Writing (Bitter)sweetness: Queer Ecologies of the Sugar Plantation in Caribbean Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation takes the works of four queer and lesbian diasporic Caribbean writers to investigate what a queer ecological analysis of Caribbean literature may engender in an age of climate change. Bringing scholarship from queer ecology and Geography to bear on a decolonial and ecofeminist literary analysis, the following investigation takes interdisciplinarity at its fore to reflect the tentacular and interwoven nature of our ecological age and its layers of sedimented histories. It draws on the Haitian creative practice of *rasanblaj* by which pieces of fabric are brought together to present a complex whole. As a central point in this tapestry, the sugar plantation is used as both metaphor and landscape through which to ask what it means for queer writers to address and reclaim this bittersweetness, building on the work of Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley with ecological and geographical scholarship. Tracing this sugar from the Caribbean, across oceans, and to diasporic cities in the Global North through storytelling, it investigates what it means to write bittersweetness in all its entanglements.

Key words: Queer ecology, decolonisation, Geography, urban ecology, magical realism, Anthropocene, climate change, rasanblaj, eco-feminism, Plantationocene.

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Introduction

Conceptual Underpinnings: telescoping perspectives

Literature from the Caribbean and its diaspora has explored themes of gender, sexuality, and coloniality in ways which are intimately linked with the environment on which they are written; landscapes crossed with human interventions, topographies of power, and regrowth. Dominant colonial literary metaphors labelling land as 'fertile', 'virgin', and 'penetrable' have historically produced a gendered construction of the environment which reflects justifications of patriarchal-colonial control, a trope which has been reclaimed and subverted by Caribbean writers in eco-feminist ways (Chancy, 2022, Lahens, 2010, Mars, 2013). This dissertation builds on well-established eco-feminist critiques and extends this to interrogate what it means to queer ecofeminist understandings in the Caribbean context using the sugar plantation as both its central landscape and metaphor for bittersweet love. It assembles a cross-disciplinary range of scholarship from queer theory, literary theory, and Geography to contribute a new approach which privileges a plurality which reflects a complex whole.

Scholars have established that notions of fecundity and (re)production in the Caribbean have deep roots in colonial, capitalist economics through systems of power reliant on growth via the appropriation of land and enslaved peoples, with child-bearing bodies bearing much of this figurative and actual reproductive weight. Scholars such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1996) have exposed this gendered, colonialist, and capitalist view of the Caribbean through metaphors which place the Caribbean as an indentured mother. Rojo states, 'without deliveries from the Caribbean womb Western capital accumulation would not have been sufficient to effect a move, within a little more than two centuries, from the so-called Mercantilist Revolution to the Industrial Revolution. In fact, the history of the Caribbean is

one of the main strands in the history of capitalism' (5). Whilst ecofeminist scholars such as Carolyn Merchant (1980) have challenged these representations of the gendering of nature to have such fertile, penetrable 'wombs', what it would mean to queer this understanding has been relatively under-explored. With this in mind, this dissertation will ask what it means to undertake a reading of Caribbean literature which is mindful not only of ecofeminism but also queer ecologies in order to move beyond both gendered and hetero-sexed binaries imposed by colonial-capitalist agendas. This project takes the sugarcane plantation as a conceptual and actual landscape through which to explore that which animates it and emanates from it in the forms of queer love, water, and cities. Through the works of four queer diasporic Caribbean writers: Audre Lorde, Myriam Chancy, Dionne Brand, and Roxane Gay, these contestations of the bittersweetness of sugar will be charted across the diaspora investigating writing from Haiti, the US, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad, and Canada. Work by the Caribbean visual artists Lisandro Suriel and Andrea Chung will also be used alongside these works to illustrate these ideas and to present a counter vision to the colonial gaze. This dissertation will draw upon scholarship from the field of Geography in conjunction with literary theory in order to situate the works in the contexts of environmental, decolonial, and urban scholarship. The interdisciplinary nature of this research will draw on and reflect the Haitian tradition of *rasanblaj,* a traditional technique for gathering, reassembling, and joining together pieces fabric or stories, and the conception of 'counter-topographies' which counter colonio-capitalist conceptions of space (Ulysse,2023, Katz, 2001). The following research aims to address the question: what new perspectives would a queer ecological lens engender when applied to the sugar plantation in Caribbean literature in our time of ecological climate change?

