauty . . . her skin was reputed to actually glow in the dark."[87] Iris's "beauty" does not give her any advantages in Dominica; in fact, she is exploited by a "coloured" man.[88] When she arrives in Roseau, the nuns of the convent and the children's school discuss where she should live.

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[84] Alleyne, *Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World*, 87.

[85] See chapter one in Morgan's 2004 text, *Laboring Women*.

[86] Brown, "Native Americans and Early Modern Concepts of Race," 91–92.

[87] John, *Unburnable*, 1.

[88] Ibid., 1.

Sister Mary-Alice, who is concerned about social welfare on the island, demands that Iris not be placed in just any house where an adult man could rape her. She fears this fate for Iris because she is a young, preteen girl, with the notorious Carib beauty. Mary-Alice argues that affairs between Carib women and creole men are common, but that among Carib teenage girls, this constitutes rape: "many of these women make conscious decisions about their children's fathers. . . . But Iris is a child. That would be something else. Child abuse."[89] The nun's argument persuades her fellow nuns to place Iris in a Lebanese house, where they believe Iris will not be abused.[90] However, she flirts with an attractive, creole man who later impregnates her. When she shames the man's wife in public, his mother-in-law pursues her and sexually assaults her with a broken Coca-Cola bottle.[91] The symbolism is not lost on anyone on the island, and they design a song about Iris—"Bottle of Coke"—and ostracize her, treating her like a madwoman. She is branded as a Carib commodity. Iris is not made infertile by this rape, but she gives birth to only one child, Lillian, who herself never has children. After the birth of Lillian, Iris becomes a sex worker, using bush teas to prevent her from giving birth again.[92] Men read Iris as a Carib who has no political power or rights, and she is discriminated against, sexually abused, and exploited. She dies, young and alone, in prison.

Likewise, in *The Colour of Forgetting*, it is clear that the many generations of women named Carib have been abused by men: "remembering the mother and grandmother, Mamag used to groan

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[89] Ibid., 58–59.

[90] I do not have sufficient space to articulate the ways in which this reproduces stereotypes about Lebanese people.

[91] Ibid., 120–121.

[92] Ibid, 94.

when talk go around about how men of Content dragging the younger Carib off into the bush whenever they feel like it."[93] Carib's mother and grandmother were raped because men felt that they could commit assaults against their non-normative bodies with impunity. Mamag attempts to stop this cycle when she discovers Carib's mother is pregnant and takes her to a mental asylum, where she gives birth to the contemporary, fourth-generation Carib. The cycle of abuse continues until Carib grows old enough to walk the roadways alone. The contemporary Carib ends the cycle of abuse: she is "fifty-ish and she had no children."[94] Mamag implies that Carib has consciously had abortions to prevent any new members of the Carib line using the "shame bush, the prickly bush which was open as long as you didn't touch it."[95] If nothing else, Carib manipulates this plant as an abortifacient, which is suggested by its name, "shame." This shame refers not to her need to use it to prevent pregnancy but to the act of rape.

A similar pattern of exploitation emerges in Kincaid's novel. Thus, in all three novels, Carib women are not just dispossessed and disavowed. Discourses of nation building *enable* sexual abuse. Xuela's experience is much like Iris's in *Unburnable*, where she receives attention because she is considered to be beautiful. We see this first in Xuela's marginalization at her school. Her classmates only see the Carib part of her—the way they "know" she is a Carib is by observing her physical features. She says, "I had thick eyebrows; my hair was coarse, thick, and wavy; my eyes were set far apart from each other and they had the shape of almonds; my lips were wide and

[93] Collins, *Colour of Forgetting*, 26.

[94] Ibid., 12.

[95] Ibid., 12.

narrow in an unexpected way."[96] These textures and shapes to her eyebrows, hair, eyes, and lips describe phenotypes for racial categorization. Xuela's description also suggests that her body is hypervisible, as though it is the sole marker of racial difference at school. The schoolyard was a place of normalization into the middle class, an economic position that Xuela does not and cannot occupy because of her racial difference and ways in which Dominican society excludes Caribs from the national body.[97]

Carib women's hypervisibility makes them targets in the schoolyard and outside of it, where they are sexually abused by creole men. In Xuela's case, she is exploited by a white man when Dominica is still under British rule. When she realizes she is pregnant, she is living in Roseau with a white couple, Madame and Monsieur LaBatte, so that she can attend a Catholic school. Her father has sent her to live with these friends of his; he has remarried since Xuela's mother died giving birth to her. When her father sends her to live with the LaBattes, he is attempting to normalize her, making her a Catholic and a proper, non-Carib woman. Instead, she ends up being exploited by privileged white Dominicans because of her Carib background. Madame LaBatte takes to her, giving her a dress that used to belong to her and also bathing her. Even when Xuela begins a sexual relationship with Monsieur LaBatte, a much older man, Madame LaBatte continues to treat Xuela this way despite knowing she is having sex with her husband. It is not until Xuela is pregnant that she understands why Madame LaBatte dotes upon her: "She wanted something . . . from me, she wanted a child I might have."[98] Xuela sees that she is being used for her reproductive capacities,

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[96] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 15.

[97] Rowe, *Imagining Caribbean Womanhood*, 8.

[98] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 77.

especially because Madame LaBatte frequently reminds her that she has a "womb like a sieve."[99] Madame LaBatte could never have children, and she wants Xuela to give birth so that she can care for a child and raise it, a perverted performance of Dominican reproductive citizenship.

When Xuela knows she is pregnant, she runs away from Madame LaBatte, resolving that "if there was a child in me I could expel it through the sheer force of my will."[100] Xuela flees this coercive reproduction.[101] Her position here is quite disturbing, not just to Xuela but to any reader who believes that a woman's reproductive choice is a basic human right. Most of all, the way that Madame LaBatte seems to be "breeding" Xuela with her husband—brushing Xuela's hair, bathing her, teaching her how to prepare coffee for him in the morning—recalls the traumatic legacy from slavery when black women were paired with black men to maximize the gene pool of slaves.[102]

The LaBatte's exploitation of Xuela's body is also about the legacy of the initial conquest of the Caribbean, when indigenous women were treated as prisoners of war and sexually exploited. Londa Schiebinger writes that Taíno women responded to the cruelties of conquest—"the fierce attack dogs, the swords used to disembowel or to hack off arms, legs, noses, and women's breasts"—with abortion and infanticide.[103] She is careful to emphasize that we know this through European accounts of conquest, and not from the women themselves. There is a gap in historical knowledge,

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[99] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 76.

[100] Ibid., 77.

[101] Monsieur LaBatte watches her in the garden outside his house, then he asks her to take off her clothes. She is about sixteen years old. Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 70–2.

[102] See Morgan, *Laboring Women*.

[103] Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 129.

an aporia that can never be fully reconciled. Regardless of the reasons why Taíno women aborted children, these records of indigenous women's responses to physical and sexual assault are important precedents for the novels I discuss in this chapter, as though even if we can never know the extent to which Taíno women aborted fetuses, the accounts of their reproductive resistance are sites of inspiration for contemporary Caribbean writers.

For example, Xuela sees the continuity between her experience and that of enslaved and Carib women because for her "history was not only the past: it was the past and it was also the present."[104] In response to the LaBatte's exploitation of her body, she decides to abort the fetus. With this resolve, she resists sexual coercion as well as the legacy of reproductive control of women's bodies in the Caribbean region. She crawls into a dirt hole in a nearby herbalist's house. When Xuela wakes up after drinking the bush tea the herbalist has brewed for her, she is still lying in the dirt hole. Her blood "smells like a newly dug-up mineral that had not yet been refined and turned into something worldly, something to which a value could be assigned."[105] This blood smell signals her rebirth as a woman who resolves to never give birth. She also derives new value from her abortion—she is like a mineral that is unearthed from the Dominican soil. Because of her abortion, she has yet to be incorporated into the national body and its economic, political, and cultural system. In this scene, Xuela highlights her knowledge that postcolonial nation building depends on extracting new forms of value; here, her newfound self resists valuation.

This episode in Xuela's narrative is quite similar to one in Michelle Cliff's influential 1984 novel, *Abeng*, in which a young enslaved woman seeks out an abortion with help from an herbalist. The

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[104] Ibid., 139.

[105] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 91.

owner of a plantation has raped Inez, a pregnant young enslaved teenager. She turns to Mma Alli, an enslaved woman to whom "[t]he women came . . . with their troubles."[106] Mma Alli helps Inez abort the fetus growing inside her:

> She brewed a tea of roots and leaves, said a Pawpaw chant over it, and . . . began to gently stroke her with fingers dipped in coconut oil and pull on her nipples with her mouth, and the thick liquid which had been the mixed-up baby came forth easily and Inez felt little pain.[107]

This episode is part of a much broader commentary on Jamaican history and women's reproductive resistance in Cliff's novel. The "mixed-up baby" is a result of a white man raping a black woman, but the language also suggests that the fetus is caught up in a political struggle. Its past—"which had been"—is discarded in favor of a revolutionary possibility.

Cliff's representation of Inez resonates with Xuela's twentieth-century experience in Dominica on two levels. First, Mma Alli is similar to Madame LaBatte, who pampers and bathes Xuela in an erotic, semi-sexual way. Mma Alli, of course, soothes Inez as she aborts the fetus, but the similarity between Mma Alli's bathing of Inez and Madame LaBatte's grooming of Xuela points to the ways in which older women tend to younger women who are in trouble. Madame LaBatte, of course, is not helping Xuela abort a fetus but is rather grooming her for pregnancy. The contrast between these two older women suggests the failure of women's community in Xuela's narrative. Second, this moment in Cliff's narrative helps us understand Xuela's predicament with Madame LaBatte as part of a historical legacy of the exploitation of women's reproductive bodies. The post-abolition Dominican nation also depends on exploiting young women. Madame LaBatte cannot reproduce,

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[106] Cliff, *Abeng*, 35.

[107] Ibid., 35.

but she wants to nurture a child in Dominica, helping to bolster its population and its future. Xuela, who has far less capital or political agency as a part-Carib woman, provides a solution for Madame LaBatte. The LaBattes are white, wealthy landowners in the capital city. In other words, they are creators of the national wealth as well as the ideologies around femininity, national belonging, and racial difference.

From her rebirth in the dirt pit in Sange-Sange's house, Xuela comes to two central resolutions that remain unbroken by the end of the novel. She never gives birth, and she therefore never participates in reproducing the nation. Echoing Virginia Woolf's famous statement in *Three Guineas*, Xuela says, soon after her first abortion, "I am not a people, I am not a nation."[108] Xuela, like Woolf in the early twentieth century, imagines what it would look like for a woman to reject existing forms of social belonging. Woolf writes out of a post–World War I context in which geopolitical struggle—imperialism and nation building—had led to millions of deaths. Xuela is influenced by a similar legacy: Dominica was a colonial outpost until 1978, and nation building depended on population growth and the mobilization of national fervor and pride. And, although she does not explicitly state it in the following terms, her disidentification with "a people" and "a nation" is a rejection of reproductive futurism, the "organizing principle of communal relations" and the requirement for all women who want to be considered citizens of a nation.[109]

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[108] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 216. Virginia Woolf's original, famous lines, "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world," come from *Three Guineas*.

[109] Edelman, *No Future*, 2.

Xuela's first abortion happens because she turns to Sange-Sange, a woman with the important knowledge of how to bring about an abortion. Yet after this pivotal moment in her life, Xuela learns about the abortifacient plants of Dominica. She looks for plants that can free her "womb from burdens . . . [she] did not want . . . to bear."[110] Xuela becomes known among the women on the island as an expert on fertility regulation. When she helps her stepsister abort a fetus, something for which she is never thanked, she says, "I had become such an expert at being ruler of my own life in this one limited regard that I could extend such power to any other woman who asked me for it."[111] Xuela lays claim to a degree of self-determination that few women possess: she is "ruler" of her life.

The control she exerts over her reproduction gives her a sense of ownership of her life, as though having children would have robbed her of this possession. Yet Xuela's expertise comes at a cost. She is alone, excluded from women's circles. This has important ramifications for her memory because when she dies, she will have no children and no friends to remember her. Such a problem also emerges for Lillian in John's *Unburnable*. Both novels illustrate a strange embrace of solitude among women who do not reproduce, thereby suggesting the polar opposite of the claims I made in chapter one about women's community formations around resistance to reproduction. In the next and final section of this chapter, I explore this problematic in greater depth, as it impacts the resilience of Caribs as well as the prospects for Carib women in the future.

C. No Future or a Destructive, Catastrophic Future?

[110] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 207.

[111] Ibid., 115.

The three novels I have explored in this chapter suggest that Carib women are hypervisible, exoticized, and exploited because of their difference from non-Carib women. I have also discussed at length the ways in which Caribbean nations like Dominica and Guyana have worked to exclude Caribs from full participation in the nation-state. These exclusions dramatically culminate in the conclusions of the three narratives, which imagine self and/or national annihilation. Because all three central women in these novels never reproduce, they raise important questions about the role of Carib women in nation building and its future in the Caribbean.

Not one of the novels offers a particularly promising future. Soon after the moment when Xuela claims that she is "ruler" of her life as an herbalist who can bring about abortions whenever she chooses to, she despairs. She asks, "What makes the world turn against me and all who look like me? I own nothing."[112] Kincaid's novel wobbles between these two extremes: Xuela is both a ruler of her life and a destitute person. The language of "nothing" here recalls that of *terra nullius*, the spaces where "no body" lives. Xuela's despair emerges around her dispossession: her mother died when she was born, her father remarried and has had more children, and she will have no children before she dies.

Xuela has been conscious of this dispossession for a long time; Kincaid's novel starts with Xuela's mother's death: "My mother died at the moment I was born."[113] This double moment of birth and death means that Xuela considers the two together, as though one is nonexistent without the other. She says, "for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity."[114]

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[112] Ibid., 132.

[113]Ibid., 3.

[114] Ibid., 3.

The maternal lack informs Xuela's idea from the beginning of the novel that there is nothing protecting her from the gaping yawn of eternity. She asks, "How to explain this abandonment, what child can understand it?"[115] The novel suggests that her inability to make sense of her dispossession results in a total rejection of the future: "I have refused to bear any children."[116] Her refusal to give birth embraces "no future" beyond her material body. Xuela's response to her mother's death and the inaccessible past is to foreclose any future for her family line after she dies.

Xuela's decision is bolstered by the LaBatte's abusive treatment of her, as well as her schoolmates' rejection of her. Notably, she mobilizes stereotypes about Caribs in her rejection of Dominica's present and future, which suggests that the very repeatability of the stereotype is founded on the Dominican reproduction of structures of violence against Carib women. Europeans called the Caribs "cannibals," and historians have argued that this was not based in fact but was rather a strategy used to dehumanize Caribs before their conquest.[117] Philip P. Boucher writes, "Europeans created the myth of Caribs as ferocious, insatiable cannibals" as part of their justification for dominating and enslaving them.[118] The words *Carib* and *cannibal* became synonyms.[119] Xuela assimilates this myth of Carib cannibalism into her refusal to ever give birth. She describes how she

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[115] Ibid., 199.

[116] Ibid., 199.

[117] Beckles, "Genocide Policy in English-Karifuna Relations," 287.

[118] Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 7. See also Senior, "Carib," in *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 96–7.

[119] Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 15.

would bear children and "eat them at night, swallowing them whole, all at once."[120] Rather than confirming that Carib women eat their children, she reframes the stereotype about Carib cannibalism as part of a commentary on the ways in which her desires are understood solely through the frame of her Carib descent. This exaggeration of the stereotype highlights its textuality, making real the refusal that is at stake in imagining a better future in which Carib women are free from this stereotype. In other words, because the national narrative about Caribs defines them as different from other Dominicans, Xuela performs an exaggerated, ironic version of this as a warning of what she is capable of should she give birth.

Xuela does not say that the stereotype about Caribs as cannibals is wrong, though. This reflects Bhabha's emphasis on ambivalence and the stereotype, which is about both "phobia and fetish."[121] The dual play of these psychoanalytic terms creates the ambivalence in the colonized subject, Xuela. Ultimately, she unifies both the colonizer's fear of and fetishization of her cannibal body into an embrace of no future, where all that she owns is her body and its pleasures, and no children will carry on her legacy. Yet this is not the "no future" that queer theory, following Lee Edelman's 2004 text, offers as a political possibility to queer subjects. Instead, she says, "Death is the only reality, for it is the only certainty, inevitable to all things."[122] This ending to the novel at first appears to border on nihilism.

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[120] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 97.

[121] Bhabha, "The Other Question," 72.

[122] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 228.

Consider, though, the stakes of refusing to reproduce within a nation that does not adequately recognize all of its subjects. The Dominican nation, including those women who try to make Xuela conform to standards of femininity, fails to include all of its subjects. Indeed, as M. Jacqui Alexander writes, legislation from Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas are benchmarks for the ways in which Caribbean nations regulate and manage non-normative sexualities. Non-reproducing female sexuality is targeted, and the Bahamian and Trinidadian governments can prosecute women who do not reproduce. Non-reproduction, and sensual pleasure, are surplus commodities and do not contribute to social and economic order.[123] Similarly, women in Dominica who seek to regulate non-reproductive sexuality target Xuela. Although they are not employed by the state, they are arms of the Dominican nation.

At the beginning of this section, I noted that all three novels explored in this chapter offer us insight into the potential role of Carib women in Caribbean nation building. It is hard to argue that Kincaid's novel is anything but a narrative about a hyperbolic, nihilistic woman, yet the novel comments on the exclusion of Caribs from the body politic, as well as their hypervisibility and sexual exploitation. Xuela's abortions also show the vital role of Carib medical knowledge in Dominica. Her first abortion is particularly interesting for the way in which she claims elements of the Dominican landscape for herself. After drinking a thick syrup made from an unspecified plant, she imagines her body as a volcano spewing out the fetus as though it were destructive lava: "blood

[123] Alexander, "'Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen'," 265. Alexander points to the 1986 Sexual Offences Act in Trinidad and the "Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 1989" in the Bahamas.

flowed from between my legs slowly and steadily like an eternal spring."[124] Xuela imagines this abortion as "eternal," much like the "black void of the world" before her. Her refusal to reproduce is thus unchanging and irrevocable, rooted in the landscape of the island. Xuela lays claim to a potent form of resistance and reclamation: the land.

However, this land is mutable and changing. Her claim to independence, like those of Caribs to the territory, is in flux and under threat. Collins's novel ends with a similarly ominous vision of the Caribbean landscape: the foreboding bubbling of the sea, as volcanic activity near Paz threatens the island. Will a new island form nearby? Or will Paz explode? Carib is on a boat with several other inhabitants of Paz as two of them fight over whether the bubbling in the ocean is caused by "the spirit in the water" or "a volcano they say that under there."[125] The boat rocks violently as a shower of water sprays up out of the surface of the water. And all the while, Carib looks to the island of Paz in the distance and says, "Blood in the north, blood in the south"—the first part of her prophecy from the beginning of the novel.[126] Her repetition of this prophecy appears to totally ignore what is happening on the boat: a baby wails and then mysteriously dies in her mother's arms. Collins writes, "Someone says, 'It look like it choke on the vomit. Nothing to do.'"[127] An anonymous "someone" sees this baby—the symbol of the future?—die as the water explodes around the boat. Paz's future is imperiled, and all the while, Carib mutters to herself. The novel ends with this suspense held, the future uncertain, with Carib babbling as always.

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[124] Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother*, 82.

[125] Collins, *Colour of Forgetting*, 206.

[126] Ibid., 212.

[127] Ibid., 213.

John's 2006 novel offers us the most desolate vision of all. Lillian has returned to Dominica to uncover her lost past. She has been cut off from her mother, Iris, since she was a toddler, and she returns to the island "to make sense out of something she could not understand."[128] She discovers that her grandmother was wrongfully executed, and her mother had tried to redeem her grandmother before herself dying in prison. Lillian, after learning all of this, aspires to notoriety on the level of her mother and grandmother, about whom songs have been written on the island. To do this, she imagines that she must kill herself, and the novel ends with her resolving to do so. John writes, "She could have ended her life anywhere, anyhow, she knew."[129] But Lillian wants a song written about her actions, and she decides to become a *souciyant*, "a woman who takes off her skin at night and flies around in search of victims whose blood she sucks."[130] The *souciyant* is a mythical beast, a Caribbean and gendered version of the vampire. It is also an iteration of the cannibal myth that Xuela embraces.

Lillian kills herself by jumping from the same spot where her mother's ancestors had jumped to their deaths when the British colonized the islands, thinking that "there were enough trees and branches [at the bottom] to tear off her skin" to transform her into a *souciyant*.[131] Before she does this, she thinks, "Let them sing on her—she wanted her own song, it was her birthright."[132] The language of birthright recalls the claims that Caribs made to the Territory, to land of their own as

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[128] John, *Unburnable*, 99.

[129] Ibid., 291.

[130] Ibid., 292.

[131] Ibid., 292.