This paper takes its point of departure from Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's work, *Thiefing Sugar* (2020) in which Tinsley investigates the symbolic and actual reclamations taking place

in Caribbean literature by queer women, foregrounding sugar as a metaphor for queer love and resistance. Through her investigation of these subverted tropes in Caribbean queer writing, Tinsley argues for a narrative repossession of dispossessed environments and agencies. Tinsley states:

> '[These] texts take tropes like women-as-flowers, women-as-water, women-as-sugar cane, invented to justify keeping Caribbean women and territories in someone else's control, and redeploy these same tropes to imagine a landscape belonging to Caribbean women and Caribbean women belonging to each other. In this, these writers' working and reworking of intimate landscapes constitute black feminist imaginations that complicate, dismantle, and reconfigure the interlocking fictions of power that shadow the region.' (2)

To this end, Tinsley refers to Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place Not Here* (1996) in which a Caribbean woman loving another Caribbean woman is expressed as being like a cane cutter thiefing sugar. The figure here of the cane cutter is representative of both an intimate, bodily expression of queer ecology and of larger relations of power. In a Caribbean landscape crossed with plantation monocultures and (neo)colonial economic control, reclaiming the sweetness and nourishment of an imperial crop produced for colonial wealth and through black oppression holds much figurative weight. This research will build on Tinsley's work in applying queer ecology and geographical scholarship to this conception of the sugar crop as bittersweet reclamation, extending this exploration of heteropatriarchy into non-human worlds such as watery spaces and concrete metropoles as counter-topographies of the sugar plantation.

The salience of this queer, ecological approach arises during our era of changing climate and what has been proposed by scholars as a new geological era caused by human activity,

referred to as the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, or Plantationocene. As geographer Erik Swyngedouw (2013) expresses, **'**we are now in a new geological era, one in which humans are co-producers of the deep geological time that hitherto had slowly grinded away irrespective of humans' dabbling with the surface layers of earth, oceans, and atmosphere' (16). For my purposes here, and particularly for a Caribbean context, I have chosen to apply the term Plantationocene as conceived of by scholars Wynter (1971), McKittrick (2013), and Harraway (2015) due to its recognition of the role of the plantation as the birthplace of the environmental degradation and resource extraction instigated by colonialism. This process of terraforming to produce new, colonial landscapes continues in our neoliberal, capitalist globalised economies in which the importance of the enmeshment of our fellow 'kin' and 'critters' demands a multispecies ecojustice (Harraway, 2015, 161). Donna Harraway expresses the salience of narrative framings of our current geological age as such:

> 'It matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems. All the thousand names are too big and too small; all the stories are too big and too small […] we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections.' (160)

It is these stories that are neither big nor small, both individual and collective, and complexly engendering new connections that a queer, ecological, Caribbean literature presents. Narrative representations of these ecologies play a vital importance in contending with these layers of sediment and the precarious lives built upon them. Michel Rolph-Trouillot (1995) has expressed the narration of colonial histories from the global north as an active silencing of the global south, an undertaking this dissertation will argue is countered by these works in their active *un*silencing of these narratives. In this way, the works (non-fiction or otherwise)

can be seen to act as alternative archives in speaking to oppressed histories (Douglas, 2016). Literary encounters with the overlapping concerns of patriarchy and environmental degradation have been discussed by ecofeminists, and yet a queer perspective is relatively nascent. The term 'queer ecology' is largely attributed to Timothy Morton (2010) who has argued that plants themselves are queer in their nature as they reproduce in a diversity of manners which run contrary to social heterosexing of plants. Classificatory systems of plants by scholars such as Carl Linnaeus in the eighteenth century introduced highly gendered and racialised implications which 'gave undue primacy to sexual reproduction and heterosexuality' ascribing plants 'male' and 'female' parts, at times even describing their reproduction in terms of Western marriage (Schiebinger 1993, 22). Morton states that, 'ecology and queer theory are intimate. It's not that ecological thinking would benefit from an injection of queer theory from the outside. It's that, fully and properly, ecology is queer theory and queer theory is ecology: queer ecology' (281). It is through this view of the inseparability of the queer and the ecological that this dissertation will view the literature discussed.