[132] Ibid., 291.

their right. Lillian ironizes this concept of a right to land by imagining the Dominican right to her body, a grotesque spectacle of Carib death.

The endings of these three novels are all hyperbolic meditations on the fate of Carib women in the national project. They are not to be emulated; they are exaggeratedly horrible. But this is what literature can do: It can make us imagine something radically different than what we already know. The three novels speak of suppressed histories and failed promises that must be reconciled with in order to create a better future for Carib women, for these endings do not offer a viable path forward. Lillian's death horrifies, Carib's prophecy and the bubbling sea are ominous, and Xuela's nihilistic vision of the end of her life is isolating and chilling. This returns me to my initial question at the beginning of this chapter: What good is a promise of permanence on an island as dangerous as Dominica? We can only begin to answer this question by looking at what these novels do in the Caribbean canon, as interventions in the homogenous narrative about creolization and indigenous disappearance. They speak of suppressed histories, the dangerous elisions written into the myth of indigenous disappearance, and the continued failed promise of equality for all in the postcolonial Caribbean nation. A promise is only kept if someone remembers it, and these novels testify to a robust memory and vitality among Carib people, despite the ominous endings of the three novels. In fact, the novels explore the extreme annihilation of Carib memory, as though they are warnings of what is to come if Caribs are not taken into account. Ultimately, whether or not a promise is good enough to survive a volcanic explosion—the threat of Xuela's abortive body—is anyone's guess.

IV. "To Name is to Possess": Jamaica Kincaid and Olive Senior's Gardening Against Biocolonialism

you cannot tear my song

from my throat

you cannot erase the memory

of my story

you cannot catch

my rhythm

—Olive Senior, "Meditation on Yellow"

Jamaican-Canadian poet Olive Senior's 1994 poem, "Meditation on Yellow," recalls Christopher Columbus's arrival on "Hispaniola." Columbus hopes to uncover material wealth (gold) and he dreams of having found a shorter route to the East Indies. Senior makes the moment of contact a catalyst for the rest of her garden poetry, since this poem introduces her 1994 volume, *Gardening in the Tropics*. "Meditation on Yellow" is the seed that gives life to her critique of *biocolonialism*. Senior's poem, which starts with the moment of conquest and ends with the contemporary tourist moment in Jamaica, offers a transhistorical understanding of the biocolonial forces that encroach upon local medical epistemologies, which are archived in common or

vernacular names for plants. *Biocolonialism* is a term for life-oriented colonization. In this chapter, I specifically address one major facet or agent of biocolonialism, *bioprospecting*, which refers to the ways that companies and scientists gamble on the potential wealth of life forms in the Caribbean.[1] Senior's perspective on bioprospecting is clear from her poem's first lines; she writes the encounter from the perspective of those who already lived on the island, the Taíno. Their tone is accusatory; they claim that the Spaniards skirted around their true desires when they first arrived. While the Taíno gave hospitality, Columbus hid his greed:

> . . . it was gold
> on your mind
> gold the light in your eyes . . .
> golden the macca
> the weeds
> which mark our passing.[2]

The imagery here equates Columbus's desires, what the Taíno see reflected in his eyes, with a golden-hued avaricious gleam that merely reflects the wealth he sees in the macca. This at first

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[1] John Merson argues that former colonies of Britain are now more dependent on Western science and technology than they were before decolonization. He points to the shifts in the global trading system and debt economy in the late twentieth century as the reason for this dependency, but also highlights the Rio International Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992, in which indigenous people worked to gain property rights on the international stage. Merson, "Bio-Prospecting or Biopiracy," 284–85.

[2] Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 11.

seems like a standard poetic metaphor where plants remain as witnesses of human death. Here, the golden weeds testify to the once-living Taíno, the victims of biological warfare and genocide. Yet this is also a metonym that demonstrates Columbus's supreme racism. The Taíno are seeing what Columbus understands of them: they are mere material, no more than plant life. In other words, they are the macca. Senior's poem deftly represents the ways in which imperial visions of the Caribbean conflate people with material wealth and treat the landscape as purely an economic opportunity, land to be measured, quantified, and capitalized upon.[3]

From the moment of conquest, when the Spaniards conflated human beings with plants, biocolonial ideology was in place. Life gained currency in the Caribbean islands. Senior then moves to the contemporary landscape of the Caribbean. In addition to what has already been conquered—forms of life like plants and people—biocolonialism wants the insides, the art and literature of the people. Now it is creative expression itself that must be protected from colonizers:

> you cannot tear my song
> from my throat
>
> you cannot erase the memory
> of my story
>
> you cannot catch

[3] Such a history of European categorization of humans as plants or animals is not exclusive to the Caribbean. Aborigines in Australia were classified as fauna until 1967. DeLoughery and Handey, *Postcolonial Ecologies*, 12.

my rhythm.

Senior connotes human creativity with the landscape, the golden weeds. The lines quoted above come from the mouth of a contemporary Caribbean worker in the tourist industry. This worker refuses the very same force that exterminated the Taíno people, using a direct address—"you"—to stake out what can and cannot be co-opted for material gain. The tourists are the new Columbuses with a persistent need for more. If they come to the Caribbean to enjoy the land (to relax and lose themselves in it), they are implicitly motivated by the same interest in its material richness as Columbus was. And, here, the worker connects that greed with its all-consuming desire for everything pertaining to the beautiful landscape, including song, memory, story, and rhythm inspired by and given life within it. If, in the eyes of the colonizers, people and plants are merely material wealth, then those people of the Caribbean will stake out a limit to what can be appropriated from them. In fact, "macca" is a word for "[a]ny prickly plant or sharp thorn."[4] The macca Columbus sees is embodied and given voice by the worker. The poem thus implicitly offers resistance as the province of plants *and* people, as the macca can refer to both the withholding worker within the tourist industry and the plants that Columbus first saw on Hispaniola.

"Meditation on Yellow" offers up a polemic against biocolonialism only if we understand the hidden meaning behind the word "macca." It is precisely the possibilities inherent within these special plant names that I explore in this chapter, where local nomenclature for plants is a code for Jamaican and Antiguan revolutionary consciousness simmering below the surface. Women use plants both to heal and to harm. Senior tells us that *Fever-grass* can be a soothing herb, brewed

[4] Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 295.

with lemon, or a dangerous poison if paired with arsenic.[5] Knowing the name of the plant does not ensure you against danger. You must also be familiar with how its preparation. It is precisely this double potential inherent to medicinal plants that interests Jamaica Kincaid and Senior in their garden writing, which focalizes the names of plants as important tools to understanding the landscape of the Caribbean. I study Senior's 1994 volume alongside Jamaica Kincaid's 1999 *My Garden (Book):*, My interest in the subversive meaning of plant names is directly tied to an anti-reproductive consciousness regarding biocolonialism. Outsiders are blocked from acquiring knowledge if they cannot interpret the names for plants. As Kincaid and Senior's gardening texts argue, Caribbean women's agency—their political, social, and embodied desire for change—emerges within this community of knowledge around medicinal botany. Whereas chapter one explored the contemporary literary imagination surrounding reproductive refusal during plantation slavery, and chapter two critiqued the role of postcolonial nation-states in eliding Carib women from the national story, this chapter turns to the possibilities inherent in a refusal to allow the cycle of exploitation within the Caribbean landscape to continue. Like in chapter two, resistance to oppression focalizes around reproduction. I argue that the ways in which Senior and Kincaid negotiate power when they write about plants is both metaphorically and inherently anti-reproductive. While I will be discussing the centrality of three abortifacients in these garden texts, my core focus is not so much on the mechanisms for producing abortion as much as on the metaphorical possibilities of anti-reproduction of medicinal knowledge about how to achieve abortion. These writers' resistance to imperial forces that equate humans with mere material value takes on the very means by which such ideologies are formed and disseminated across several

[5] Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 11, 14.

centuries. Biocolonialism and its mechanisms of scientific naming, categorizing, and expropriating information seek to "tear," "catch," and "erase" Caribbean people's knowledge about plants and the stories they share about them.

Women code their botanical knowledge. Senior and Kincaid's garden writing does this by using only common, local names for medicinal plants. To name or not to name plants is an issue of grave importance for sustaining Caribbean-based epistemologies, Kincaid argues. In her imagining, to name plants is to give birth to imperial ways of knowing. To not name plants, therefore, is to ensure the survival of local, community practices. This reinterpretation of notions of naming and birth, where birth suggests the death of protected plant knowledge, is fundamentally anti-reproductive. Put bluntly, Kincaid's practice of not naming medicinal plants is abortive. And Senior's refusal to allow the co-optation of song, memory, dance, and story is similarly invested in preserving knowledge and creative expression from biocolonial acquisition. Theirs is, as I discuss in what follows, a political stance against entrenched forms of medical and scientific authority as well as a celebration of how women's medicinal knowledge has survived for so long in the Caribbean and a vision of the many generations to come.

A. Knowledge-Making and Biocolonial Discourses

Kincaid, an Antiguan-American writer, attained high literary success with *The New Yorker* in the late 1970s and 1980s. She is also an avid gardener in Vermont. *My Garden (Book):* collects her musings on the subject. As the title's strange grammar implies, her garden is both a material reality and a "text" to be studied, where a colon followed by a blank space suggests an unanswered,

open-gapped connection to some unspoken idea. Senior, who grew up in Jamaica and now lives in Toronto, is best known for her folklore-inspired fiction and poetry, as well as field-changing sociological studies of Jamaican life.[6] Although she is not a self-titled "gardener" like Kincaid, Senior's "garden" poetry—1985's *Talking of Trees* and the 1994 volume up for discussion—betrays her similar interest in plant life. Senior says of this recurring theme in her poetry, "I wrote out of anger at the ecological destruction, which to me was just a paradigm of what was happening in the society, where things were being done to us by politicians, people weren't consulted, and we were allowing these things to happen to us."[7] Senior's reference to "ecological destruction" points to a particular moment in Jamaican history: structural adjustment plans and their effect on the environmental landscape, especially agriculture.[8] She speaks as part of an angry collective in Jamaica, one where politicians and others in power wreck the landscape without consulting the people, who suffer from IMF and World Bank structural adjustment loans. My earlier framing of Senior and Kincaid's writing as sometimes "polemic" is inspired by Senior's words. For Senior, environmental degradation is a political and poetic issue, where anger at injustice can be translated into poetry that speaks on behalf of a collective to an ecological problem and tries to find solutions.

Kincaid, too, reflects on political impacts on the material landscape of the Caribbean. This is a familiar issue for Caribbean literature: male authors have grappled with the impact of past and

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[6] See Olive Senior, *Working Miracles*.

[7] Qtd. in Glaser and Pausch, eds., *Caribbean Writers*, 83.

[8] For an incisive representation of the effects of structural adjustment on agriculture and the environment in Jamaica, see Stephanie Black's 2001 documentary, *Life and Debt* (US). Jamaica Kincaid provides the narration.

present forms of colonialism on the natural landscape. Wilson Harris, Edouard Glissant, and Derek Walcott are the three most prominent of these, among a long and growing list. Unlike the grandiose historical approach of Glissant—"landscape is its own monument . . . . It is all history"—Kincaid and Senior focus on one small part of the landscape, medicinal plants, and the ways women know and use them.[9] In other words, it is not "all" the same history. As Denise DeCaires Narain writes, "Senior favors a . . . 'down to earth' approach . . . anchoring reflections in the everyday world of the kitchen garden."[10] I pair these two writers because of their shared interest in women's healing in this ecologically fragile region with a history of plant-resource, and human, exploitation. Garden writing offers a space for them to celebrate the rich material history of women's botanical knowledge and to lament and archive its precarity.

It is especially important to note their distance from any yearning for a lost connection with nature not only because of the historical oppression of women but also because the concept of humans interacting with plants necessarily recalls plantation slavery in the Caribbean. Kincaid speaks to how nostalgic nature writing is impossible for her: "the people of Antigua have a relationship to agriculture that cannot please them all. Their very presence on this island hundreds of years ago . . . was for the free labor they could provide in the fields."[11] Such anti-sentimental language proves that she aligns herself with a history of Antiguan consciousness around the roots of oppression on the land Antiguans were forced to labor. Yet her desire to garden suggests that it is not wholly bad as an activity, and that it can be recuperated from the violations of the past. Kincaid

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[9] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 11.

[10] Narain, "Nature Studies," 86.

[11] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*:, 139.

and Senior think along a historical continuum of exploitative regimes around women's knowledge-making and healing practices.

They are not alone in their critique of empire and its role in controlling bodies and knowledge in the Caribbean. Vandana Shiva argues in the polemic, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (1997), that knowledge-acquisition in the Caribbean began with Columbus. Shiva traces a long history of *biopiracy*, a term for the economic and environmental exploitation of a biodiverse space by a wealthier company or country. Biopiracy is a component of biocolonialism that operates according to a particular patenting logic. Untapped and unknown natural resources became potential wealth for Western extractors upon the arrival of Columbus to Hispaniola. But, like Senior's "Meditation on Yellow" suggests, the ideology has never died: "Five hundred years after Columbus, a more secular version of the same project of colonization continues through patents and intellectual property rights."[12] Shiva gestures here toward precisely the same issue that Kincaid and Senior grapple with. Patenting knowledge—legally imprinting one's ownership of an invention or idea—is synonymous with conquering land, bodies, and epistemologies. Shiva underlines how the initial civilizing mission of colonialism cannot be separated from the extraction of material wealth from the colonized land.[13]

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[12] Shiva, *Biopiracy*, 2.

[13] Londa Schiebinger reinforces this contemporary vision in her study of the peacock flower, writing "[t]he search for new and profitable drugs in the eighteenth century was not unlike bioprospecting today. Then as now, the European search for effective pharmacopoeia was fueled by the vast fortunes to be made." Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 73.

This argument becomes gender-specific when Shiva turns to the present-day. She argues that what was once seen as empty land is now "'empty life,' seeds and medicinal plants." It is now "the interior spaces of the bodies of women, plants, and animals" that must be colonized. [14] Such spaces contain the story, rhythm, memory, and poetry that Senior's worker refuses to give up in "Meditation on Yellow": the creative interiority of women and the ways that they code their knowledge about plants, like "macca." Although David Arnold's notion of "colonizing the body" comes out of a study of colonial medicine in India, his discussion of medical discourse is helpful to parse out the issues at stake here. Arnold argues that medical discourses and practices colonize the body linguistically, spatially, and sexually. Just as the gold reflected in Columbus's eyes shows how imperial visions debased the Taíno, so too do contemporary ideologies around medicinal plants and life matter seek to colonize people with medicinal knowledge. By and large, those people are women, as Shiva's work argues. If women are to resist this form of biocolonialism, they must resist the colonization of "life itself," i.e., the vital embodied knowledge in the vulnerable spaces biopiracy exploits. [15]

Biopiracy can emerge in both rather obvious ways, like the conquest of Hispaniola and the Caribbean, and in more latent forms. I turn now to the dominant ways that the international health agency, the World Health Organization (WHO), has viewed plant-based healing practices since the late 1970s as a particular version of biocolonialism. My emphasis on the late twentieth century is bound by the argument I make for why Kincaid and Senior are invested in this issue in the first place: the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant global economic and political ideology corresponded

[14] Ibid., 4, 5.

[15] Shiva, *Biopiracy*, 5.

with growing bioprospecting efforts in postcolonial spaces like the Caribbean. These changes had a direct impact on the Caribbean landscape, and, because of entrenched beliefs about women's medicinal knowledge as a viable, conquerable space, women were especially affected by the WHO's policies.

From November 28 to December 2, 1977, global experts in traditional medicine met in Geneva at the WHO's headquarters. The WHO's official report lists the attendees. Of the members and secretariat present, only two, a Ms. J. Nemec and Dr. A. Mangay Maglacas, were women: Dr. A. Mangay Maglacas, the "Senior Scientist for Nursing, Division of Health Manpower Development," and Ms. J. Nemec, "Secretary for Studies, Christian Medical Commission." While Maglacas's advanced degree and credentials suggest why she was in attendance, Ms. J. Nemec was merely an "observer"—the sole person listed under this category at the WHO Meeting on the Promotion and Development of Traditional Medicine.[16] Nemec's title and position mark her as less knowledgeable than the other nineteen people present, who are all described as doctors or professors. Furthermore, she is a "Secretary," a title that positions her as a less-qualified, less-specialized worker than the others. Her general administrative position, and the passive descriptor, *observer*, labels her as a classed and gendered subject. The two titles codetermine her as a docile listener at the WHO meeting.

Because of long-standing beliefs about women's lack of expertise within medicine, we should hardly be surprised that only two women were present at a seminal meeting on traditional medicine. Gendered, raced, and classed paradigms have historically promoted "Western" medical authority and silenced women's voices. Also, the very term *traditional medicine* is steeped in conservative

[16] WHO, "Promotion and Development of Traditional Medicine."

ideologies about medicine—that modern medicine is progressive and constantly evolving toward the future horizon of perfect health, while traditional medicine is old, primitive, earth-bound, and un-evolving. Hannu Vuori, a global health policy scholar, critiques this dichotomous way of thinking about healing. Critics of traditional medicine operate within a fallacy, "a belief that traditional or 'primitive' cultures are void of content and . . . It is therefore easy and desirable to pour the blessings of our scientific-technological advance into the empty receptacles."[17] Vuori points to a highly gendered reading of the relationship between modern and traditional medicine, an ideology that *de facto* plays out in the 1977 WHO meeting's sex ratio. Only one woman is a medical expert, out of nineteen total attendees. The "empty receptacles" that Vuori describes are like the passive Ms. J. Nemec; she is "void of content," just as traditional, plant-based medicinal cultures need to be filled with superior authority. Misogynist portrayals of women's reproductive organs, specifically the vagina, sometimes describe it as a void. Perhaps unwittingly, but in highly poetic fashion, Vuori illustrates how the very notion of "expert medical knowledge versus traditional medicine" reproduces a sexist framework for understanding knowledge.

The 1977 report implicitly reproduces sexist ideas of authority: women are not experts on health and wellbeing. Instead, they are solely the keepers of "old wives" remedies that have no basis in science.[18] Yet midwife and black women healers' knowledge was appropriated by modern-day, "Western" science, as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English also point to the "male takeover of

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[17] Vuori, "WHO and Traditional Medicine," 167.

[18] There has been substantive research on African American midwifery. See Jones, "Knowledge Systems in Conflict," and Fraser, *African American Midwifery in the South*. For a historic study of British Caribbean midwifery, see Inniss, "'Any elderly, sensible, prudent woman'."

healing roles" in the early 1800s in Europe and its colonies.[19] The Industrial Revolution bolstered the rise of male-dominated, state-sanctioned medicine, which thrived on co-opting women's knowledge and rendering women practicing medicine illegal.[20] Linda Janet Holmes speaks specifically to this issue in the *Black Women's Health Book*, writing, "state health departments have been successful in efforts to eradicate many black lay midwifery practices.[21] By convening a meeting on traditional medicine with only two women present, the WHO authorizes a continued neglect of women's perspectives on an issue that is, according to the ways that Kincaid and Senior frame it, often primarily the province of women. But even more troubling, the WHO fails to acknowledge the material ways in which traditional (and women's) medicine has always been part of the modern medical schema. People outside of the wealthy system of industrial medicine have long guided its development with their knowledge about medicinal herbs. As ethnobotanist G.T. Prance writes, "[f]olk medicine has been a pointer towards many of the drugs that we use."[22] Ikechi Mgbeoji, a legal scholar on the issue of biopiracy, emphasizes that "[a]lmost one-quarter of all doctors' prescriptions in the North have their origins in plant species."[23] Both Prance and Mgbeoji remind us

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[19] Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses*, 61.

[20] Legality around midwifery and infant care, whether, largely determined two prominent areas for women medical experts, or not women were suspected of helping women "miscarry."

[21] Holmes, "Thank You Jesus to Myself."

[22] Prance, *Ethnobotany and the Search for New Drugs*, 1–3.

[23] Mgbeoji, *Global Biopiracy*, 51. Paul Alan Cox reports the same statistic in "Ethnobotanical Approach to Drug Discovery," 25. His position on how to gain more knowledge about traditional knowledge is clear when he writes, "*Consent* of the indigenous people, *respect* for their culture and

of the importance of traditional medicine in modern healing practices, a necessary intervention in light of the way that a global health entity like the WHO suggests that the two types of healing are somehow split and irreconcilable.

My goal in bringing in the WHO's 1977 summit to this discussion of Kincaid's and Senior's writing is to illustrate a major arena in which global health experts had no vested interest in plants and healing as memory, song, story, or rhythm. As Mgbeoji writes, "traditional knowledge is characterized as 'folklore,' while Western empiricism is characterized as 'scientific.'" The two, though, are not mutually exclusive. This oppositional thinking model produces dichotomous ideologies around medicine that evade nuance and the potential negative impacts on cultures with a vested interest in protecting community-specific plant knowledge.

Indeed, although the WHO meets in Switzerland, the organization is not a neutral international entity. It was conceived as part of a post–World War II paradigm that upheld the authority of certain powerful states, the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, and China, the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, over other states. The WHO aligned with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and, in the 1990s, the World Trade Organization, in efforts to distribute development opportunities and improve life conditions across the globe.[24] Yet as Christina Ewig writes in *Second-Wave Neoliberalism*, when the World Bank entered international health services, it "shifted the focus of international public health from one centrally based on equity

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submission to indigenous political control are features that should characterize all responsible agreements" (34, italics in original).

[24] The WHO was also a close affiliate of certain national interests, like in 1988 when the WHO and Great Britain co-organized a summit on AIDS.

to one interested primarily in efficiency."[25] This emphasis can be traced throughout the WHO report, where phrases like "low cost," "could be adopted easily," and "maximum utilization" give off a bureaucratic, detached mood so unlike the "story" and "rhythm" that Senior's worker articulates.

The WHO was not alone in envisioning a better, more efficient global health system. In addition to this 1977 summit on traditional medicine, the Alma Ata declaration of 1978, which was issued at the International Conference on Primary Health Care in Kazakhstan, insisted on the importance of "health care for all."[26] In the Caribbean region, TRAMIL, a research project based on the islands, sought "to improve and rationalize popular medical practices." This Caribbean-centered project hosted a series of workshops in the 1980s, where the focus was on setting "boundaries between simple belief and what is of use and effective."[27] The 1970s and 1980s were a time when medical equity became a utopic ideal. The experts at the WHO meeting agreed that a goal of total health care coverage of the world population by the year 2000 meant a concerted effort to integrate the advances of Western medicine within a community's cultural knowledge. Those present in 1977 represented Sudan, Sri Lanka, the United States, Cameroon, Mexico, India, and Egypt as well as several branches of medicine including psychiatry, immunology, Ayurveda, and physiology. Yet "the

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[25] Ewig, *Second-Wave Neoliberalism*, 69. Ewig writes that "the 1993 *World Development Report*, that year subtitled *Investing in Health*, marked the arrival of the World Bank as a major player in international health policy. Bank lending for health, nutrition, and other social services leaped from 6 percent of its original lending in the 1980s to over 18 percent in the 1990s" (68).

[26] "Declaration of Alma-Ata."

[27] Scholars disagree on the appropriate meaning of the acronym. Weniger and Robineau, *Elements for a Caribbean Pharmacopeia*.

material rewards [we]re enormously unequal" and access to safe health care is still highly stratified post-2000.[28] Even with the efforts of a Caribbean-based workshop series like TRAMIL, where the goals would seem more attuned to the region's needs, this international project—cataloguing traditional medical practices and testing their efficacy—did not have the intended material or social effects.[29]

I do not intend to criticize the summit's aims wholesale. Access to universal health care is a necessary goal for human equity. But the WHO's logic for achieving this objective—classifying and cataloguing knowledge through empirical testing—reproduced systemic structures of violence against people who have long struggled within and against colonialism. And it is clear in the report that there are communities that wish to protect their knowledge. For example, the WHO report lists Sudan as a country where "[t]he methods and techniques employed are at present closely guarded secrets." Here, the emphasis on the "present" bodes ill for the future. In a report where traditional medicine is promoted as possessing an "intrinsic utility" that solves cultural health problems, the WHO's agenda is clear.[30] Regardless of whether Sudanese practitioners may have wanted to keep their knowledge secret, the utilitarian aims of collecting and using this information for universal benefit outweigh a community's attempts at insularity against global forces. In fact, the phrase

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[28] Klak, "Thirteen Theses on Globalization and Neoliberalism," 9.

[29] In fact, TRAMIL was associated with the WHO Collaborating Center for Traditional Medicine, so it was not a grassroots organization. Weniger and Robineau, "Elements for a Caribbean Pharmacopeia," 1.

[30] WHO, "Promotion and Development of Traditional Medicine," 11, 13.

"cultural health problems" implies that the community itself is responsible for the ill health of its members, as though the sickness can only be cured if WHO-led physicians and botanists fix it.

Furthermore, the personal views of the Sudanese are totally absent. Their testimonies are silent while an authority speaks for them. Living presence becomes merely a research object, a quantifiable fact that will be uncovered by the WHO.[31] Perhaps we have reason not to worry. In a region like the Caribbean, where traditional medicine is a complex of "West African traditional religious and medical practices combined with the colonial European humoral medical system and Amerindian medical system," it should be a great challenge to categorize knowledge and belief systems.[32] As Renato Tomei writes in his study of Caribbean plant allonyms (i.e., other names), "diasporic language codes are restricted in-group and the outsider is barred from the code as there is no scientific phytonym given for identification. This is a consequence of a Renéewed group identity and sense of belongingness, against language and cultural oppression."[33] Tomei studies

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[31] Andrew Lewis discusses the Enlightenment concern for verifiable facts, which he traces back to Francis Bacon's work that "adopted an approach to knowledge creation, fact discourse, which favored testimonies of individual experience and observation as the primary means of collecting information about the natural world." Lewis distinguishes the work of early American writers from that of Europeans, arguing that naturalists in America tended to favor a diversity of opinion regarding natural phenomena and resources. Lewis, *A Democracy of Facts*, 17. Mary Poovey also points to Bacon as the originator of fact-based scientific methodology in Poovey, *History of the Modern Fact*.

[32] Payne-Jackson, "Caribbean Traditional Medicine."

[33] Tomei, *Forbidden Fruits*, 46.

Caribbean plant names, where allonyms for a certain plant proliferate from many dialects, regional affiliations, and ethnicities. His linguistic project alone should suggest the futility of the WHO's ambition, regardless of its questionable ethics. But the second sentence I quoted above delivers the real blow to such an endeavor: the community condemns "cultural oppression." Keeping secrets about medicinal knowledge makes possible an anti-reproductive stance on the oppression the Sudanese and others have known and refuse to see continue.

Biocolonialism is at the center of the WHO's aims in 1977. The WHO's emphasis on uncovering secret medicinal treatments aligns with the aims of contemporary neoliberal bioprospecting. It also, perhaps unwittingly, upholds the status quo of pharmaceutical enterprise: wealthy corporations patent biological agents from biodiverse regions and sell them for huge profit. The pharmaceutical *empire*—there is no other word for how it operates globally—of the late twentieth century is directly tied to bioprospecting, as Melinda Cooper discusses in *Life as Surplus*, a study of US-led neoliberalism. In her chapter on the impact of the AIDS epidemic on global policy around public health—a key issue for the WHO in the 1990s when Senior and Kincaid wrote their gardening texts—Cooper links the decolonization of colonial states to the reconsolidation of Western political, economic, and medical power in international entities, like the WHO.[34] Long-standing regimes of knowledge extraction, initiated by Columbus's discovery of the New World, became re-entrenched and solidified. Knowledge, medicinal and otherwise, created profit. This was especially notable when new nations emerged out of the decolonization movements

[34] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 57.

of the late 1950s through the 1970s.[35] In other words, the push to codify and patent knowledge from other spaces, like the Caribbean, was a reaction to the new political freedom of former colonial states. Pharmaceutical companies only grew more influential as international entities like the WHO called for Renéewed research on biological agents in postcolonial and decolonized spaces.

The neoliberal economic model is the same one that Senior critiques in "Meditation on Yellow" with her tourist worker. Senior also condemns neoliberal development in "The Knot Garden," another poem in *Gardening in the Tropics*. She directly criticizes the Jamaican prime minister's involvement with the IMF, whose policies regarding the Jamaican economy detrimentally impact life ways and ecosystems. This time, the voice is an unspecified Jamaican, one who could speak for many as indicated by the word "our" as seen below:

> Only last week as our leader left
> for another IMF meeting, he order
> the hacking out of paths and
> ditches, the cutting of swaths
> to separate out flowers from weeds, woods from trees.[36]

The unnamed prime minister (likely Edward Seaga based on the poem's date of 1986) falsely believes in the value of certain plants over others, without any regard for the potential positive effects of "weeds" or "trees." He wants to control the landscape using techniques that would clear it of much botanical vitality. When he returns from the international meeting, he finds it is totally

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[35] Kincaid's Antigua did not achieve full independence from Great Britain until 1981, an issue she takes up in *A Small Place*.

[36] Senior, "The Knot Garden," in *Gardening in the Tropics*, 88.

overrun and "too impenetrable for landing." His inability to understand the landscape is produced by his connection with the IMF, a global entity that would similarly see a lush, confusing landscape of weeds as it flew over the island. Instead of accepting the wildness of Jamaican plants as good in itself, he travels instead to the "Cayman Islands, or Liechtenstein, / or Geneva," three centers of global trade and tourism.[37] This poem critiques the powerful man for his ideological affiliation with the development model and his inability to see it as a destructive force with interest only in strict order, not wildness.

The Caribbean-specific ramifications of this desire to name, quantify, "tap into potential," and "improve" is contemporary and as old as empire. Kincaid looks back to early natural historical work in the Americas when she criticizes biocolonialism in *My Garden (Book):*. As historian of science Harriet Ritvo writes, "[T]he discovery, naming, and classification of new species was a routine feature—indeed the staple employment—of natural history."[38] The botanical subfield of natural history involved uncovering plant medicines for western science's development, much like the WHO called for in 1977. Kincaid argues that natural history's methodology and ideology have not disappeared. Instead, it is now reproduced through pharmaceutical companies' bioprospecting and WHO-sponsored botanical inquiry. Contemporary threats thus mimic natural history's earlier effects on the Caribbean landscape.

The next section takes up Kincaid's position on historical legacies of biocolonialism, especially around naming as a practice of power. Where natural history once worked to uncover medical advances in the landscapes of the Caribbean, now the WHO seeks to tap into medicinal plant

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[37] Ibid., 89.

[38] Ritvo, *Platypus and the Mermaid*, 10.

knowledge that remained hidden for centuries. Both scientific agents rely on Western views of scientific naming practices for plants and medicines.

B. Binomial Nomenclature and Coding: Kincaid's Strategies of Resistance

Although Jamaica Kincaid does not directly refer to Adam in the Garden of Eden in Genesis in her chapter titled "To Name is to Possess," her language makes it impossible not to recall the Judeo-Christian foundational moment when Adam names all the birds and beasts: "the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof."[39] Eve has no place in the naming of any plants or animals. She does not even exist yet! Adam's naming is tied to male authority, as the italicized "*was*" emphasizes a rigidity in who names all life on the earth. We are supposedly not allowed to question Adam's names for these creatures.

Natural history, according to Kincaid, operated under a similar idea of male authority. As her garden writing argues, it was natural history as a discipline that initiated a system of coding that continues to shape the material exchanges between wealthy, industrial entities and impoverished, natural-resource-rich countries. She directly names Carl von Linné (1701–78), the Swedish botanist and doctor, as the man most responsible for instantiating a system of knowledge-extraction and domination in the Caribbean. Kincaid envisions natural history and its contemporary global-health implications through an oppositional lens that reproduces Michel Foucault's critique of natural history's "nomination of the visible" and reduction of natural phenomena and life to mere structural

[39] Gen. 2: 19 (Authorized King James Version).

categories.[40] In particular, Foucault's fixation on the linguistic practice of power mirrors Kincaid's understanding of the pitfalls of natural history. Kincaid writes of the desire to name, to test, and to authenticate: "we associated it with our dominators, the English people, their love, their need to isolate, name, objectify, possess various parts, people, and things in the world."[41] "We" in this short quotation from *My Garden (Book):* is an unspecified collective from her childhood memory. The word therefore is open to interpretation of its collectivist possibilities, as though "we" means the people of the Caribbean, broadly, or even the people throughout the world who were adversely affected by the British Empire. It could even gesture toward the global impact of natural history, which was a European enterprise and not exclusive to British colonialism.

Linnaeus designed a unique form of binomial nomenclature whereby twenty-four classes of plants were subdivided into orders, families, genera, and species.[42] His *Systema Naturae* (1735), *Genera Plantarum* (1737), *Hortus Cliffortianus* (1737), and *Classes Plantarum* (1738) set the groundwork for a system of naming plants that is familiar to all present-day botanists and biologists. Richard Drayton emphasizes the seminal impact of Linnaeus's system, which integrated earlier scientific naming schemas from Aristotle's *scala naturae* to those conceived in John Ray's *Historia Plantarum Generalis* (1686–1704) and Joseph Pitton de Tournefort's *Elementes de Botanique*

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[40] Foucault, *Order of Things*, 132. Parrish, *American Curiosity*, 9. Parrish mentions Max Weber, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer as thinkers who also read the Enlightenment's devastating effects on human perception of the natural world as "the disenchantment of the world." See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

[41] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 143.

[42] Drayton, *Nature's Government*, 18.

ou Méthode pour Connaître les Plantes (1683). In his study of imperial scientific expansion between 1500 and 1800, Drayton underlines Linnaeus's debt to "three centuries of European reconnaissance of a wider world."[43] The work of European expansion made possible natural history's success, and Linnaeus's system had wide appeal across European national boundaries. This was fundamental to the imperial enterprise, which called for the accumulation of knowledge about the New World to promote commercial development and intellectual progress within the imperial hubs of Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and France. As Christoph Irmscher writes, "Linnaeus had hammered into the minds of aspiring naturalists the world over that the study of natural history, 'simple, beautiful, and instructive,' should consist mainly in the 'collection, arrangement, and exhibition of the various productions of the earth.'"[44] Irmscher's verb "hammered" speaks to Linnaeus's imperative that all natural scientists adopt his system. Plants, animals, and humans became "products" for European consumption and economic development. Such consumerism is what Senior criticizes in "Meditation on Yellow," in which she imagines the Taíno people as merely gold to Columbus. Harriet Ritvo argues that natural history was an agent of empire that enabled the acquisitive logic of biocolonialism. Senior's poem reminds us that the Caribbean was at the very locus of this empire-building enterprise, partly because Columbus "discovered" it

[43] Ibid., 18.

[44] Irmscher, *Poetics of Natural History*.

and partly due to its abundant biodiversity.[45] Just as Adam claimed the right from God to name the animals of the Earth—and there were no other names—so too did natural history.

Jamaica Kincaid directly addresses Linnaeus's impact on her region when she writes,

> he saw an opportunity, and it was this: These countries in Europe shared the same botany, more or less, but each place called the same thing by a different name; and these people who make up Europe were (are) so contentious anyway, they would not have agreed to one system for all the plants they had in common, but these new plants from far away, like the people far away, had no history, no names, and so they could be given names.[46]

Kincaid depicts Linnaeus rationalizing an ethically ugly practice. The words "more or less" and "anyway" are part of a rhetorical strategy where Linnaeus obfuscates the violent strategies of silencing and erasing peoples' histories. She imagines Linnaeus's work as part of a racist schema that ignores the real cultural history of spaces like the Sudan in the WHO report, or her home in Antigua. These are attempts to replace a local reality with a Westernized version of history. This, as historian of science Londa Schiebinger writes, had distinctly economic aims: "[e]ighteenth-century natural history . . . was . . . big business, an essential component of Europe's commercial and colonial expansion."[47] Indeed, the naming system upheld a trans-European colonial consolidation of language. Latin and Greek were the only languages allowed in the system, and religious names or

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[45] Ritvo writes, "Naturalists in the mother country *automatically* claimed the right to classify the plants and animals of its growing colonial territories." Ritvo, *Platypus and the Mermaid*, 18. Emphasis added.

[46] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 122.

[47] Schiebinger, "Nature's Unruly Body," 26.

those that spoke to specific uses for the plants were not permitted.[48] Instead of local names, the binomial nomenclature system erased anything but a purportedly superior global taxonomic code that celebrated a few "great" men's memories. This "universal" language would eradicate confusion around the names of plants and animals, and scientists would be able to more efficiently share their knowledge with others across national boundaries. Such advances would help "the cause of science": to promote medical advancement, improve life conditions, and to understand the mechanisms of the natural world.

Yet before we get carried away with lambasting binomial nomenclature, Kincaid herself recognizes the importance of his system to global knowledge: "The invention of this system has been a good thing."[49] Before Linnaeus's system was devised, there was an "unmanageable profusion of names."[50] This, as Rivto describes, was a barrier to spreading knowledge about botanical agents across national boundaries. As a gardener, Kincaid benefits from a system that catalogues specific plants under specific names. This is a volatile subject for her. She writes, "the garden for me is so bound up with words about the garden, with words themselves, that any set idea of the garden, any set picture, is a provocation to me."[51] Kincaid's enigmatic phrasing suggests that the garden is not static and cannot be "set" or bound, yet she admits her benefitting from this standard system of naming as a gardener.

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[48] Ibid., 41.

[49] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 166.

[50] Rivto, *The Platypus and the Mermaid*, 53.

[51] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 7.

Kincaid testifies to a complex struggle through which she comes to accept that using binomial nomenclature allows her to communicate successfully with other gardeners. She frames this as an argument within herself that took place in some recent past: "One day, while looking at the things that lay at my feet, I was having an argument with myself over the names I should use when referring to the things that lay before me. These things were plants."[52] Kincaid frames this argument as a narrative of how she came to grapple with her role as a gardener with her particular Antiguan history. This is not an evasion of political critique, though. It is a strategy for showing how she tempered her response to a form of domination. She writes, "I believed that it was an affectation to say *Eupatorium* when you could say joe-pye weed, and I would only say joe-pye weed [because] [t]he botanists [who assigned the names] are from the same part of the world as the man who sailed on the three ships."[53] Kincaid, like Shiva, points directly to Columbus as the source of a long history of biocolonial exploitation. For Kincaid, as for Shiva, Columbus is not so much a blame-worthy individual as a symbol for the beginning of colonial practices of environmental degradation and knowledge-extraction. Instead of repeating his name, she repeats "they" to emphasize a collective body of biocolonists who were inspired by his discovery: "they emptied worlds of their names; they emptied the worlds of things animal, vegetable, and mineral of their names and replaced these names with names pleasing to them; these names are pleasing to them because they are reasonable; reason is a pleasure to them."[54] By refusing to use the Linnaean names for plants she knew, Kincaid had originally staked out a resistant position to binomial nomenclature. In this recollection of her political

[52] Ibid., 160.

[53] Ibid., 160.

[54] Ibid., 160.

refusal to name plants, Kincaid also highlights the ideology of reason and authority when she describes how biocolonists chose new names for "the world of things." Recall how Vuori discusses the dichotomous thinking around traditional medicine and modern medicine. Authority is the reserve of modern medicine, and non-incorporated healing practices are the domain of those with lesser reasoning, such as women.

Kincaid critiques the botanists—those who name plants—in a way that reproduces in many respects Michel Foucault's critique of natural history in *The Order of Things*, as well as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's position that the Enlightenment led to "the disenchantment of the world."[55] But Kincaid seems to be admitting her complicity with the system by writing her critique in the past tense. She is inconsistent in her use of Linnaean nomenclature, mixing it with common names throughout *My Garden (Book):*. Honeysuckle is also *Lonicera*, the perennial pea is *Lathyrus latifolius*, and yellow hollyhocks are *Alcea ficifolia*, to name just three examples.[56] Kincaid has clearly changed her mind about using scientific names, but she does not offer any explanation for the shift. She waivers, grappling with her contemporary position as a garden writer

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[55] Foucault discusses the rising prestige of the physical sciences and increased emphasis on "observation" in science in the seventeenth century. See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Also, Parrish's research into natural history has suggested that Foucault's and Horkheimer and Adorno's readings miss much of the complexity of natural history. Kincaid's own poetic celebration of non-scientific names that have survived the Enlightenment upholds a more informed critique of the impact of natural history on our conceptions of the natural world. Parrish, *American Curiosity*, 9.

[56] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 11, 22, 26.

with a Caribbean past. Linnaean nomenclature established a more systematic understanding of the natural world that, as Kincaid concedes, had a tremendous influence on the ways that botanists, and gardeners, think about plants. Her inconsistency illustrates the collision of her gardening interests and her history in Antigua.

I argued at the beginning of this chapter that Kincaid, as well as Senior, code women's medicinal knowledge using common names. Kincaid's reservations about binomial nomenclature illustrate how contemporary practices of bioprospecting reinforce entrenched power systems around plant knowledge. I have not yet discussed the ways in which this coding works and how we might begin to understand its effects on outsiders. An example from outside Kincaid and Senior's writing sheds light on the exclusionary tactics of using only common, non-scientific names for plants. "West Indian Weed Woman," a song with roots from the 1930s in the Caribbean, is a catalogue of common names for medicinal plants. There are many versions with competing and diverse plant names. I will cite the first recorded song.[57] A hungry man sees a woman hawking plants in the street and approaches her for food. She is carrying quite the list:

Man Piaba, Woman Piaba,

Tantan, Fall-Back and Lemon Grass

Minnie Root, Gully Root, Granny-Backbone,

Bitter Tally, Lime Leaf and Toro,

Coolie Bitters, Karile Bush, Flat 'o the Earth, and Iron Weed,

[57] A full transcript of the song is available in Tomei's *Forbidden Fruits*, and a digital music file is available on *Calypso Pioneers, Vol. 2 (1925–1947)*. Tomei, *Forbidden Fruits*, 30–32. Rogers, vocal performance of "West Indian Weed Woman."