The position of the Caribbean in this respect is central as the birthplace of the plantation economy, modern international capitalism, and its subsequent environmental effects. As such, literary representations of Caribbean ecologies are uniquely positioned to contend with the threats of a changing climate. Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2022) discusses in her work *Allegories of Anthropocene*, drawing on the work of Éduard Glissant (1989), the position of the archipelago in theorising climate change, 'allegory has long relied on the figure of the island to engage the scalar telescoping between local and global, island and Earth. The island's simultaneous boundedness and its permeability to travellers – and therefore its susceptibility to radical change – have made it a useful analogue for the globe as a whole. Of course, the island also represents finitude, a cautionary concept for the Anthropocene epoch of planetary

boundaries' (6). For my purposes, Caribbean islands will be considered both as these bounded spaces as well as being permeable and highly connected with cities in the Global North. As Deloughrey argues, climate change narratives from the Global North have the tendency to create the illusion of a novel rather than processual crisis, whilst 'catastrophic ruptures to social and ecological systems have already been experienced through the violent processes of empire. In other words, *the apocalypse has already happened*; it continues because empire is a process' (emphasis added, 7). As such, investigating current narratives of climate change through the lens of the long history of the sugar plantation acknowledges the processual nature of environmental destruction and climate change in the global south. This idea of a continuing and insidious rather than dystopian apocalypse is also expressed by Eric Swyngedouw who draws on Calder Williams' (2011) notion of combined and uneven apocalypse and Giorgio Agamben's (1998) 'bare life' in which, 'many are already living in the post-apocalyptic interstices of life, whereby the fusion of environmental transformation and social conditions, render life ''bare''' (Swyngedouw, 2013, 15). This attention to the reality of interstitial ecological change is contrasted by what Swyngedouw terms, 'a fetishist invocation of CO^2 as the ''thing'' around which our environmental dreams, aspirations, contestations, as well as policies crystallize' (13). It is this reclaiming of the ecological narrative away from these misleading fetishisations and climate change narratives, repositioning from the birthplace of the Plantationocene with its current and historical socio-ecological injustices, to which these works give voice.

In recognition of this ecological (in)justice, this dissertation chooses to draw upon scholarship from urban political ecology (UPE) to appreciate the role of metropoles in the Global North in these systems of power, metropoles from which many Caribbean diasporic storytellers write. This is in accordance with the notion that the organisation of our global systems of control have been dictated in large part by a rise in urbanism which extends far

beyond bounded cityscapes. This will draw primarily on Henri Lefebvre's (2003) concept of planetary urbanism in which the world is said to have become urban as even rural areas serve as 'operational landscapes' of urbanisation producing material, food, water, etc in service of cities. Lefebvre expresses that, 'the urban fabric grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life […] small and midsize cities became dependencies, partial colonies of the metropolis' (4). The word choice here of 'colonies' is pertinent as formerly colonised landscapes continue to serve as sites of production for cities in the Global North through export economies. As such, viewing Caribbean spaces in terms of 'operational landscapes' of planetary urbanism will illuminate the matrices of power in which the narratives take place. As David Montgomery (2012) observes, 'today's globalised agriculture that ships local produce overseas to wealthier markets reflects the legacy of colonial plantations established to help feed European cities' (83). This continuing legacy is seen in the works studied here as characters move between or work to service these metropoles.