Sweet Broom, Fowl Tongue, Wild Daisy,

Sweet Sage, and even *Toyo*. . .

She had *Cassava Mumma, Coocoo Piaba,*

Jacob's Ladder, and *Piti Guano,*

Fingle Bush, Job's Tear, Piti Payi,

Jumbie Bottle and *White Cleary,*

Bile Bush, Wild Cane, Duck Weed, Aniseed,

Wara Bitters and *Wild Grey Root,*

She even had down to a certain bush

Barbajans does call *"Puss in Boot."*[58]

There are three more stanzas of plant names, but these two will suffice. The man has no idea how to order, and even if a scientist could figure out the specific plants referred to here, "[m]ost of the names are not found in dictionaries, and the identification of plants is impossible."[59] We recognize "Lemon Grass" and "Aniseed" as two herbs used in cooking, but the rest are inscrutable. The sheer abundance of names, each of which is merely one allonym for a plant where there may be many allonyms, is part of the song's gimmick. The weed woman overwhelms the man in the street with the number of plants she carries. Herein lies the crux of medicinal knowledge in the Caribbean: those who use medicinal plants do not change the way they refer to them for outsiders to understand.

[58] Tomei, *Forbidden Fruits*, 31.

[59] Ibid., 32.

There is a tidal wave of information that, even if a community were willing to share what it knew with outsiders, could not be totalized or translated.

Traditional medical knowledge in "West Indian Weed Woman" is a coded form understood only by those in the community. Jean D'Costa argues that Jamaican oral discourses, like common names for plants, build and strengthen communal practices: "the discourse becomes the expression system for the newly centered voice of authority, authorizing, naming, and imposing control that is locally sited." For D'Costa, discourse is an "expression plane" where a community's language codes do not necessarily invite outside comprehension. In fact, it is a revision of authority from within. The hidden discourse has roots in the centuries of exploitation the Caribbean people have survived, but it also continues to promote insularity from outsider influence.[60] For this chapter on the anti-reproductive negotiations around scientific naming, D'Costa's work highlights an ongoing community system of preserving local epistemologies against acquisition.

Kincaid does not, like the West Indian Weed Woman, list a panoply of medicinal plants. She names only three such plants, and all are abortifacients. Her interest in abortifacients is not exclusive to *My Garden (Book):*, though. Plant means of producing abortion appear in *At the Bottom of the River*'s "Girl" (1983), *Lucy* (1992), and *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996). Kincaid, more often than any other writer in this dissertation, turns to the symbolic and material anti-reproductive potential within this class of plants. Kincaid's fixation on only one class of medicinal plants in her garden writing informs the argument I make in this chapter. She does not, as with *joe-*

[60] Lalla, D'Costa, and Pollard, *Caribbean Literary Discourse*, 1–14. Jean D'Costa's scholarship on early song and dance rituals in Jamaican literature is a key influence on my thinking about oral discourse's role in community-building. See D'Costa, "Songs in Silence," 17–41.

pye weed, waiver between the scientific and the common name. These abortifacients are exclusively common, part of the community of knowledge around them and not for outsider acquisition.

Kincaid refers to "whitehead bush . . . an important ingredient in the potions my mother and her friends made for their abortions" and to "some six sixty-six and maiden-blush tea."[61] She writes of *whitehead bush*, "I do not know its proper name."[62] All three are abortifacients, according to Kincaid's mother and her friends. Instead of attempting to pin down the scientific names for the plants, though, Kincaid describes their use within the women's community she grew up in. Apparently *whitehead bush* makes a good broom weed as well: "this same bush I often had to go and cut down and tie in bunches to make a broom for sweeping our yard; both the abortions and the sweeping of the yard, actions deep and shallow, in a place like that (Antigua) would fall into the category called Household Management."[63] The two actions Kincaid cheekily describes, sweeping and abortion, are the province of women. With *six sixty-six* and *maidenblush*, we find out that they are made into teas for women to drink "for all sorts of ailments, including abortions."[64] She does not, however, include a description of what part of the plant needs to be used, how much of it should be steeped, for how long, and what to do if it does not work. Instead, we read about how "its leaves are a beautiful ovoid shape and a deep green."[65] These details around plants with no proper names—Kincaid at least does not know them—are descriptive rather than proscriptive.

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[61] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 119, 138.

[62] Ibid., 119.

[63] Ibid., 119–20.

[64] Ibid., 138.

[65] Ibid., 138.

Kincaid offers a clear reasoning for why she discusses them in this way: "the awe and poetry of botany cannot be eaten, the mystery and beauty in the knowledge of botany cannot be taken to market."[66] Such strong language around abortifacients, part of the broader province of medical botany and gardening, illustrates Kincaid's position on plant beauty versus plant use value. Avaricious, hungry market-driven bioprospectors cannot understand the full potential of medicinal plants. In this community, only women know the way to identify plants and use them. As Susie O'Brien discusses Kincaid's plant-specific writing in this text, the "descriptive passages are oddly elusive."[67] Her caged language is a strategy of obfuscation, a way of naming and not naming knowledge that women share.

Kincaid's coded discussion of plants is part of her inherited knowledge from her mother. By implication, we may assume that there is a legacy of women sharing plant medicinal knowledge with their daughters that goes back even further than Kincaid's relationship with her mother in the mid twentieth century. Leslie Lewis, a scholar of early African American literature, discusses the rich underpinnings of silence and elusiveness in African American literature. She writes, "secret tellings are often misconstrued as silence."[68] Kincaid inherits a version of the "coded talk among slaves" as

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[66] Ibid., 140.

[67] O'Brien, "The Garden and the World," 167–184.

[68] Lewis, *Telling Narratives*, 13. Lewis turns to Adrienne Rich's idea that women paradoxically lie and tell the truth to one another. Rich elaborates on these ideas in "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying," where, as Lewis writes, "between groups of people disparate in social status, the dominant group may hear nothing and assume silence when, in fact, members of the subordinate group are quietly whispering to one another" (13).

a historic mode of resisting oppressive aims, one of which, as Lewis writes, was to prohibit open speech among slaves against whites. This recalls the issues I discussed in chapter one around enslaved women's tactical negotiations of abortion. Arvilla Payne-Jackson and Mervyn C. Alleyne's study of the spiritual and religious practice around medicinal plants is useful as well: "religious practitioners . . . guard the knowledge as part of their sacred duty."[69] Despite the absence of any religious focus in Kincaid's garden writing, Payne-Jackson and Alleyne's analysis testifies to the continuity of a practice of coding around abortifacients and other medicinal plants that we can trace in Kincaid's work as well. It is a strategy that has protected the insularity of medicinal practices and maintained a community of knowledge.

In an interview Kincaid admits that "[i]t was in my first garden that I discovered the relationship between gardens and history, or that you could write a history of empire through plants."[70] Kincaid's text illustrates how gardening can inform a political critique of empire, where natural history and bioprospecting played and continue to play a significant role in threatening women's communities. I use this term, *women's communities*, to suggest the ways that plant medicinal knowledge is the archive of Kincaid and other women's expertise and memories. The plural form—"communities" rather than "community"—marks the diverse forms of knowledge and bonding among women. For example, Kincaid's response to inequity is deeply personal. In the introduction to *My Garden (Book)*:, Kincaid emphasizes the role that her history plays in her conception of gardening. She writes, "the garden for me is an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my own immediate past, a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is

[69] Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, *Jamaican Folk Medicine*, 145.

[70] Balutansky, "On Gardening," 793.

indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings)."[71] As Jill Casid writes in *Sowing Empire*, a study of how colonial gardens impacted postcolonial writing about the natural world, gardening "endeavors to materially rework how . . . the archive is physically remembered, raking over and reseeding the ground of the past for the materialization of a different future."[72] Such an image recalls Michelle Cliff's Clare Savage digging with fellow revolutionaries on her family's former plantation grounds in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) to uncover bones and bits of earth, as it also resonates with Alice Walker's famous 1972 essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," in which Walker understands that her mother's gardening "handed down respect for the possibilities—and the will to grasp them."[73] Kincaid's digging to uncover the broad geologic and colonial past situates her argument within a long history of women's plant epistemology.

Another part of Kincaid's strategy here is ironic: abortive medicine is what she knows best from Antigua. This either means that her mother was concerned for her reproductive health or that abortion is a common issue in Antigua. Whichever way you interpret it, abortive consciousness is an important part of Kincaid's memory of her country. Critics of Kincaid's work are usually concerned with her inconsistencies in tone, especially her use of irony. Jeanne C. Ewert writes, following Homi Bhabha's notion of the mimicry of the colonized subject, Kincaid's text is a hybrid, a marriage of the colonizer and colonized where her narrative voice testifies to an uneasy reproduction of the colonizer's relationship to the land. Ewert reads Kincaid's writing as wholly "unproductive," and Sarah Phillips Casteel agrees: "[r]ather than breaking out of these power structures, Kincaid

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[71] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 8.

[72] Casid, *Sowing Empire*, xiii.

[73] Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens."

ironically reproduces them, as though rehearsing the botanical conquest of the New World."[74] These critics dismiss Kincaid's project and miss a crucial part of her literary project around naming and not naming medicinal plants. Such misunderstanding of Kincaid's writing is not exclusive to Ewert and Casteel, but it is noteworthy for what it misses. Anne Collett appears to be more aware of the complex stakes involved in Kincaid's project. She takes up the strange origin story of an unknown Caribbean author achieving success through a high literary, bourgeois publication like the *New Yorker*: "what amount of control or power does Kincaid have in her literary garden? Is she the owner or the owned?"[75] Collett asks whether Kincaid may have been attempting to subtly subvert the *New Yorker* audience's expectations. In particular, Kincaid's gardening column, the meat of *My Garden (Book):*, ran from 1992 to 1995. Titled "In the Garden," Kincaid's column critiqued "the acquisitive greed of the colonizer and the destructive and demeaning ramifications for the colonized" in these essays.[76] Like Collett, I read a significant amount of subversion into Kincaid's publishing history with the *New Yorker*, since Kincaid's discussion of abortifacients is consistent with a quietly ironic tone around the forces of colonization in gardening. Indeed, Kincaid names three such plants in order to show the persistence of women's subversive practices despite biocolonial covetousness.

Yet irony is not Kincaid's endgame. The third major tone in her garden writing about abortifacients is melancholic. She laments the loss of plants indigenous to Antigua, the work of biocolonialism across centuries. Kincaid writes, "What did the botanical life of Antigua consist of at

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[74] Ewert, "'Great Plant Appropriators'," 125. Casteel, "Kincaid's and Pollan's New World Garden Writing," 130–131.

[75] Collett, "A Snake in the Garden of the *New Yorker*?," 99.

[76] Ibid., 101.

the time . . . Christopher Columbus . . . first saw it? To see a garden in Antigua now will not supply a clue."[77] We can only speculate on the native plants that were once indigenous to Antigua because natural historians and explorers brought new plants to the island.[78] Kincaid writes that the original plants were "stolen" to be put in the Kew Gardens in London, led by the efforts of Joseph Banks.[79] She argues that the land's history has been mostly replaced—the plants that once thrived in Antigua are gone, writing, "What herb of any beauty grew in this place? What tree? And did people who lived there grow them for their own sake? I do not know, I can find no record of it." There is no written testimony and no authentic scientific source for pre-colonial botany or aesthetic gardening on her island. Instead, "[t]he botany of Antigua exists in medicinal folklore."[80]

Kincaid positions herself as an authority on this traumatic erasure of Antigua's landscape. She knows only what has been shared with her under the purview of "medicinal folklore," or the traditional knowledge that the WHO wants to uncover. I have already discussed the derogatory implications of outside agencies like the WHO using terms like *traditional knowledge* or *folklore* to refer to the medicinal practices Kincaid discusses. Kincaid, though, does not denigrate such knowledge. She archives her memories of Antigua, the book becoming a living presence that maintains continuity between her mother's medicinal knowledge and her own. Her fixation on

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[77] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 135.

[78] African slaves and, later, indentured servants from China and India also brought plants to the West Indies. Kincaid's argument is not inclusive, but rather exclusive to the colonizer's negative effects on the landscape.

[79] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book):*, 135.

[80] Ibid., 137.

abortion demarcates the enigmatic space where she will not share scientific names and utterly reveal this medicinal bounty. The extensive research on other plant life, which she testifies to in the rest of *My Garden (Book):*—her own trips to learn about plants and her obsession with plant catalogues—suggests that she could have discovered proper names for the abortifacients if she chose to. This possibility—that Kincaid protects the knowledge of women in her community and does not condone scientific epistemologies around medicinal practices—traces the limit of the WHO's acquisitive drive from 1977 onward, to investigate and catalogue all medicinal plants throughout the world. Like the way that the WHO report suggests that the Sudanese people will not reveal their secret medical practices, Kincaid implies that women will keep their particular woman-centered medicine safe from incorporation into Westernized medical categories.

Using only common names for abortifacients, Kincaid argues that culturally situated medicinal folklore cannot be the province of biocolonial forces. She imagines how, by not using binomial nomenclature, she can instantiate a form of non-reproduction of knowledge—an abortive mechanism surrounding naming practices that ends the cycle of authority around taxonomic systematization. According to Kincaid's logic, "life" cannot be classified if she does not participate, or reproduce, the system. My reading of Kincaid recuperates her from the dominant way of understanding her inconsistencies as unwitting effects of her complicated standpoint as a gardener. What these readings miss is the clear, consistent position she takes on medicinal folklore. It is here that we find her anti-reproductive stance. Indeed, her writing even proposes a possible solution to ending the cycle of exploitation of traditional medicinal knowledge: by not using proper names for medicinal plants, we can stop reproducing structures of violence against communities. For Kincaid, gardening can be both a practice of power *and* a mode of creative expression against incorporation.

C. Olive Senior's Sexualized, Rebellious Plants

Senior's garden writing, like Kincaid's, imagines the destructive effects of imperialism on the landscape of the Caribbean. While *My Garden (Book):* positions Kincaid as a present-day subject grappling with the continued legacy of biocolonialism in the Vermont garden, Senior's work imagines multiple Caribbean subjectivities that converge in discourses around medicinal plant knowledge. Senior's poetry does not mention abortifacients, yet her writing shows the same privileging of common names that we see in Kincaid's work. In fact, there is not one scientific name for a plant in her entire volume, despite her titling a section of it "Nature Studies." She plays on the significance of this title, where the people of Jamaica, and not natural historians or contemporary biocolonists, are investigating plants. This is a crucial revision of past forms of natural studies to explore how communities know and understand medicinal plants.

Although she does not use binomial nomenclature anywhere in the poetry, that does not mean she shies away from discussing specific plants. She mentions several species of medicinal plants: *fever-grass*, *cerasee*, *bizzie-lizzie* or *impatiens* (the same herb). As Tomei argues about Caribbean plant names, a community-specific knowledge system functions as an archive of medical practice and life ways. The double name for the last plant in the list, part of the poem "Advice and Devices," suggests multiplicity even within a single group of people. As Senior warns, "Gardening in the Tropics can be / quite a struggle if you don't / know what you're doing."[81] This is true for any of those who do not know the nuances of gardening and plant names in "the Tropics." In fact, the

[81] Senior, "Advice and Devices," in *Gardening in the Tropics*, 111.

plurality suggested in a phrase like "the Tropics," which is a residue of colonial visions of the area that contains many nations, testifies to a difficult code to be cracked if we want to succeed as gardeners or medicinal practitioners.

Senior, like Kincaid, is interested in preventing biocolonialism's impact on the Caribbean. Senior also highlights biocolonialism's harmful effects on contemporary memory. "Anatto and Guinep" illustrates this point. At first, the poem starts with a lament: "No one today regards anatto and guinep / as anything special." Whoever this speaker is, he or she remembers the past uses for the two plants. The Arawaks "used both for things . . . like / medicine and curing or birth or death." Note the connection between birth and death, a rich description that suggests the cycles of reproduction. Regardless of the forgetfulness of the current community, there is still someone who remembers and testifies to old ways of knowing, even as far back as the "Arawaks," a term that is often used to refer to the people of Jamaica before European contact.[82] By giving voice to this disappearing plant knowledge, Senior articulates a community-specific practice of healing and archives it in her poem.

Senior's take on biocolonialism usually incorporates many voices, as she writes from multiple subject positions. This allows her to explore the multifaceted impact of colonialism on Jamaica, or, broadly, "the Tropics." Whereas with Kincaid's gardening essays there seem to be less potential for agency—at least critics have missed the subtle moments of resistance in her writing—Senior's poem cycle is more clearly about the refusal to reproduce biocolonial forms of knowledge and material wealth. For her, the body—plant and human—emerges as a site of colonial exploitation *and* subversion. Plants are fleshy, supple, and sexualized. They are also endowed with a form of agency

[82] Senior, "Arawak," in *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, PAGE NUMBER.

typically reserved for human subjects: plotting and the capacity for memory. This implies that plants are gendered as women, and that these plants are, like Senior and Kincaid, critical of the colonial enterprise. An example illustrates this gendering and anthropomorphization of plants. In "Pineapple," Senior represents one of the first moments of contact between the Taíno and the Spanish. The colonizer is "Oblivious / of irony" and accepts the Taíno symbol of hospitality, the pineapple, as his own,

> never suspecting
>
> the retribution
>
> incarnate
>
> in that sweet flesh.[83]

The pineapple becomes another "incarnation" of simmering revolution. Notice the emphasis on "sweet flesh"—a descriptor that surely underlines the pineapple's supple, delicious taste and texture. This characterization is a version of how a misogynist male gaze views the female body, and it correlates with the context for the poem, another scene of the arrival of the acquisitive, lustful Spaniards. In this way, it forms a bookend to Senior's earlier depiction of Columbus with gold shining in his eyes. But the gendered pineapple is not a passive subject or gift. The white settlers store these fruits, "not knowing [of] / each headdress / of spikes." It appears that the Spaniards are not paying attention to the features of the pineapple. They are like inept bioprospectors who have missed something crucial about the fruit that contains a threatening aura and potential that may come to fruition at any time,

> Unless

[83] Senior, "Pineapple," in *Gardening in the Tropics*, 66.

You can peel

Them off quick

Pineal eyes

Watch and

Wait

Counting

Down.[84]

Senior's poetry tends to make limited use of capital letters and is usually heavily enjambed. The enjambment here, coupled with eight lines of short words, operates syntactically like exclamation points. These lines are ominous because they quickly drop down, creating suspense around the revolutionary potential contained within them. The "pineal eyes"—fruit has eyes?—recall the Taíno people in the beginning of the poem—the collective "we" of the lines "we welcomed you / to our shores."[85] Senior's poem illustrates how the plants of the region *are* the people and are thus as capable of resistance. They are also quietly simmering with the promise of revolt against the failed hospitality of the settlers.

Senior's poetry about medicinal plants reveals the budding plant and human rebellion in the Caribbean region. "Pineapple" links hidden plant power with women's agency—something the colonizers miss because they skim merely the surface of appearances. This recalls the discussion I took up in chapter one about the ways in which plantation owners and naturalists speculated on whether women were capable of reproductive rebellion on the plantation. It is not so much a question of whether women did or did not abort fetuses so much as how outsiders missed the signs

[84] Ibid., 67.

of rebellion and believed that women could not use plants to help them negotiate their reproductive futures. Agency need not be enacted—but its possibility exists.

Speaking of potent forms of subversion, poems like "Madam Fate" and "Plants" depict a more sinister side to these seemingly innocuous growing herbs. *Madam fate*, a well-known poison in Jamaica, appears to be innocent; it is called, among other names, the "star-flower." Yet certain people believe that Lucifer "poses" as this new plant.[86] They understand its potency as a poison and are not deceived. The message is clear: if you do not know the secret uses of plants, you will be in danger. "Plants" is even more straightforward about latent plant revolt: the first line reads, "Plants are deceptive" and "were always there / one step ahead of us."[87] Mimi Sheller writes of this characterization that "plants contain a kind of natural militancy, conquering territory with explosive growth. But the powers of plants might also be propagated and harnessed by those who know the secret powers of root, bark, leaf, and flower."[88] In Sheller's reading of the poem, those with essential medicinal knowledge about plants can use them against the conquerors, as a pseudo-form of plant and human re-colonization of the landscape. Another way to put it is that Senior's poem imagines a strategy for ending the cycle of biocolonialism by reclaiming the land for the resistors.

Both Kincaid and Senior emphasize the centrality of medicinal plants to the survival of the Caribbean landscape. Their positions on the historical impact of biocolonialism within the region stake out the terrain of resistance: medicinal plant knowledge can be withheld from contemporary

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[85] Ibid., 66.
[86] Ibid., 68.

[87] Senior, "Plants," in *Gardening in the Tropics*, 63–64.

[88] Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 188.

colonizers, i.e., those with the global drive to acquire more medicines in order to tap into the promising horizon of perfect health for all. Kincaid and Senior's strategic non-scientific naming practices around medicinal plants produce a form of refusal, a tactical attempt at ending the cycle of knowledge appropriation by outside agents. Kincaid's especial interest in abortifacients, the domain of "Household Management" and therefore of women, carves out a particularly gendered arena to resist biocolonization. Senior, too, in her gendering of plants as women in "Pineapple," suggests that this fight is against a long, ongoing system of knowledge extraction by outsiders. Their literary engagement with this struggle reaffirms the power of Caribbean women's community at the same time as it points to a broader global struggle. For example, in Western Africa, *fam wisa*, a plant that women use to regulate their menstrual cycles (and perhaps to abort fetuses) is a closely guarded secret. When Abena Dove Osseo-Asare visited Ghana for fieldwork on her study of healing plants on the African continent, she describes "coy" responses to her questioning about the applications of *fam wisa*, which is commonly called the "grains of paradise."[89] Across the globe, postcolonial spaces like the Caribbean and Ghana continue to testify to guarded knowledge around women's medicinal knowledge. To use only common names for abortifacients, as Kincaid does, is to articulate an anti-reproductive position around biocolonialism. More broadly, Kincaid and Senior refuse to bow to binomial nomenclature as a totalizing system of categorization. This, although it is a measured victory over the long history of colonial exploitation of natural resources and human knowledge in the region, is a step toward protecting local women's healing practices and sustaining their importance for years to come.

[89] Osseo-Asare, *Bitter Roots*, 100.

D. Postscript: Since 1999

Twelve years after Jamaica Kincaid published *My Garden (Book)*:, Ivelyn Harris, a practicing Maroon herbalist, produced a book titled *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*. As I discussed in chapter one, Maroon herbalists are seen as practitioners with vast knowledge of old forms of healing, since Maroons are those Africans who escaped enslavement and formed communities mostly within the Blue Mountains region of Jamaica. Harris's was not the first Jamaican pharmacopeia, but it is certainly the most interesting one of the last several decades. As I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation, many books on Caribbean medicinal plants exist. What distinguishes Harris's text is her Maroon background as a practitioner of herbal medicine. Her work, which surveys forty-two common plants that she uses in her medical practice, seems at odds with the broader standpoint of the texts I have studied in this chapter, where language about plants and gardens is a battleground, a contestatory site where Kincaid and Senior refuse European modes of knowing. Because she is a member of the Maroon community, a group living in the Blue Mountains with a long history of resistance to outsiders, her publication of a book revealing certain secrets about healing practices is, at first read, perplexing.[90]

[90] Zora Neale Hurston's trip to Jamaica for the ethnographic work she published in *Tell My Horse* speaks to the long history of Maroon isolation from the rest of Jamaica. She writes, "Since they are a self-governing body, I wanted to see how they felt about education, transportation, public health, and democracy." Hurston's text frames them as radically separate from the rest of the world. Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 23.

Harris's text was published much more recently than Kincaid's or Senior's, and it is seemingly invested in a different project. Each plant has its own entry in which Harris lists its common name *and* scientific name. The common name is in large font type, then, below, the scientific categorization in smaller type, and, in the third row, several less popular common names for the species appear in the smallest font. The common names bookend the binomial nomenclature. This diminishes the scientific name's status in the hierarchy of naming. Such a strategy is implicitly subversive because the common name is privileged above the scientific one. After this list, Harris outlines the key ailments that the plant can treat. There is also a color photograph of the plant for easy identification. Many entries include personal anecdotes about how she discovered that the treatments work and how people from the United States and Europe have come for her help. She also discusses how each plant was named and where to find the plant in the wild. The final section in each entry is titled "Preparation," and then lists the "Parts Used" of the plant. Directions for use include dosage size, frequency, and type (bath, tea, etc.). Harris structures each entry in such a way that non-specialists, even outsiders, could find and prepare the plants according to her instructions.

Yet before we ungenerously call Harris a traitor of protected life ways, of spilling the weeds, in other words, she does list three known abortifacients, the same number as Kincaid does. Pennyroyal is the only one she distinctly categorizes as an abortive plant of the three. She writes, "Pregnant women should avoid drinking pennyroyal tea or medicine, as it can cause spontaneous abortion."[91] This is, after all, a book on healing, and some would disagree with Kincaid on the idea that pregnancy is an "ailment" to be cured.[92] Indeed, pennyroyal is also not exclusively an

[91] Harris, *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*, 107.

[92] Kincaid, *My Garden (Book)*:, 138.

abortifacient. Pennyroyal is listed as a plant that can also treat toothaches and insect bites. With lesser-known abortifacients, like *cerasee*, she does not even bring up their potentially abortive side effects.[93] *Cerasee* (*Momordica charantia*) "clear[s] up rashes and ease[s] belly pain."[94] But what about belly pain that is caused by pregnancy? As I discussed in the section of this chapter dedicated to Kincaid, there are many communities of knowledge around plants that produce multiple names and uses for them. *Cerasee*, according to Maroons, may not be considered an abortifacient.

I am not so sure Harris is unaware of the anti-reproductive possibilities in plants beyond the famous pennyroyal. There are two plants that are not explicitly abortifacients, but the caged language about how these drugs promote menstrual flow strategically euphemizes them as non-abortifacients. *Dog Blood* (*Rivina humilis*) offers relief for "women's troubles," specifically menstrual cramps, infertility, and "tardy periods," and *Spanish Needle* (*Bidens cynapiifolia*) regulates menstrual flow.[95] These phrases, as I discuss in chapter one on the debates about enslaved women's use of abortifacients, are common ways of euphemizing abortion or protecting women's knowledge from outside appropriation. With these two entries, Harris is as cryptic as Kincaid can be, even though she uses the Western scientific names for medicinal plants.

Harris's text is inconsistent: it incorporates both roundabout ways of talking about abortion—let us solve "tardy periods" and "regulate" our menstrual flow—and also Kincaid's and Senior's resistant coding around plant uses. I see two possibilities in this inconsistency. Either Harris views

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[93] Pennyroyal's abortive potential is well known to botanists and historians. See McLaren, *History of Contraception* and Riddle, *Eve's Herbs*.

[94] Harris, *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*, 27.

[95] Ibid., 55, 143.

bioprospecting as less of a threat to her community than Kincaid and Senior do, or there could be another impetus for publishing, one that outweighs the potential harm to the community of revealing her knowledge. The first possibility is certainly true. Some entries on specific plants discuss their active agents. In the *Jamaican peppermint* entry, for instance, Harris writes that it contains "carvacrol . . . [which] kills many bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites."[96] Yet this is not from the mouth of a Maroon scientist. She cites a medical source. This is true every time she details the active medical agents in the plant under discussion. Harris does not pretend to be an authority on all botanical knowledge. In fact, this practice of blending her knowledge with that of others demonstrates the incorporation, or at least the coexistence, of herbal and biomedical knowledge and practice. To return to the earlier discussion of the WHO, a strategic mix of both traditional and modern medicine was the original aim of its meeting in 1977. It encouraged the use of traditional medicine in areas where people had less access to expensive health care. WHO practitioners began to experiment for active substances in plants because their initial tests on a wide range of active botanical medical effects were not as successful as hoped. Indeed, the "green revolution (characterized by phytotherapy)—the treatment of illnesses by pharmaceutical preparations based on vegetable drugs," was not easy if just a plant were tested without some clear parameters.[97] Harris performs herbal medicine but gestures toward successful applications in the biomedical world, like when she writes of *Mary Goules* (*Wedelia trilobata*) that "Germany's Commission E has approved . . . [it] for several applications."[98] It would be fair to say that Kincaid and Senior

[96] Ibid., 78.

[97] Vuori, "WHO and Traditional Medicine," 185.

[98] Harris, *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*, 95.

would not do this, since they avoid any mention of possible uses of plants outside of the community in which they live. This is a vital difference between Harris and the two writers. While Kincaid and Senior view outside authority as a threat to the preservation of their community of knowledge, Harris does not.

I would be remiss if I did not address the different publishing venues for these three texts. While Kincaid and Harris publish through literary houses—Farrar, Straus and Giroux and Insomniac Press, respectively—Ah-Ha Press is largely a venue for medical professionals to publish books to "generate streams of passive income."[99] This suggests that Harris wrote *Healing Herbs of Jamaica* within certain constraints and without a necessarily literary goal. In fact, when, in 2015, I contacted her agent to try to schedule an in-person meeting with her on a research trip to Jamaica, the agent emphasized that Harris had scaled back her availability for personal contact with tourists and researchers because she had not anticipated the book becoming quite so popular.[100] Harris's particular venue for *Healing Herbs of Jamaica* necessarily shapes her writing. Yet regardless of the particularities of AhHa Press, it is useful to highlight the differences between Harris's text and Kincaid's and Senior's texts because this discussion gives a fuller picture of the stakes of writing about abortifacient plants in the Caribbean. It is possible that Harris does not view biocolonialism as a threat to medicinal plant healing, but it is also likely that she writes to preserve knowledge. As Yuri Clement writes of the Caribbean region-wide disappearance of herbal practices, "traditional herbal knowledge has . . . been lost due to . . . little intergenerational oral transfer of traditional

[99] AhHa Press, Inc.

[100] Mary Lou, phone conversation with Leah Fry, 5 May 2015.

knowledge." It is also "without adequate documentation."[101] In the introduction to Harris's text, a medical doctor from Florida, Dr. Al Sears, writes that Harris is the sole remaining practitioner in her settlement in the mountains of Jamaica: "Ivey is the last of the Windward Maroon women practicing herbal medicine."[102] Kincaid and Senior, neither of them practitioners, do not insist on a crisis in the disappearance of plant medicinal knowledge that must be rectified by cataloguing it explicitly. Harris, on the contrary, subtitles her book around this issue. The full title of her text reads, "Improve Your Health with the Secrets of a Disappearing Culture: Healing Herbs of Jamaica." Harris is listed as a "7th Generation Maroon Herbalist" who has decided to share her knowledge about her dwindling community's healing practices. She also maintains a web presence via Twitter (@healingherbsivy) and is listed as an important person to see on an ecotourism site, "Port Antonio Rio Grande Valley, Jamaica," which encourages tourists to visit the remote spaces of Jamaica. Guests are encouraged to

> Learn about traditional bush medicine and
> roots tonic. Feast on delectable Maroon
> meals, juices and herbal teas, enjoy relaxing
> herbal 'bush bath' and create (or purchase)
> native Maroon crafts!

[101] Clement, "Herbal Medicine Practices in the Caribbean," 52–61.

[102] Sears, "Introduction," *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*, viii.

The tourism site encourages guests to enjoy Maroon culture in ways that Kincaid's *A Small Place* catalogues as lazy and uncritical white tourism.[103] Indeed, as Dennis J. Gayle writes, "ecotourism is often treated, in practice, as either a fashionable, politically correct diversion . . . or as a potentially lucrative niche market."[104] Let me be clear: most tourists in Kincaid's text are enjoying the broad, sunny beaches of Antigua, and are not interested in the long history of Maroon settlements or in a legacy of slave resistance. But enough tourists are interested in this for the shift in packaging to have an impact. As Polly Pattullo writes on Dominican ecotourism, "the concept that wilderness could be incorporated into the tourism package, that visitors might choose to trek across mountain ranges and through rainforests rather than bake themselves senseless on a beach—changed the island's fate . . . [and] the marketing of the entire region."[105] Furthermore, Kaye Walker and Gianna Moscardo argue that ecotourists' goals for sustainability may even broaden out beyond the region they initially visit, so that there is a radical shift in their perspective created out of ecotourism.[106] Here, then, is the reason behind the advertising of Harris's home as a place to learn and create "native Maroon crafts" and "roots tonic." Harris appeals to a certain type of tourist, one who might actually care

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[103] In Kincaid's 1988 text, tourists in Antigua fail to see many things, of which three are the most dominant: drought, poverty, and pollution. Instead of drought, tourists see a paradise of sunshine; poverty looks like a carefree, laidback lifestyle; pollution is merely pristine blue water. Kincaid, *A Small Place*.

[104] Gayle, "Ecotourism," np.

[105] Pattullo, "Beach, Bush and Beautification, 23–29.

[106] Walker and Moscardo, "Encouraging Sustainability Beyond the Tourist Experience," 1175–96.

about sustaining the environment enough to trek into the Blue Mountains of Jamaica to learn her history.

Harris's web presence on Twitter suggests that this is part of a broader strategy of sharing her knowledge both for the benefit of outsiders who need medical cures and for the preservation of Maroon healing practices. Although she could not necessarily be classed with Kincaid and Senior as anti-biocolonialism, she certainly has a political agenda in her writing about plants. The ecotourist site describes Harris: "She produces her own line of cultural herbal remedies for various ailments, and traditional Maroon crafts in an effort 'to continue 300 year-old Maroon art tradition and to preserve the headwaters of the Rio Grande through sustainable wild harvest production."[107] Harris maximizes on the rising trend of ecotourism, one aspect of which is learning about plants in new places, for the benefit of her community's survival and the survival of the landscape around her. In fact, the tourism site is part of a broader effort to encourage ecotourism in the Portland, Jamaica area. The Portland Ecotourism Art Community Endeavor receives funds from the revenue of tourist visits to initiate and maintain sustainable agricultural practices.

Although it may seem that the WHO's initial aims of uncovering secret medicines comes to fruition through cataloguing her work, it is clear that a form of environmental activism, one that marries historical cultural preservation with broader sustainability goals, has emerged. Harris's book could work to counter biocolonialism's negative effects on the environment by strategically advertising traditional knowledge as part of healing across the globe to certain audiences who may care about the environment enough to visit and learn from her. Harris has packaged herself as an authority that is invested in sharing her community's secret knowledge. She writes in *Healing Herbs*

[107] "Ecotourism."

of Jamaica, "For hundreds of years, this knowledge was passed down from generation to generation. But not any more. Most young people today dream of moving to the city where there are jobs and an easier life . . . . I work to keep Maroon tradition and culture alive by handing down my knowledge of these traditional healing herbs. With this book, I hope to pass on that healing knowledge to future generations of the Maroon people. And to people all over the world."[108] It is hard to argue with Harris's ideas here, even if Kincaid and Senior might offer more secret solutions to preserving Maroon life ways and healing practices.

By bringing Harris into conversation with Kincaid's and Senior's concerns, I share the complexity of what is at stake in this chapter. Biocolonialism around medicinal plants has negative effects on the survival of women's knowledge. Kincaid and Senior imagine how a strategy of not naming medicinal plants according to the rules of binomial nomenclature can prevent the destruction of Caribbean life ways and epistemologies. Their abortive resistance to naming, an attempt at ending the reproduction of biocolonial authority in the Caribbean region, is an important attempt at protecting women's communities from incorporation. Yet Harris's concern for the preservation of her community is equally valid, and her strategy may be the one that ends up helping the Maroon settlement to survive in the Blue Mountains. Indeed, there is hope that revealing certain medicines and encouraging outsider interactions with them may help to end biocolonialism. As changes in international property law have begun to shape the ways that people think about "traditional knowledge," so more people like Harris may be interested in sharing what they know to protect it from disappearing.

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[108] Harris, *Healing Herbs of Jamaica*, 196, 198.

Two recent developments in global health policy suggest the climate has indeed changed since Senior and Kincaid published their garden writing in the 1990s. The WHO Kobe Centre, dedicated to health development, convened a meeting in Awaji, Japan in April 2000 to discuss woman-centered global health issues. "Ms Margaret Lewis," the director of the Ministry of Health of Jamaica, was present at the majority-women conference. Such a sex ratio radically diverges from the one at the 1977 meeting on traditional medicine, where only two women attended. The Awaji Statement, prepared from the consensus of proceedings of a WHO Kobe Centre meeting from 5–7 April 2000, positions the conference as addressing the problem of women gaining access to equal health care. It reads, "We, the participants of the International Meeting on Women and Health: 'Better Health and Welfare Systems: Women's Perspectives' organized by the WHO Kobe Centre, April 2000, call for the integration of women's perspectives into decision-making at all levels and pledge to bring the necessary courage and creativity to our endeavors to advocate and promote well-being and quality of life for women throughout the world."[109] Although this was a measured victory for women globally, it is a step toward including women's perspectives on health issues by default, rather than as an empty, last gesture. The second global meeting, The People and Plants initiative, began in 1992 as "a joint effort of the World Wide Fund for Nature, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew." It works to promote conservation efforts where common important drugs can be found and to promote biodiversity across the globe.[110] Without eliding the destructive history and dangerous

[109] WHO, *Women and Health*.

[110] Martin, "Conservation and Ethnobotanical Exploration," 233.

contemporary threats that Kincaid and Senior attest to, two such global proposals may help to prevent the total disappearance of these medicinal plants and the women who use them.

V. Caribbean Women Speculate on the Future

"replenishing replenishing / Go to your wide futures, you said"

— Grace Nichols

Jamaica's Sistren Theatre Collective's anthology of life stories of Jamaican women, *Lionheart Gal* (1987), begins with a dedication "[t]o the daughters and mothers of all the Caribbean and the vision their struggles will set free."[1] Honor Ford Smith, a poet, scholar, former theater director of Sistren, and the editor of this anthology, argues that *Lionheart Gal* contains within it a "composite woman" formed from the diverse stories of women involved in Sistren. This "woman" possesses the power of everyday resistance to oppression.[2] Ford Smith frames the anthology as a potential tool for women of the Caribbean to learn how similar women's struggles have been overcome. She argues that stories about the women in the anthology "suggest ways of re-inventing the terms of struggle and the strategy itself."[3] *Lionheart Gal*'s stories invariably end with a reflection on how the narrator overcame her struggle, whether she got help from a female friend as she survived on pitiful wages with two children, or became part of Sistren after years of exclusively domestic labor. Despite the diversity of stories in the anthology, a repeating theme emerges in *Lionheart Gal*: unplanned pregnancy. In "Criss Miss," a teenager's grandmother beats her and throws her out of the house, saying, "Call di man who breed yuh, for me no want no bellywoman in here" (Call the

[1] Sistren, *Lionheart Gal*.

[2] Ford-Smith, "Introduction," xv.

[3] Ibid., xv.

man who made you pregnant, for I don't want a pregnant woman in here).[4] "Bellywoman" is not always a negative term; in this case, though, it is used to denigrate this young woman whose dreams of becoming a nurse are dashed because she does not know that sex causes pregnancy.[5] Her grandmother has not told her the essential relationship between sexual intercourse and pregnancy, and the granddaughter's school has not educated her on how to use birth control.

Yet to identify this story as evidence of the grandmother's failure to care for her granddaughter is to fundamentally miss the link between her response and sex education policy in Jamaica. In a failed social welfare system, where women must choose between giving birth and gaining a steady form of employment, pregnancy means decreased educational attainment for young women.[6] These two realms, education and economics, shape the grandmother's response to her granddaughter's pregnancy as a physical blight on the family. The evidence of pregnancy—the granddaughter's belly—must be cast out of the family home. Similarly, in "Country Madda Legacy," a woman narrates her mother's experience of rape and unwanted pregnancy that led to exile from the family: "One day, Icilda send her to buy carrot in a man field. Di man rape her in a hut in di field. She get

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[4] Sistren, "Criss Miss," *Lionheart Gal*, 117. For definitions of "breed" and "bellywoman," see Cassidy and Le Page *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, 38, 68.

[5] Sistren, "Criss Miss," 115.

[6] The Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation conducted a study of young women in Jamaica who gave birth in 1994 and measured the rates of repeat pregnancy for those women who then received sex education from the foundation. Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation Programme for Adolescent Mothers, "Programs that Work to Prevent Subsequent Pregnancy among Adolescent Mothers."

pregnant. Icilda throw her out di house."[7] Icilda, the narrator's grandmother, abandons her daughter when she discovers she is pregnant. In both stories, Sistren highlights the ways in which the family punishes young women's ignorance about preventing pregnancy. Sistren also points out women relatives' role in policing pre-marital sex. Teenage girls who dream of attaining economic security through higher education fail to reach these goals on the timeline their family envisions for them. The abuse they experience is linked to a maternal investment in the daughter as future potential, which is squandered when she becomes pregnant and cannot complete her education.

Sistren's stories posit the daughter as a figure of the future: a promise of a better world. Yet the treatment of daughters who do not conform to the parent's expectations—who become pregnant at a young age—suggests a deeply troubling connection between sexuality and violence. Indeed, Sistren's stories of exile from the family home merely scratch the surface of negative stories about young girls with unwanted pregnancies. Unplanned pregnancy is a frequent event in Caribbean women's literature. It is a story that traverses national boundaries, affecting women across the region. This should come as no surprise; education policy, law, religion, and economics determine youth access to contraceptives. Countries with limited sexual education in schools report high rates of unplanned pregnancy, and, as I discussed in the introduction to this project, Caribbean nations in particular inherited the abortion laws of their former imperial rulers.[8] Countries of the British

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[7] Sistren, "Country Madda Legacy," *Lionheart Gal*, 62.