Whilst some postcolonial geographers (Buckley and Strauss, 2016, Kanai, 2014, Oswin, 2018) have critiqued this theory due to its lack of interaction with local-scale urbanism, this dissertation will work in accordance with the view that planetary urbanism is not inherently at odds with individual, queer concerns, but that it enables a reading of the local through the global. As queer geographers Angelo and Goh (2020) express, they consider 'the "planetary" aspects of planetary urbanisation not as foreclosing the possibility of alternative social practices or occluding everyday life, but as inviting scholars to expose and centre everyday struggles as an inevitable part of plural, multi-scalar processes' (743). It is this telescoping between the local and the global, the individual and the collective with which queer, Caribbean diasporic literature is uniquely positioned to contend. In recognising the global systems in which characters act, narrative voices can address concerns which are simultaneously local and global. In recognition of this, these works will also be said to

construct what Cindi Katz (2001) conceptualises as a 'counter-topography'. Katz states, 'if topographical knowledge is so integrally important to capitalists and other agents of domination and to the maintenance of uneven development, its appropriation should be important in countering them' (1215). As such, the authors studied here can be viewed as remapping their own narratives over colonised or colonising land in a manner which foregrounds a Caribbean, queer perspective and traces a counter-topography of geographies of power and oppression such as the sugar plantation. This approach of centring literary texts in a space of geographic enquiry is one increasingly adopted by geographers in their studies of 'geopoetics' and 'deep' or 'slow' mapping which aim to decolonise the geographical imagination and to call into question traditional, supposedly objective cartographies (Biggs and Modeen, 2010, Thacker, 2006, Hones, 2022). As such, paying attention to a diasporic, queer Caribbean literary atlas here has the potential to remap understandings of the sugar plantation to produce a geopoetic counter-topography.

Methodologies: Reading Sugar

In researching this project, a wide range of reading was undertaken of queer, Caribbean writing which touched on themes of sugar and sweetness from which a core corpus of works was selected. This selection process proved challenging and yielded more anglophone results than francophone due to the challenge of finding queer writing from the Caribbean where it is often dangerous to be an openly queer person. As a result, this research yielded more results from diasporic writers living openly in the US and Canada. The surrounding secondary research has taken an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on work in Comparative Literature, Geography, and queer and decolonial theory. This approach has been used with an ethic of plurality in mind in recognition of the importance of diversifying disciplines and storytellers so as to best represent the intertwined, queer, and constellatory nature of the work studied. This also draws on the Haitian practice of *rasanblaj,* a creative technique by which multiple

layers are stitched together in order to present a diverse whole. As Neli Sargsyan (2021) terms it, *rasanblaj* can be both a feminist and decolonial practice as it gathers and weaves together stories, is attentive to and resists hierarchies, and encourages solidarities. Scholar and practitioner of *rasanblaj*, anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse foregrounds the nature of the approach as rejecting the separation of Western lines of division between arts and humanities, instead drawing on a diverse range of archival material and a plurality of experience:

> 'Based on a Haitian Kreyòl word, rasanblaj refers to the act of calling up and bringing together, summoning to action and to presence, a collocation of ideas, peoples, things, spirits (Ulysse 2017). As developed by Ulysse, this conjuring not only activates a cut across languages, historical periods, geographies, disciplines and the secular/spiritual divide, but also reveals the violence and power inherent in segmenting stories, peoples, discourses and connected histories. Rasanblaj is a paradigmatic example of feminist and decolonial practice rooted in Black aesthetics and, specifically, Haitian spirituality and historical experience.' (Papailias cited in Ulysse 2023, 11)

With this approach of plurality, enmeshment, and cross-disciplinarity in mind, a literature review was conducted across geographical, literary, queer, and decolonial scholarship to identify research already conducted and potential gaps to be addressed. The following literature review is divided into its two main parts, literary and geographical studies. Research has taken place both in the UK and abroad as research was conducted in Montréal at The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia University, the Centre International de Documentation et d'Information Haïtienne, Carabéene, et Afro-Canadienne (CIDIHCA), the Montréal LGBTQ+ Community Centre Library, and the Maison d'Haïti. At the COHDS, I was granted access to interviews conducted for the 'Haitian Life Stories Project' and the 'Little Burgundy Project' in which Haitian and Caribbean individuals

living in Montréal were interviewed regarding their life experiences. These interviews shed light on gendered and politicised relationships with Caribbean and Canadian environments and excerpts from these are utilised in the following chapters. At the CIDIHCA and the LGBTQ+ community library, I was directed to works by queer writers living in Montréal and New York. At the Maison d'Haïti, I was given a tour of their centre and was informed of the work they do to support Haitian and Caribbean populations in Montréal, with a particular point of interest being their newly established LGBT+ department.