[8] Colin Francome discusses the correlation between sex education and rates of unplanned pregnancy in a recent global study. Francome, *Unsafe Abortion*, 133, 197. For information on the limited sexual education young women receive in schools in the Caribbean, see Holness, "A Global Perspective on Adolescent Pregnancy."

Commonwealth operate under the 1938 *Rex v. Bourne* case, in which a physician was acquitted for performing an abortion on a fourteen-year-old because her pregnancy was the result of rape.[9] Changes to this almost eighty-year-old law have yet to be implemented across the region. Education, law, religion, and economics work together to produce ignorance about how to prevent pregnancy—and to make it more difficult for women to gain access to abortions when they become pregnant. Coalitions have formed in the last four decades to address lack of access to information about birth control and to redress outdated and conservative bans on abortion, yet these networks rely on many actors working together across the public and private sectors.[10] The effectiveness of these groups remains uncertain as conservative movements, like Jamaican's Coalition for the Defense of Life, mobilize to undo the work of several decades of women's activism.[11] Because unplanned pregnancy is such a concern for young girls and women of the region, it fundamentally shapes the kinds of stories that women tell about their reproductive lives.

In this chapter, I look at two major novels in the last two decades of Caribbean women's literature in which unplanned pregnancies end in birth—and where the decision to give birth is heavily mediated by lack of access to abortion services. Furthermore, as is the case in the Sistren stories I just discussed, family members abuse the daughters in these two novels. These two issues

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[9] Maxwell, "Fighting a Losing Battle," 99.

[10] The Jamaica Youth Program began in 1994 to address a wide range of issues concerning children and teenagers in the country. It does not specifically address sex education in schools. See the National Centre for Youth Development's recent report, "National Youth Policy."

[11] Shakira Maxwell writes that the Coalition for the Defense of Life's arguments against abortion are premised on "moral and religious grounds." See Maxwell, "Fighting a Losing Battle,"108.

are interrelated and complicated terrain for any literary scholar to discuss adequately. I do not read the case studies contained in this chapter as a totalizing reflection of the state of women's reproductive lives in the Caribbean. Rather, I see these literary texts as important contributions to a more complex understanding of reproductive rights in the region and the many factors that determine a woman's decision to abort a fetus or not. As Gloria Thomas Pillow writes in her study of the maternal psyche in African American women's literature, stories that involve maternal violence and abuse call "not only the individual, but society at large as well into accountability by illuminating the hegemony of social dysfunction by which racial and gender relations are driven."[12] Literature is a collective art form which involves writers and readers. Thus, I mention Pillow's reminder of the intersection of race and gender within particular social formations because it informs my understanding of the ways in which representations of parental abuse of daughters are themselves shaped by social inequity. In this project, I have so far explored the many symbolic roles of herbal abortions in Caribbean women's literature. In this chapter, I look more closely at what happens when these methods fail, where failure can mean many things. First, as I write above, formal education about preventing pregnancy may be lacking. As the stories I examined in chapters one through three suggested, older women usually share herbal methods of pregnancy prevention and abortion with young women. But in this chapter, teenage girls do not know what herbs to use to induce abortion. This is a failure of transmission, a communication gap in which girls do not learn how to use herbal methods of abortion. It is, in other words, a failed inheritance.

If the chapters of this dissertation suggest one overarching concept, it is that access to herbal methods of abortion ultimately depends upon the strength of women's relationships with one

[12] Pillow, *Motherlove in Shades of Black*, 6.

another. Caribbean stories about parental abuse of daughters are quite difficult to read and analyze, especially because parents who hurt their daughters are themselves shaped by sexist state policies that limit women's health, educational, and economic chances. This reality is a key hermeneutic—and an essential acknowledgment—in my reading of the failure of herbal abortions in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000). Abortions become possible within the home space, but familial hurt can, in turn, make them impossible.

As Danticat's and Hopkinson's novels illustrate, parents can and do sexually and physically abuse their daughters. But if daughters promise a better future for Caribbean women, as *Lionheart Gal*'s epigraph suggests, why would their parents abuse them? *Breath, Eyes, Memory* grapples with this issue through the figure of the mother and her two unwanted fetuses. Martine, the mother of Sophie Caco, the novel's narrator, tries to have two abortions in her lifetime. Her second attempted abortion ends in her death. She stabs herself in the stomach seventeen times to rid herself of an unwanted fetus, causing both of their deaths.[13] Her abortion-suicide has been foreshadowed throughout the novel; in fact, she did not want to give birth to Sophie. Martine tells her, "When I was pregnant with you, *Manman* made me drink all kinds of herbs, vervain, quinine, and verbena, baby poisons. I tried beating my stomach with wooden spoons. I tried to destroy you, but you wouldn't go away."[14] When she is a teenager, herbal methods of abortion do not work—vervain, quinine, and verbena—so Sophie is born. Later, as an adult, Martine is turned away from an abortion clinic in New York City. This second time, a knife serves her desperate purpose.

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[13] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 224.

[14] Ibid., 190.

I read Martine's abortion at the end of the novel within the context of Haiti's political history, US abortion law, and, most importantly, Martine's familial relationships. Women's stories about pregnancy and abortion in the Caribbean region invariably involve the family and its relationship to sexist policies and practices. Mothers determine what their daughters learn about birth control, mothers punish their daughters for getting pregnant, and mothers, sometimes, provide their daughters with knowledge about how to drink bush teas to abort fetuses. Mothers become ideological extensions of the state: they police norms of reproductive citizenship, which, as Mimi Sheller argues, involves "state policies, welfare systems, and legal systems [that] have all served to constitute a heteronormative national citizenship" in which women's value as citizens depends on their reproduction.[15] Abortion is a familial affair, in part because reproduction impacts not just the mother of a child but also her most intimate relationships.

Martine's desperate abortion is clearly not a viable option for women. Throughout this project, I have been considering the role of literary representations of abortion. Abortions in literature help women to imagine possible solutions to social and economic inequities, to play with impossibilities to create theoretical dialogue, to communicate across geographic and historical boundaries about common practices of resistance to domination, and to re-create the past to uncover lost subjectivities. Literary representations of abortion are politically and emotionally charged, and they do real work in the world. They respond to material realities for women, and they contribute to ongoing conversations among activist circles. Likewise, graphic representations of violence, sexual abuse, and unwanted pregnancy must also do something for women of the Caribbean. In the framework of Danticat's novel, Martine's suicide is a tragedy. But Sophie's own reproductive

[15] Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 245.

choices offer a possible response for women who have lived through political violence and familial abuse. Sophie's past does not prevent her from giving birth to a daughter, Brigitte. Similarly, in Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, a young teenage girl decides to keep her fetus despite the fact that it is a result of her father's incestuous rape. Why would these daughters give birth willingly? I have already explored the relationship between family and abortion in chapter three of this project, which looked at contemporary Caribbean women's fiction that represented Carib women aborting as an alternative to perpetuating cycles of violence, racism, and indigenous exclusion within the postcolonial Caribbean project. This chapter argues that choosing *not* to have an abortion can be *as* politically and socially productive as having one. Black feminist scholar and activist Loretta J. Ross writes, "Abortion, in and of itself, does not automatically create freedom." It must be part of a program for change in women's material, social, and personal lives—an upheaval in the patriarchal fabric of society that demands that women police their sexuality and that of their daughters.[16] This hope for change is at the core of Danticat's and Hopkinson's literary imaginations, for if Martine had not unwillingly given birth to Sophie, the story of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* would never have been told. Sophie is the narrator of the events, so she is fundamental to the story's expression. Similarly, Hopkinson creates a frame narrative for *Midnight Robber*, in which an *eshu*, a guiding spirit in Caribbean folklore, shares Tan-Tan's story with her son, Tubman.[17] Reproduction is thus inherently connected to storytelling. Danticat and Hopkinson revise our understanding of reproduction in the region by imagining a Caribbean future where birth can be understood as a political choice, a source of storytelling, and an affirmation of hope.

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[16] Ross, "African American Women and Abortion," 144.

[17] Lalla, "The Facetiness Factor," 235.

Indeed, in both texts, the fetus that grows out of familial violence bears the promise of a better world. Giving birth is a potential form of healing from the sexual abuses of the past. The moment of childbirth in myth and story most often, according to Carl Jung, marks the gateway to the future. Jung writes, "The child is potential future."[18] Within the context of contemporary Caribbean women's literature, it is tied, as Caroline Rody argues, to "contact with historical origins" while simultaneously affirming "the possibility of genealogical and literary inheritance."[19] This suggests that Caribbean women's decisions to have an abortion or to give birth play dual roles: women must grapple with the past *and* the future simultaneously. This past, as I discuss in the pages that follow, is deeply imbricated in medical experimentation on women's bodies in the region. The choice to give birth, as it is framed in both novels I study in this chapter, marks a gateway, a point where women who have suffered and "struggled" (in the words of Ford Smith) can envision a better future.

Following the vision of Sistren Theatre Collective and M. Jacqui Alexander, I explore the ways in which these stories about daughters offer up an "emancipatory praxis" that liberates children from the burden of the past and the "power of heterosexual lore" (i.e., do not have sexual relations before marriage, and you will be cast out of the home if you become pregnant before you are married).[20] This praxis, as we see it emerge in Danticat's and Hopkinson's novels, offers women a range of responses to exploitation and suffering that do not demand abortion, but that open up a realm of possibilities that includes abortion. Such a praxis revolves around the imaginative space that literature creates, which "might explode mothers' inherited discomfort with the emerging, restless

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[18] Qtd. in Segal, *Theorizing about Myth*, 84.

[19] Rody, *The Daughter's Return*, 6.

[20] Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization," 99.

sexuality of their own daughters" by dismantling the patriarchal logic of purity and state-sanctioned violence against daughters.[21] These stories imagine emancipation for Caribbean women not as a refusal to give birth to and thus perpetuate patriarchal violence; instead, freedom can mean embracing a new reality for Caribbean women that may help them, in the words of Sistren, set their struggles free.

A. Caribbean Women's Speculative Fiction about Biomedical Nightmares

Caribbean women's literature commonly takes up motherhood as an issue, as I discussed in my introduction to the project.[22] When women grapple with motherhood in literature, they enter a difficult terrain of contemporary Caribbean politics and culture: a history of misogynistic constructions of the nation as a nurturing mother, anti-gay laws directed at policing non-reproductive citizens, and strict measures preventing women from aborting pregnancies. Yet despite or because of these complications, Caribbean women's literature manifests "a symbolic matrifocality," a central motherhood trope that continues to resonate into the present.[23] Sometimes motherhood emerges as something more than symbolic: it becomes a politically charged choice, and, in the case of Danticat's and Hopkinson's novels, an affirmation of hope. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *Midnight Robber* are fundamentally about the future as it is carried within two successive generations: that of

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[21] Ibid, 99.

[22] Nadège T. Clitandre emphasizes the popularity of Danticat's novel within African American and Caribbean women's literature. Clitandre, "Mapping the Echo Chamber," 176.

[23] Rody, *The Daughter's Return*, 6.

Sophie and Tan-Tan, and their children, Brigitte and Tubman. The two potential mothers speculate on the possible future for their children. This "speculation" suggests that in both metaphorical and literal ways, both novels participate in the genre of *speculative fiction*, a term that encapsulates "sci-fi, fantasy, fable, magic realism, and horror."[24] For her part, Hopkinson argues that she writes speculative fiction because "[t]he general message that I got from . . . [mimetic fiction] was 'life sucks, sometimes it's not too bad, but mostly people are mean to each other, then they die.'"[25] Hopkinson's humor exaggerates the mimesis of non-speculative fiction, yet her take on mimetic fiction raises questions about the role of the "test" and Martine's abortion-suicide in Danticat's novel: Does Danticat imagine an extravagantly bleak future for women who have suffered during the Duvalier regime, and who cannot escape their memories of that time without dying? Or does Danticat write in a quasi-speculative mode, in which the test and Martine's death represent theoretical possibilities but not realities as such?

When Danticat's novel appeared in 1994, she told the *New York Times* that "there is a great deal of rage toward the book" among the Haitian-American women's population. She received letters from readers who were "ashamed of things like testing . . . and some, raised in cities . . . [were] shocked to learn that it exists."[26] The Caco women monitor their daughters' sexual activities using the "test." The mother inserts a finger into her daughter's vagina to feel if her hymen is intact, as though the hymen is material proof of her virginity. Anthropologist Karl Kaser argues that any

[24] Nelson, "Making the Impossible Possible," 98.

[25] Ibid., 98.

[26] Quoted in Pierre-Pierre, "At Home with Edwidge Danticat."

rituals that seek to preserve the intact hymen are proof of the "continuity of patriarchy."[27] The Caco women thus reproduce the belief that virginity is both physically verifiable as well as important to familial and societal health and survival.[28] This policing tradition has been handed down through generations of mothers as part of a ritual of purity, which operates according to the patriarchal logic that Haitian young women must be virgins before marriage or they will be valueless to their husbands.[29] Danticat's novel imagines an extreme form of ritual abuse among women, but one that is deeply interwoven with postcolonial male dominance in Haiti.

Indeed, the test in Danticat's novel is only possible in a society that prohibits abortion and places the burden of policing premarital sex on mother's shoulders. Haiti's legal paradigm does not accommodate women who have unwanted and unplanned pregnancies (i.e., the so-called consequences of premarital sex and a lack of sexual "purity"). Abortion is illegal in Haiti under Article 262 of Haiti's Criminal Code from 1835, in which any woman who participates in an abortion (whether by administering a drug to a woman or by undergoing an abortion herself) is imprisoned. Only recently have certain islands of the Caribbean, most notably Barbados, made significant inroads in ensuring women's access to abortion services.[30] Danticat arguably exaggerates the test's material reality to expose the persistent link between law and a patriarchal understanding of women's role as reproductive citizens.

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[27] Kaser, *Patriarchy after Patriarchy*, 231.

[28] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 84.

[29] Ibid., 60.

[30] Miller and Parris, "Capturing the Moment," 40.

Scholars, meanwhile, have argued that the test plays a symbolic role in the novel and does not have clear ties to Haitian material practices. Claire Counihan claims that the test is a site of memory (*lieu du mémoire*) that links Haitian-American women to a traumatic generational continuity.[31] Along these lines, Donette A. Francis frames the test as part of Haitian folklore, which is undergirded by "misogynistic cultural practices."[32] Francis's critique is one I will return to later in the chapter, yet here it offers a way of understanding the test as a fiction. The general audience's and scholar's interest in verifying the reality of the test, as well as the outraged responses to it, stem from a similar impulse that ignores the potential of fiction to exaggerate in order to push the limits of our understanding, to grapple with uncomfortable topics like child abuse, sexual violence, and suicide. In this way, both Danticat's and Hopkinson's representations of extreme violence against children must be seen as, ultimately, stories about how daughters can imagine a better world that is born out of the traumatic inheritance of their family's pasts.

In a 2002 interview, Hopkinson argues that she writes speculative fiction because the genre imagines worlds "in which standards are different. Or I can blatantly show what values the characters in the story are trying to live out by making them actual, by exaggerating them into the realm of the fantastical, so that the consequences conversely become so real that they are tangible."[33] This definition of speculative fiction, especially its emphasis on the paradoxical relationship between exaggeration and tangibility, resonates with the outraged responses to Danticat's novel. In fact, the most graphic moment in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* hinges on this

[31] Counihan, "Desiring Diaspora," 37.

[32] Francis, "Silences Too Horrific to Disturb," 77.

[33] Quoted in Nelson, "Making the Impossible Possible," 101.

marriage of exaggeration and gory detail. Sophie rejects her mother's testing: "My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet."[34] Sophie grabs the pestle that her mother uses to grind up spices and forces it into her vagina to stretch out her hymen and simulate the texture and appearance that her vagina might take on (the test's logic assumes) if she had sex with a man. Is this mimetic fiction, or is it speculative (horror) fiction?

By exploring the similarities between Danticat's and Hopkinson's writings, I am by no means suggesting that mimetic fiction is always inherently distinct from speculative fiction. Instead, the tension between them in Danticat's work illustrates that the two genres blend together, especially in the Caribbean canon. The proliferation of stories about female children suggests that Caribbean women writers are particularly interested in women's future in the region. We have, then, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *Midnight Robber*, a "remix" of two repeating concerns in Caribbean women's literature: the child and the future. My term, *remix*, is tied to Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s argument about the blues aesthetic in African American literature as "a synthesis. . . . always becoming, shaping, transforming."[35] Baker, Jr.'s vision of the amalgam of African American literature shapes my understanding of the ways in which two genres might mix and "shape" and "transform" two repeating concepts in the Caribbean women's canon. Canonical novels that center on children, like Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey!* (1970) and Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), neither openly speculate on technological exploitation of women's bodies as part of Caribbean patriarchal dictatorships, nor vividly imagine on the same scale the possible means of liberation from these structures. I am therefore arguing that the two novels I study in this chapter

[34] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 88.

[35] Baker, "Belief, Theory, and Blues," 231.

offer a spin on traditional concerns of Caribbean women writers by mixing two genres: speculative fiction and mimetic fiction.

Hopkinson argues that genre mixing is a specialty of Caribbean writers because the Caribbean is the place where creolization emerged as a theoretical paradigm.[36] As I discussed in chapter two, creolization has been extensively theorized by Caribbean scholars and artists as a process of acculturation to a new environment.[37] Creolization is a contemporary reclamation of a brutal process of acclimating enslaved African people to the plantation model. Scholars and artists thus argue that mixing forms—of genre, of language—is the foundation of the Caribbean literary canon. Yet it is also useful to consider how genre mixing is part of a broader phenomenon within the African diaspora. As Paul Gilroy claims, the Caribbean shares cultural currents with African diasporic spaces like the United States and Britain because it is positioned along the same waterways that historically linked diasporic African people together in the Atlantic slave trade. Cultural forms mix and traverse geographical boundaries to this day.[38] Following Gilroy, African American women's writing like Toni Morrison's 1987 *Beloved* and Octavia Butler's 1979 *Kindred* fuse fantastic elements with the neo-slave narrative. This suggests that genre blending is a common enterprise across the two canons. African American and Caribbean women writers also share concerns about reproduction and the future. Caribbean literature is therefore well suited to genre mixing, which is also a feature of African American women's literature. Across these two canons, something unique emerges out of the place where genres mix: a unique voice and perspective on, in Danticat's and

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[36] Quoted in Nelson, "Making the Impossible Possible," 99.

[37] See Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica."

[38] Gilroy, "Route Work," 18.

Hopkinson's novels, speculative fiction as a genre and the role of Caribbean women's particularly traumatic past. These commonalities help us understand the ways in which these two novels explore storytelling and the legacy of the past.

I read Hopkinson's and Danticat's work within this a broader context because they both write about technologies that impact women's reproductive decisions. These are concerns that arise in *Afro-futurism*, a literary aesthetic that, in studies of African American literature, often replaces the term *speculative fiction*. Both terms offer important theoretical paradigms to this chapter. I understand *Afro-futurism* as a specific form of speculative fiction with a political or social justice mission, in which genres and artistic and other cultural forms mix across African diasporic spaces. Mark Dery coined the term in 1993 as a way of understanding a particular wave of black science fiction writing that took off with Samuel R. Delany's and Octavia Butler's pioneering work. According to Dery, *Afro-futurism* is fundamentally about historical and contemporary experiences of exploitation: black writers "inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind."[39] This list suggests hundreds of years of bodily exploitation, ranging from the branding that was common to Atlantic slavery and the Tuskegee experiments on black men and forced sterilization of black women in the middle of the twentieth century, to the contemporary problem of police brutality ("tasers"). The term *Afro-futurism* highlights the unique ways in which black writers imagine the impact of historical and present experiences of structural oppression on the future.

[39] Dery, "Black to the Future," 736.

The Caribbean shares many of the same general concerns of US-based Afro-futurism, yet the Caribbean women's canon testifies to particular concerns about how women in the region have been uniquely subject to technologies that exploit their reproduction. Since the late 1970s, women writers, scholars, and activists have mobilized against the exploitation of their bodies in the biomedical pursuit of reproductive technologies. As Mimi Sheller writes, "experimentation with population control and birth-control methods in the United States is deeply rooted in the Caribbean."[40] These roots proved hard to dismantle precisely because the Caribbean has historically been one of the laboratories of Western science. Chapter three of this project explored the origins of natural history in the region and argued that contemporary biomedicine reproduces ideologies about exploitable knowledge. Biomedicine, the dominant paradigm of the late twentieth century that emerged within the Cold War arms and science race, "is embedded [within] and sustains dominant political and economic systems."[41] Because many Caribbean nations remain indebted to European powers in the form of structural adjustment plans, they have struggled to break free from the cycle of biomedical and economic exploitation of their bodies and nations.[42] *Structural adjustment* is an economic term for the late 1970s Euro-American loans to former Caribbean and African colonies to bolster their faltering economies during the global recession. Caribbean leaders like Jamaica's Prime Minister, Michael Manley, felt compelled to accept the terms of the debt relief programs. As dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson summarizes, Manley's democratic socialism and diplomatic friendliness to neighboring Cuba did not help Jamaica's debt

[40] Sheller, *Citizenship from Below*, 256.

[41] Rhodes, "Studying Biomedicine as a Cultural System," 166.

[42] See Massiah, "Feminist Scholarship and Society," 48.

problems within the international economy, so that "[i]n the end the Manley government had to go back to the IMF cap in hand for a loan and Jamaica has been swallowing the IMF medicine ever since."[43] Johnson points out the continuing role of debt within the Jamaican economy. Yet one crucial dimension of structural adjustment plans is missing from his analysis of the late 1970s economic recession's impact on Jamaican lives.

Feminist critiques of structural adjustment in the Caribbean region argue that women suffered the most from the debt plans. In one of its historical plays, *Ida Revolt inna Jonkonnu Stylee* (1985), Sistren Theatre Collective argues that women feel the impact of economic suffering most. Sistren reimagines the 1938 Frome estate revolt in Jamaica, led by a woman named Ida, a sugar plantation worker. The play, staged in a series of open amphitheatres throughout Jamaica as part of the Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange, argued that the same material conditions that led women to strike in 1938 also existed in 1985: low wages, long hours, no upward mobility, and little state support for working mothers.[44] The women on stage chant in chorus, "Ida mek a crick crack in de wall of oppression / . . . Her story is no mystery / Is my story and your story."[45] The final line of the chant establishes a chain of connection stretching back fifty years. Sistren's play is particularly valuable for its understanding of the unique experience of Caribbean women as laborers. While it is true, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes, that "capitalism utilizes the raced and sexed bodies of women in its search for profit globally,"[46] it is also important to note that capitalism manifests itself in

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[43] Johnson, "Jamaica Uncovered."

[44] See Smith, "Re/Telling History."

[45] Sistren Theatre Collective, *Ida Revolt inna Jonkonnu Stylee*, 3.

[46] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," 383.

different forms across the globe. The play's setting connects the 1980s audience with Jamaica's sugar plantation past as a vital part of the contemporary story about neocolonial exploitation of women's bodies.

Sistren's 1985 play critiques structural adjustment plans while at the same time demonstrating their impact on Jamaican cultural production, especially representations of the island's labor history. *Ida Revolt inna Jonkonnu Stylee* also points out the particular force of Caribbean women's revolt: the 1938 Frome estate revolt was part of a wave of uprisings on sugar plantations across the British Commonwealth. These bursts of protest helped shape the independence movements and parties of the region.[47] In sum, Sistren underlines the vital role women play in mobilizing against economic exploitation. But, as I am arguing in this chapter, economic exploitation is inextricably tied to technological exploitation. Caribbean women write about the technological exploitation of their bodies to shed light on how the debt economy made women particularly vulnerable to biomedical experimentation in the late twentieth century.

Two examples, one from the late 1970s and the other from 2015, help situate Danticat's and Hopkinson's novels within a decades-long history of women writing about a Caribbean space in which "testing" is possible. Michelle Cliff, the Jamaican-American feminist writer discussed in chapter one of this project, examines the impact of biomedical experimentation on nonwhite women's bodies in the late twentieth century in a short prose poem, "Against Granite," which was first published in the "Third World Women" issue of *HERESIES: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* in 1979. *HERESIES* was published by the New York City-based Heresies Collective from 1977 to 1993. The journal was a suitable venue for writers like Cliff who produce mixed-

[47] See Fanon, "Are We Seeing the Birth of a Nation in the West Indies," 344–346.

genre, feminist protest pieces. In "Against Granite," Cliff positions exploited women in the center of an imagined communal space, while

> Around the periphery are those who would
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> enforce silence:
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> slicers/suturers/invaders/abusers/sterilizers/infibulators/castrators/dividers/
>
> enclose rs—traditional technicians/technicians of tradition.[48]

Cliff's poem equates silence with medical practices or "techniques" that are used on women's bodies. The "tradition" Cliff speaks of is the medical profession's trade and its dependence on disempowering women as both patients and providers of medical care. The next lines of Cliff's poem make this sinister tradition clear by playing on the double meaning of the language of medical care: "The providers of Depo-Provera" are also the "deprivers of women's lives."[49] Cliff's accusation here is part of a broader critique that was mobilized against reproductive technology experimentation in the Caribbean. Two drugs, Depo-Provera and Norplant, were promoted in the Caribbean as successful birth control drugs that, unlike the hormonal birth control pill, were easily administered and lasted for an extended period of time. Depo-Provera is an injectable form of birth control, while Norplant is a hormonal implant. Depo-Provera was largely tested on Puerto Rican women, while Norplant underwent trials in the Bahamas and Haiti.[50] Before these drugs were released on the global market, they were tested on Caribbean women. In the case of both drug trials, experimentation on women's bodies served the interests of biomedicine. The late 1970s and

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[48] Cliff, "Against Granite," 50.

[49] Cliff, "Against Granite," 50.

[50] See Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 108; Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 171.

early 1980s were clearly a hotbed for this sort of feminist critique, as, not three years after Cliff published her poem in *HERESIES*, Angela Davis critiqued the Depo-Provera studies in Puerto Rico and the US South. Davis, a US-based black feminist writer, scholar, and activist, cited the 1973 case of the Relf sisters (in which two teenage girls were sterilized after doctors discovered a link between cancer and Depo-Provera) as evidence of wide-ranging abuse of nonwhite, poor women's bodies for medical knowledge.[51] Likewise, Caribbean DAWN (Development Alternatives for Women Network) mobilized against Norplant tests, arguing that the medical establishment and the Bahaman state had conspired to forfeit women's agency (i.e., their right to determine the size of their families) for economic gain.[52] Both drugs caused dangerous or uncomfortable side effects for women—women reported "severe migraines, dizziness, nausea, high blood pressure, hair loss, and in some cases continuous hemorrhaging for an entire month"[53]—yet the drugs were prescribed and promoted as effective birth control technologies.

Women in Caribbean countries were subject to birth control drug tests because they were viewed as an exploitable resource and a population in need of birth control. As US neocolonial interests expanded in the region, racist assumptions about black women's reproduction—that black women have too many children, that black women thus cannot support their children, that black women must be stopped from having children if they are deemed "unfit"—informed a surge in

[51] Davis, "Racism," 216.

[52] Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization," 72.

[53] Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 172.

biomedical experimentation there.[54] Neocolonialism reproduces the colonial attitudes and power structures of the British colonizers, who had just in the previous two decades been removed from *de jure* power on the islands.[55] Cliff's poem therefore connects neocolonialism to experimentation on women's bodies. Those who "provide" drugs to a population that the white supremacist ideology deems unfit for reproduction must also "deprive" women of *reproductive liberty*.[56] Dorothy R. Roberts defines *reproductive liberty* as a fuller understanding of women's range of reproductive decisions than the term *reproductive choice*. Roberts argues that the latter term is steeped in white, middle-class assumptions about reproduction.[57] *Reproductive liberty* refers to the "full range of procreative activities, including the ability to bear a child" that must be understood within a social context, "including inequalities of wealth and power."[58] Just as, following Gloria Thomas Pillow, parental abuse of daughters must be understood within a social context, so too must we read and understand reproduction. Cliff's "Against Granite" places women in opposition to neocolonial forces that deprive women of reproductive liberty. Within the specific argument of the poem, Cliff refers to mandatory prescriptions of Depo-Provera to certain women in the Caribbean (those who had been

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[54] See Dorothy R. Roberts's incisive critique of late twentieth century US state and global policies around black women's bodies and reproduction. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 5.

[55] Antigua was one of the last islands to be granted freedom from British rule (in 1981). Jamaica Kincaid addresses this in *A Small Place*.

[56] Cliff, "Against Granite," 50.

[57] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 6.

[58] Ibid., 6.

labeled for reproductive regulation) who would no longer have the ability to choose when and if they had children.[59]

A second, much more recent example illustrates biomedicine's persistent reproduction of the categories of "desirable" and "undesirable" citizens. In a November 2015 issue of the *New Yorker*, poet and scholar Loretta Collins Klobah describes a "tissue gallery" for dead fetuses of Puerto Rican women. She visits a medical laboratory in a Puerto Rican medical school that is "sequestered from public view" and filled with stillborn and aborted fetuses.[60] Klobah enters the room, ushered in by a doctor who "loves the arts" and wants to show her an exhibit of "human tissue."[61] He does not warn her that "human tissue" means fetuses in jars, and he appears to delight in withholding this information from her. The doctor describes the tissue in jars as "*not-fish,*" "golem," "quelque chose," and "casualities"—all terms that distance us from the human reality of the fetus. These are castaways contained in jars, left over from the abortions and miscarriages of Puerto Rican women.

Klobah's poem reveals the uneasy legacy of biomedical reproductive technologies in US-dominated spaces. Puerto Rico, an island that is wedged between the Dominican Republic and the United States and British Virgin Islands, has been a US territory since the US victory in the Spanish-Cuban-American war of 1898. People born within the territory are considered citizens of the United States, but they possess no constitutional right to vote for legislative representation in

[59] See Davis, "Racism," 220.

[60] Klobah, "Tissue Gallery," line 3.

[61] Ibid.

Congress or the US presidency.[62] The geopolitical terrain of this "tissue gallery" is thus deeply interwoven with US imperialism and its attending hopes and fears about its territories. Klobah's identification of these dead fetuses as non-human castaways in a secret biomedical laboratory in Puerto Rico is thus inseparable from the ways in which the women who produce these fetuses are themselves not considered full citizens of the United States. Their inability or unwillingness to bring fetuses to term mirrors the state's refusal to recognize them as fully American.

Furthermore, the dismissive language of the doctor highlights white supremacist attitudes toward nonwhite women's bodies. Although it is limited to a US context, Davis's history of the birth control movement in the twentieth century illustrates the link between white supremacy and the exploitation of nonwhite women's bodies. She uncovers the insidious connection between the eugenics and birth control movements, arguing that the white-led birth control movement advocated for the involuntary sterilization of nonwhite and poor women.[63] The late twentieth-century drug trials of Depo-Provera and Norplant proved that nonwhite women's reproduction was still imbricated in white supremacist

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[62] For information on the 1952 ruling that established Puerto Ricans born after 1899 as citizens of the US, see Cornell University Law School's Legal Information Institute page on 8 US Code 1402. "8 U.S. Code § 1402 - Persons born in Puerto Rico on or after April 11, 1899," *Legal Information Institute*, www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1402 (accessed 26 March 2016). The right to vote in presidential elections remains a contested ground. Inhabitants of US territories like Puerto Rico do not have the right to vote for federal representation at the congressional or presidential level because they are not legally states within the US. See Bustos, "Puerto Ricans in 2016."

[63] Davis, "Racism," 203.

notions of the nation. What is more, these women were not considered full citizens to begin with (in the case of women living in Puerto Rico), or they belonged to recently decolonized nations that were seeking to forge new relationships within the global economy. We see this play out in Klobah's poem when the doctor refers to the fetuses in jars as "golems" or "quelque chose." He clearly does not identify them as human remains, instead demeaning and valuing nonwhite women as less than "human." This logic suggests that he opens up the laboratory to Klobah to show off his collection. The fetuses are thus eligible for consumption and study by the privileged few *because* they are the reproductive remains of nonwhite women. When she returns to her home later that day, Klobah acknowledges that her entry into the gallery was an exclusive event. Klobah writes, "I was told that I cannot tell you the names. / It is a secret."[64] The secret, however, is much bigger than just the names of the fetuses. Not all of the women consented to or are even aware of the preservation of the fetal tissue in jars: They "do not know that these small ones are still here curled in their womb poses."[65] The fetuses that grew inside of them live on, secretly, in the biomedical community, which constructs fetal tissue as an object of observation and experimentation that can be collected and preserved without the consent of Puerto Rican women.[66] Klobah's poem is a timely reminder of the continuity of ideologies that demean nonwhite women, police their reproduction, and profit off of their fetal remains.

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[64] Klobah, "Tissue Gallery."

[65] Ibid.

[66] Donna Haraway discusses the ways in which modern science constructs women as objects of observation and experimentation by linking the experiences and representations of women subjects in medical studies to those of female primates. See Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 2.

Klobah also reminds us that biomedical language—and its fundamental connection to discourses of US neocolonial power—maintains a particular vision of Caribbean women's reproduction. The Caribbean, which had long been exploited for its material resources, became a space where overpopulation could be "solved" with biomedical enterprise. Under this logic, a surge in scientific growth fed the post-1970s neoliberal economic paradigm, which in turn would (via trickle-down economics) compensate the victims of biomedical experimentation. Neocolonialism and neoliberalism are intimately linked structures of power, bound together by international corporations and conglomerates that extend former colonial powers' reach to postcolonial nations across the globe. This of course depended on the idea that, if neoliberal economics thrives on the unrestrained and unending accumulation of wealth, monetary compensation would inevitably end up in the poorest people's hands.[67] Melinda Cooper incisively critiques this argument in *Life as Surplus*, claiming that biomedicine and neoliberalism are fundamentally linked, codependent, and coercive: both thrive on the representation of their effects as universally positive and hopeful, but benefit from the disenfranchisement of certain bodies, both animal and human, through medical experimentation and economic exploitation.[68] The post-decolonization medical exploitation of Caribbean women is particularly chilling for the way in which, as Mimi Sheller argues, women "have literally had their blood sucked and their bodies cut up 'for science'" in a way that reproduces the power structures of slavery, where human bodies were disposable and gained currency solely for their biological

[67] Rajan, *Biocapital*, 3.

[68] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 19.

value as workers and reproducers.[69] The logic of biomedical experimentation thus depends on the continued abuse of women's bodies.

It also rather chillingly relies on the reproduction of disenfranchised political subjects. We see this in Danticat's novel when Martine kills herself following a mandatory twenty-four hour waiting period for abortions. She tells Sophie, "I tried to get rid of it, today. But they wanted me to think about it for twenty-four hours. When I thought of taking it out, it got more horrifying. That's when I began seeing him. Over and over. That man who raped me."[70] The New York doctor's demand that she wait to have the abortion causes traumatic flashbacks of her rape: she is asked to "think about it," and her past experience of coercive reproduction surfaces. Such waiting periods are familiar strategies of state intervention in women's reproductive decisions after the US Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. As Olga Khazan writes in a 2015 issue of the *Atlantic*, "Proponents of these measures say they are simply injecting more time into the process so that women can fully consider their choices." As if women who come to abortion clinics have not already given such decisions much thought![71] Mandatory waiting periods demand that the poorest women reproduce poor children, suggesting that the state profits off of a robust exploitable reserve population. Mandatory waiting periods in the United States disproportionately affect poor, immigrant women like Martine. In a response to Florida's recent mandatory waiting period bill, Jessica González-Rojas, executive director of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, argued that waiting periods "would have a disproportionately negative impact on Latinas, immigrant

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[69] Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 171.

[70] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 199.

[71] Khazan, "Waiting Periods and the Rising Price of Abortion."

women, young women, and women of color across the state, who already struggle to get the care they need."[72] Martine's experience at the abortion clinic points to this failure of reproductive justice, but it also raises questions about the symbolic weight of *waiting* for reproductive care. Martine stabs herself in the stomach because she cannot bear to wait any longer to be rid of the unwanted fetus growing inside her.

This comparison of these two poems, one from 1979 and one from 2015, highlights a particular post-decolonization paradigm in the Caribbean in which women's reproductive decisions are policed. Caribbean women have been waiting for reproductive justice for centuries: biomedical reproductive technologies participate in a long history of exploitation of women that is rooted in the plantation model. Under this paradigm, the Caribbean is viewed as a resource-rich region that can provide the clinical labor and raw material for scientific and economic change. Clyde Woods describes the plantation tradition as a uniquely reproducible structure of power. It undergoes transformation with a new economic or social upheaval, like decolonization. Then, the "dominant plantation bloc" mobilizes to contain the crisis, to establish a "new stable regime of accumulation."[73] Within this model, Cliff's and Klobah's poems show how the decolonization movements, and women's activism from the late 1960s onward, were met with a shift in the plantation regime.

Biomedical technology continues to compromise reproductive options in the Caribbean. Yet the two poems are not completely similar in their vision of a future for women of the Caribbean. Cliff and Klobah represent different possible responses for women to this exploitation. Cliff's 1979 poem imagines women as a collective unified against technological abuse, while Klobah's poem

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[72] Ibid.

[73] Woods, *Development Arrested*, 2.

suggests that women are connected only by their mutual suffering. This difference in vision certainly points to a shift in the tenor of feminist writing in the more than three decades since Cliff published "Against Granite." It also recalls the comparison I drew in chapter one of this project, in which I noted Cliff's idealism regarding women's historical and contemporary forms of resistance. "Against Granite" appeals to a certain feminist dream of collective action and refusal that is neither reflected in Klobah's poem nor imagined in Danticat's or Hopkinson's novels. These three works represent a fragmentation in women's relationships with one another, a breakdown in communication which creates the social conditions in which biomedicine produces silence among the women who unwittingly donate fetal tissue in Puerto Rico, in which several generations of Haitian women monitor their daughters' sexuality using the "test," and in which a young daughter is raped repeatedly by her father. All three works respond to a "sci-fi nightmare" that "frustrates" women's movements. The two novels distinguish themselves from the two poems in that women respond to techniques of control—technologies like the test that police their bodies—by affirming the future in the figure of the child. Despite their own traumas, Sophie and Tan-Tan embrace the possibility of a better future for their children. This suggests that the tools for resisting biomedical and plantation power have been in women's hands since they started sharing stories with the next generation. Birth thus becomes a tool for binding women again to one another.

B. Reproductive Justice in the Future?

Sophie and Tan-Tan have become archetypal daughters in the contemporary Caribbean women's canon. Since Danticat's novel was published in 1994, Sophie's story of trauma and

survival has been the subject of over one hundred scholarly articles and dissertation chapters. It has also occupied a particular niche within non-scholarly circles, in part because it was an Oprah's Book Club selection in 1998.[74] Hopkinson's novel was released in 2000, and it too has become a touchstone text for studies of Caribbean women's literature—and a popular novel in its own right among science fiction enthusiasts.[75] The two novels clearly tapped into a particular need within the reading community in the 1990s and early 2000s. I would like to briefly explore the possible reasons why two novels about sexual abuse of daughters became so popular during this time, especially because both novels offer the decision to give birth as a redemptive and affirmative choice for both of these daughters.

Danticat's novel, as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, generated controversy about the test that the Caco women perform on their daughters. I also noted in the second section of this chapter that the test situates *Breath, Eyes, Memory* within the speculative fiction genre: the test's logic resonates with the exploitation of Caribbean women's bodies within the biomedical economy. Martine performs a gesture that her mother has passed down to her as part of the patriarchal

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[74] "About *Breath, Eyes, Memory*."

[75] Amazon's customer reviews are by and large glowing. See "Customer Reviews," *Amazon*, www.amazon.com/Midnight-Robber-Nalo-Hopkinson-ebook/product-reviews/B001GXF2XK/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=recent (accessed 26 March 2016). Of course, as Paul C. Gutjahr writes, "those who write the reviews tend to have strong opinions about the book upon which they are commenting." Gutjahr's article was first published in 2002, but it remains true to this day. See Gutjahr, "No Longer Left Behind, 219.

Haitian society, which demands that women be virgins when they marry. Yet the level of policing that Sophie experiences as a teenager exceeds the ritual of the test: her mother invades her privacy when she urinates and tells her how to walk and what sports activities to avoid. Sophie says of this ritual, "I have heard it compared to a virginity cult, our mothers' obsession with keeping us pure and chaste. My mother always listened to the echo of my urine in the toilet, for if it was too loud it meant I had been deflowered. I learned very early in life that virgins always took small steps when they walked. They never did acrobatic splits, never rode horses or bicycles. They always covered themselves well and, even if their lives depended on it, never parted with their panties."[76] Martine demands that Sophie perform a certain version of femininity that is linked to quiet solicitude and virginity: Sophie must urinate quietly, and she must take "small steps." Worst of all, even if it means that she is killed, she must never "part" with her "panties."

These rules resonate with the list of demands that Jamaica Kincaid imagines in her short story, "Girl," first published in June 1978 in the *New Yorker*. In the three pages of print, a mother lectures her daughter incessantly on how to behave as a proper woman. The mother's instructions lay out the realm of women's work, the day-to-day labor of maintaining a house and family, as well as an unimpeachably modest sexual reputation. This mother alludes to her daughter's inevitable "slut" identity three times, and the stream of lecturing seems to be aimed at preventing her daughter from becoming one. But Danticat's novel diverges from Kincaid's now-classic piece because of the test, which constitutes sexual abuse. It is "unwanted sexual penetration"[77] that Sophie cannot believe her mother would subject her to, when Martine knows and understands that it reproduces patriarchal

[76] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 154.

[77] Kalisa, *Violence in Francophone African & Caribbean Women's Literature*, 179.

violence. Martine confesses to Sophie that the "two greatest pains of . . . [her] life are related."[78] With this phrase, she links her rape to her own mother's testing.

The "test" makes women's relationships with one another seem utterly abusive. Yet it is too easy to identify the test as merely evidence of women's complicity with structures of neocolonial and Haitian power over their bodies. While it is true that Martine abuses Sophie in the same way that her own mother abused her, it is important to situate the test within a broader examination of Haitian relationships during the Duvalier regime of the mid to late twentieth century. Indeed, as Nadège Clitandre points out, Danticat's novel emerged within a particular wave of Haitian expatriate writing that reflected back on decades of Duvalier dictatorship from the position of the United States. Clitandre argues that "displacement" and "migration" are key hermeneutics of Danticat's representation of the Caco women's relationship to one another.[79] As Haitians moved to the United States, and families were divided, these spatial relationships impacted the ways in which women understood their role as citizens of Haiti and potential citizens of the United States—and also as mothers, daughters, aunts, and friends of women across large geographic divides. As such, the test enacts a symbolic detachment other women; it is a policing gesture that reminds daughters of their subjugation to a patriarchal Haitian state and to US state policies and biomedical experiments that deny their right to reproductive liberty. The test reifies silence and censorship of women's voices on the familial, national, and international stage.[80]

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[78] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 170.

[79] Clitandre, "Mapping the Echo Chamber," 174.

[80] Ibid., 175.

When Martine tests her daughter in New York City, she is performing a complicated ritual of abuse that must be understood as part of Danticat's effort to unveil the strategic silencing of Haitian women during the late twentieth century. As Clitandre emphasizes, Danticat's oeuvre privileges the voice of women.[81] Within this context, Sophie's choice to become a mother despite her own mother's policing of her sexuality could be a celebration of Haitian women's voice and potential growth in political power in years to come. Yet I would also like to note that Sophie's response to the test must be distinguished from her motherhood. When Sophie shoves the pestle into her vagina, she does it in response to a threat that the man Sophie loves will not separate mother and daughter. Martine tells Sophie as she tests her that "the love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man who you didn't know the year before."[82] Martine argues that their connection is more profound than any love Sophie might feel for a man. Sophie responds to this threat by mutilating herself. By and large, scholars read this act as resistance to the test. Sandra C. Duvivier argues that "Sophie, though victimized, nevertheless exhibits agency when she violates herself as a means of escape from the horror of her mother's testing."[83] In this interpretation, despite Sophie's self-mutilation, she "escapes" the purity-preserving logic of the test. But even if one were to admit this to be resistance, this would, as Donette Francis notes, only be a "short term victory,"[84] since Sophie is marked by the testing in such a way that she must attend a

[81] Ibid., 176.

[82] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 85.

[83] Duvivier, "(Re)Writing Haiti," 50.

[84] Francis, "Silences Too Horrific to Disturb," 84.

sexual phobia group *and* undergo individual therapy for an eating disorder. She does not enjoy sex with her husband; their daughter, Brigitte, is a result of the first time they had sex.[85]

Sophie diverges from her mother in her response to the sexual violence of the test by speculating on a future where the Caco ritual no longer exists. Whereas her mother kills herself during a violent abortion attempt, Sophie finds a way to reframe her struggle within the context of the future. Sophie refuses to participate in the test with her own daughter, thus ending its cycle of violence. She thinks, "It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had *her* name burnt in the flames."[86] Imagining the future helps Sophie change the present. Sophie understands that, as a mother within the Caco family, she bears responsibility for testing her daughter. The test becomes in this way a ritualistic fire that she, as the Haitian mother, would enter if she believed in the test's purity- and family-preserving logic. However, she refuses to do so because she wishes to prevent the reproduction of her daughter as a young girl with "ghosts" and "nightmares" like her mother. In other words, it falls on the unwanted child, Sophie, to decide the terms in which she will continue her family line. Sophie is thinking here on a macro scale—her wishful thinking is about her family and also about a dream for a better world where daughters are not abused.

The same burden falls on Tan-Tan's shoulders in *Midnight Robber*, where she is the victim of parental abuse that mirrors the patriarchal fabric of society. Thus, in both novels, reproduction offers transformative potential. Children become the source of a profoundly radical affirmation of a new form of women's community. Sophie imagines a different means of connecting with her daughter,

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[85] Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 130.

[86] Ibid., 203.

where she is in the role of protector, but not with the goal of ensuring her virginity. Instead, she will protect Brigitte from nightmares. Likewise, Tan-Tan is followed on her journey by a female friend who helps her to survive trauma, abuse, and violence and to reframe her pregnancy as an opportunity to "undo the unfortunate cultural legacies of colonization and gender inequity."[87] I have discussed Danticat's novel at some length in the introduction to this chapter and in this particular section, but I have so far not addressed *Midnight Robber*. The novel is structured as a frame narrative, in which Tan-Tan's son, Tubman, listens to an *eshu*'s narrative of Tan-Tan's early life. We understand Tan-Tan through the *eshu*'s characterization of her story as a distraction for a small child.[88] The narrative maps the struggles of a young woman, Tan-Tan, onto a new world far beyond Earth, but with the critical distance that a frame narrative creates. Unlike the emotional intensity that we experience when reading about Sophie's struggle in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, we are frequently judging Tan-Tan's experience from a remove. Also, it is not revealed until the very end of the novel that the child being entertained is Tan-Tan's child. Hopkinson's novel is thus frequently playful in tone. It withholds key information so that the narrative unfolds as a revelation of Tan-Tan's decision to give birth to Tubman. Despite these tonal differences, Tan-Tan's experience mirrors that of Sophie and Martine. Tan-Tan is sexually abused like Sophie and Martine, she is raped and becomes pregnant like Martine, and she must, like Sophie, find a way to reconcile her abusive past within a much bigger story about state violence against women. Tan-Tan's story is, at heart, about a girl who is sexually abused by her father, who must learn to defend herself and imagine a world outside of that abuse. Tan-Tan's choice to become a mother reveals the ways in which *Midnight*

[87] Crosby, "Black Girlhood Interrupted," 201.

[88] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 1.

Robber comments on the contemporary struggle for women's reproductive liberty in the region, at the same time as it imagines a future of technological progress and transplanetary travel.

Reproductive liberty is at the heart of the dream Sophie has for her daughter, Brigitte, when she imagines that she will not go through the symbolic fire of abuse. Tan-Tan envisions her own decision about giving birth extending to legal and punitive decisions that she metes out as the "Midnight Robber." In fact, she only decides to give birth to Tubman after she successfully defends her good name before the community that accuses her of unjustly murdering her father. The Midnight Robber is a figure from Trinidadian folklore that appears during Carnival as either a Robber Queen or Robber King, depending on the performer's gender identification. Carnival is a tradition in Trinidad and Tobago in which people dress up as part of a masquerade celebration on the Monday and Tuesday before Lent. It is, however, a tradition across the Christianized world that Mikhail Bakhtin describes as a "suspension of all hierarchical precedence."[89] It is a site of possibility in which the disempowered can become powerful, at least for one day. Tan-Tan fantasizes that if she could dress up as the Robber Queen, she would "enter . . . the town square in high state for all the people to bring her accolades and praise and their widows' mites of gold and silver for saving them from the plantation boss."[90] The Midnight Robber, according to this description, disrupts the plantation system and redistributes wealth.

This Carnival role, we find, is crucial to reshaping the power dynamics of the world Tan-Tan inhabits. Indeed, Hopkinson imagines a world that structurally and symbolically mimics the Caribbean as we currently know it. *Midnight Robber* takes place on two planets, Toussaint and

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[89] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

[90] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 23.

New Halfway Tree, whose names recall the legacy of Haitian revolution and a famous neighborhood in Jamaica's capitol, Kingston. Yet Toussaint is not an idyllic planet where all people are created equal and live together in harmony, a fantasy of Caribbean nation-states.[91] Toussaint is part of a network of planets that have been colonized by the Marryshow Corporation, which is run by an intelligence known as "Granny Nanny," a name that, as part of this remix of Caribbean history and geography, evokes the historical figure of Nanny of the Maroons. Furthermore, the namesake of the Corporation, T. A. Marryshow, was a journalist and politician who helped advocate for the decolonization of Grenada and the institution of democratic political structures there.[92] Toussaint is therefore a planet where imperialism and neo-colonialism from forces outside of the Caribbean, like Europe or the United States, no longer exist.

Yet the idea of Toussaint's freedom from neocolonialism only exists if we ignore its colonizing influence on other planets like New Halfway Tree, which is "a primitive planet" and a "technologically undeveloped parallel world."[93] It is the place where political exiles go, as well as prisoners of the Marryshow Corporation. Also, neither Toussaint nor New Halfway Tree is a safe space for women. Their justice systems depend heavily on surveillance of the population. On Toussaint, the Granny Nanny network monitors political subjects using a small device that is inserted in their inner ear canal. This device connects them to the network, and to their own personal *eshu*, a personified quasi-Internet service that advises humans.[94] These *eshu* are connected to the network

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[91] And, let's be honest, every nation state.

[92] Thaler, "A Better Future," 99.

[93] Allen, "Tricksterism," 81; Thaler, *Black Atlantic Speculative Fictions*, 17.

[94] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 10.

that surveils all actions and thoughts on Toussaint. The network mirrors Martine's smothering of Sophie. In Hopkinson's novel, it is not a mother, but Tan-Tan's father, Antonio, who polices and abuses his daughter. The novel foreshadows his sexual abuse of his daughter when he watches her sleep, thinking, "He could never hold her long enough, never touch her too much."[95] In Antonio, we see the possessive, privacy-invading policies of the Marryshow Corporation embodied. Antonio's tendencies only worsen on New Halfway Tree, where, at least, the Granny Nanny network does not monitor the castaways of Toussaint. Antonio mirrors the dominance of the state, and its policing of its subjects, in his treatment of his daughter. He first rapes Tan-Tan when she is nine, telling her that "she was the spitting image of Ione,"[96] her mother and his former wife, whose lover he killed in a duel. In the same way that he feels entitled to possess her mother and to police her behavior without acknowledging his own infidelities,[97] he also attempts to control Tan-Tan.

Tan-Tan follows her father to New Halfway Tree, at first believing his argument that he is "innocent" of wrongdoing and will be unfairly punished if they stay on Toussaint. However, once they settle into their new lives in New Halfway Tree, he begins to rape her, claiming that she looks just like her mother, who they have left behind on Toussaint. Tan-Tan's first experience of rape is "something more horrible than she'd ever dreamt possible," and "she felt her own self split" into "Good Tan-Tan" and "the bad Tan-Tan."[98] This splitting opens up the possibility for Tan-Tan to imagine her means of escape from this abuse, although it takes her years to break free from her

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[95] Ibid., 13.

[96] Ibid., 141.

[97] Ibid., 25.

[98] Ibid., 140.

father, who becomes aligned in her mind with the plantation bosses that the midnight robber playfully "robs" during Carnival performances. From the first time she is raped, she imagines that she is "Tan-Tan the Robber Queen . . . the one who born on a far-away planet, who travel to this place to rob the rich in their idleness and help the poor in their humility. She name Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, and strong men does tremble in their boots when she pass by. Nothing bad does ever happen to Tan-Tan the Robber Queen. Nothing can't hurt she."[99] Just as Sophie uses her rejection of the test as a symbolic site of affirmation of her daughter's future, Tan-Tan imagines a means of escaping her father's abuse by making a material and symbolic practice—Carnival—grounds for personal transformation and a communal intervention. The test and carnival performance emerge at the site of struggle against ritualized abuse; they are ways of articulating a vision of transformation and escape from patriarchal trauma, where "strong men" like Tan-Tan's father will "tremble in their boots."

Both *Midnight Robber* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* suggest that parents perform technologies of control, policing their daughters' sexualities in attempts to keep them from unwanted pregnancy. These abuses are a means of controlling their daughters, of possessing them, as they reach puberty. In Antonio's perverse mind, his sexual abuse of his daughter will preserve her innocence: "Let me put on your nightie. I go tuck you into bed, all right?"[100] The parents in these two novels infantilize their daughters, recreating a culture of dependency that their respective worlds demand. The Marryshow Corporation mandates that citizens who do not wish to do physical labor must give up

[99] Ibid., 140.

[100] Ibid., 140.

their privacy. Tan-Tan and Antonio both depend on their *eshu* for help navigating Toussaint, and when they arrive on New Halfway Tree, they no longer have access to these guiding spirits.[101]

Yet, as I argued in the second section of this chapter, these novels participate in speculation about investing in the future (i.e., the child) creates a space free from patriarchal dominance. Tan-Tan's fantastical journey to freedom from her father's abuse as the midnight robber suggests that there are untapped resources for survival in the Caribbean women's canon, a space of possibility that is not dependent for success on surveillance technology like the *eshu*. Tan-Tan, once she murders her father and escapes into the bush of New Halfway Tree, falls in with the *douen*, an animal species that lives in uneasy tension with the humans of the planet. Her escape allows her to move beyond the destruction written within her family, Antonio, and to find a new family that might not abuse her.[102] They protect her until humans discover Tan-Tan's location, and she is banished from the community of *douen* because she accidentally leads humans to the animals' secret hiding place.[103] Of course, just as the Marryshow Corporation reproduces problems of privacy and liberty on Toussaint, the human civilization on New Halfway Tree threatens the survival of all other species on the planet.

Tan-Tan's banishment mirrors Sistren's stories about young women being cast out of their family homes when it becomes clear that they are "bellywomen." Yet Tan-Tan is cast out of the *douen* village not because she is pregnant, but because she has revealed their location to humans. Just as being a "bellywoman" makes visible the reality of teenage pregnancy (and the economic and

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[101] Lalla, "The Facetiness Factor," 235.

[102] Crosby, "Black Girlhood Interrupted," 193.

[103] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 283.

societal factors that contribute to it), so Tan-Tan has brought out into the open the neocolonial human domination of the animals of New Halfway Tree. Banishment is thus the necessary response to young girls who dare to reveal so much. Tan-Tan is banished but her friend, Abitefa, a young female *douen*, follows her on her journey.

Abitefa does not yet know that Tan-Tan is pregnant, and when she discovers it, she argues against abortion. Tan-Tan shares with her that the child within her is "a monster."[104] Tan-Tan has had an abortion once before, and she must track down a doctor to give her the abortifacients that will help her be rid of the incest-based fetus. Abitefa, however, is horrified by her suggestion of abortion, saying that the *douen* live by a logic wherein a fetus "is a gift."[105] Like Martine in Danticat's novel, Tan-Tan threatens suicide if she cannot be rid of the unwanted fetus: "Abitefa, I tell you true, if I don't lost this baby, I go kill myself."[106] This threat proves empty. She does not kill herself like Martine does, and, even more strikingly, she does not abort the fetus. As the two young women journey in search of a doctor to perform the procedure, Tan-Tan comes to acknowledge the value system of the *douen*, which sounds uncommonly like the very same arguments against abortion that we see in the Coalition for the Defense of Life, which argues against abortion as "taking life."[107] How, then, does Tan-Tan come to accept the fetus that she repeatedly calls "a monster"?

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[104] Ibid., 233.

[105] Ibid., 233.

[106] Ibid., 236.

[107] See Maxwell, "Fighting a Losing Battle?", 99.

The hint lies in her emerging struggle to define herself outside of the smothering patriarchal system of both Toussaint and New Halfway Tree. As she and Abitefa cross New Halfway Tree, she encounters unequal fights where she intervenes as the Robber Queen. Tan-Tan mobilizes the folk tale of the midnight robber to perform vigilante justice, and as she becomes better at the role, she comes to accept the fetus inside her. Tan-Tan's decision to name her formerly "monstrous" fetus "Tubman" is particularly revealing in this regard. She thinks, "She'd carried the monster all this way. The damned pickney was hers."[108] In this moment of reclamation of her unwanted fetus as "hers," she affirms the power of her labor, her work to bring it into being. Tan-Tan names this boy after Harriet Tubman, who, as the narrator *eshu* says, is "the human bridge from slavery to freedom."[109] Although I am wary of Tan-Tan's decision to give birth as a totally positive moment in the novel, *Midnight Robber*'s ending contributes to a more realistic vision of women's decisions regarding reproduction than have been offered in some of the chapters of this project (especially chapter two). Hopkinson is proposing a way out of patriarchal violence that does not necessarily rely on abortion. It can also involve empowering a woman to feel that she is in control of her life as well as her persona. The Robber Queen performance allows Tan-Tan to distribute justice and to re-imagine her role in the community of New Halfway Tree, where reproductive liberty might be possible.

C. Coda

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[108] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 321. "Pickney" means "a child" in Jamaican English. See Cassidy and Le Page, *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, 348.

[109] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 329.

In 2008, twelve Latin American and Caribbean countries met to discuss revising sexual education standards in schools. The First Meeting of Ministers of Health and Education published *Prevention through Education*, a policy document that argued for sexual education as a means of preventing the spread of HIV in the region. They promoted two particular policy goals: By 2015, these countries would reduce by seventy-five percent "the number of schools that do not provide comprehensive sexuality education." Also, by 2015, they would halve "the number of adolescents who are not covered by health services that appropriately attend to their sexual and reproductive health needs."[110] These two goals were ambitious in their aspiration for radical sexual-policy change in schools within seven years. Although a formal study has not yet been published to assess whether or not these policies were successfully implemented at the scale the ministers of health and education predicted, it is difficult to imagine that it has fully happened without a profound shift in policy, economy, and ideology in the region.

As *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *Midnight Robber* suggest, state policies that limit reproductive choices affect young women most of all because their guardians in many cases embody and perform state-sanctioned violence against them. In Sistren's life stories, female relatives banish their pregnant daughters from the household. In Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Martine bears the brunt of sexism-based reproductive ideologies, first as a teenager who cannot successfully have an abortion, and then as an adult in New York City. Martine experiences rape at the hands of Haiti's secret army, but she also endures her mother's testing of her virginity until this rape makes her mother stop testing her. Despite this twofold form of abuse, she enacts the same ritual test on her own daughter.

[110] "Preventing HIV through Education in Latin America and the Caribbean."

Likewise, in *Midnight Robber*, Tan-Tan's father reproduces patriarchal violence. These two stories of violence against teenage girls do not end with suffering, though. Sophie and Tan-Tan's affirmations of motherhood point to a new possibility for Caribbean women, perhaps a way of embracing a better future that does not demand abortion.

In a recent essay in an anthology about science fiction's next frontiers, Marge Piercy observes that cultural production changes when women are politically active in movements of progress. Piercy points to the popularity of utopia as a concept in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when women made significant gains in the US and Canadian courts. Ursula K. Le Guin's popular 1969 *The Left Hand of Darkness* imagines a world where sexual difference becomes a fluid category. Conversely, Piercy argues that when women are mobilizing in defense of rights gained, "whether we are defending the existence of women's studies, access to safe medical abortions, or affirmative action, there seems to exist among us less creative energy for imagining a fully realized alternative to what surrounds us."[111] It is hard to say if Tan-Tan and Sophie offer enough of an alternative to women of the Caribbean, or if their struggles help women make sense of their own lives. However, it is clear that their stories help to complicate an easy narrative of women's suffering and abuse. Even within the context of biomedical experimentation on their bodies, women imagine an end to silence: Klobah's poem reveals the silence and secrecy, Danticat's novel celebrates the end of silence, and Hopkinson's novel argues that storytelling itself can liberate women in their struggles.

In the epigraph to this chapter, I quoted the last line of Guyanese poet Grace Nichols's "Praise Song for My Mother." Nichols celebrates her mother's elemental importance to her life—"You

[111] Piercy, "Love and Sex in the Year 3000," 137.

were / water to me" . . . / "You were / moon's eye to me."[112] Nichols's vision of her mother ends with an affirmation of multiple possibilities in Nichols's life: "Go to your wide futures, you said."[113] The poem ends on a resonant celebration of multiplicity within the future. The texts studied in this project have all offered possible choices: revolts, refusals, and even affirmations for women in the Caribbean region. In chapter one, enslaved women's reproductive resistance was tended for generations on the remains of provision plot grounds. Chapter two took up the problem of indigenous exclusion from the postcolonial Caribbean nation-state, and Carib women's refusal to reproduce within that paradigm. Chapter three explored the linguistic refusal to reproduce biocolonial acquisition of women's reproductive knowledge. This final chapter looked at the ways in which motherhood is reclaimed as a means to a better future for all women in two popular contemporary women's novels. These stories bring private forms of violence into the public sphere of literature so that we, as Gloria Thomas Pillow suggests, can reckon with the social inequities that create the conditions in which women negotiate their everyday lives. If the Caribbean women's canon testifies to any continuity beyond the symbolic matrifocality Caroline Rody identifies within it, it is surely the "wide futures" that Caribbean women imagine as part of reproductive liberty: the choice to give birth or to not give birth, and, ultimately, to determine a future free from patriarchal and neocolonial violence on women's bodies.

[112] Nichols, "Praise Song for My Mother," 101.

[113] Ibid., 101.