To make note of author positionality, it was important to recognise that I as a researcher am a bisexual, white, middle-class, European, cis-gendered woman. Whilst my positionality as a queer woman affords me access and insight into certain LGBT+ spaces and experiences, it has also been essential throughout this project to pay special attention to the privileges and power dynamics involved in my researching black and colonial histories. This has required a sustained focus on critical reflexivity and an awareness of unconscious biases when consulting texts and visiting Caribbean spaces. I acknowledge that the following discussion will unavoidably be to some extent influenced by my positionality.

Literature Review

Queer Ecologies in Literature

This first section of literature reviewed is regarding existing work studying gender, sexuality, queer ecologies, and environmental insights into Caribbean literature. For instance, Gregory Luke Chwala (2019) takes the setting of 'ruinate' (previously used land abandoned to go wild) in Jamaica to situate queer ecologies. Chwala states that the:

> 'reclamation of Jamaican land by the ruinate acts as a trope that mirrors the reclamation of national identity from the ruins of empire' and that 'escaped Afro-Carib slaves (the maroons) had used the ruinate to hide, organize independent free

> communities, and assemble […] The ruinate is thus a haunting cultural metaphor, part of a historical mental repository that draws attention to the importance of nature-culture interconnectivity in the process of Jamaica's decolonization.' (142)

Chwala argues that the postcolonial gothic tropes employed of ghostly ancestors and untamed wilderness provide a way in which to theorise its queer, decolonial ecology. Importantly, decoloniality is viewed as inseparable from queer ecologies, Chwala states:

> 'One cannot commit to decolonization without acknowledging queer ecologies because the ways in which the Western concept nature has influenced colonization is deeply ingrained in a discourse of sexuality and gender, and it is likewise impossible to have queer ecologies, even ecocriticism, without a commitment to decolonization because fear and oppression of Western conceptions of both the erotic and isolated nonhuman environments—erotophobia and ecophobia—are so deeply intertwined.' (144)

Chwala also draws on Katie Hogan's (2010) work in which she states, 'since both queer and environmental justice perspectives assume that nature and environment are not neutral ahistorical categories, and each critical practice looks at how the very language of nature and environmentalism can often mask harm to humans and nature, this shared theoretical and historical experience could serve as a basis for coalition.' (151) Here we find the idea of coalition as central to queer ecologies in uniting decolonial as well as erotic concerns, a theme of concomitance which appears frequently in the literature.

Similarly, in her book *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination,* Ann Laura Stoler (2013) draws on the theme of ruins to argue for the ongoing treatment of the effects of empire as our contemporary world sits in amongst the ruins of its colonial past. Stoler outlines the importance of considering ruins in order to 'track *the uneven temporal sedimentations* in

which imperial formations leave their marks. Most important, we seek to ask how empire's ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live and what compounded layers of imperial debris do to them' (2, original emphasis). In this way, ruins become both psychic and material spaces, sedimented in geologic layers as well as in people's lives and minds, an enmeshed and complicated ecology. Stoler argues that ruins are a key site of the *longue durée* of imperialism and that 'such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind. The focus, then, is not on inert remains, but on their vital refiguration' (9). In a similar manner to Chwala, Stoler here imbues ruins and ruined landscapes with the agency to reconfigure in ecological, urban, and personal spaces as a salient and active consideration.

Literary theorist Benítez-Rojo employs a similar framing technique of plurality and enmeshment for Caribbean literature of 'chaos', in which he argues that, 'chaos looks toward everything that repeats, reproduces, grows, decays, unfolds, flows, spins, vibrates, seethes; it is as interested in the evolution of the solar system as in the stock market's crashes, as involved in cardiac arrhythmia as in the novel or in myth' (1996, 3). In a similar manner to queer approaches, this approach highlights the inextricability of ecologies and individuals, as well as global systems and stories, foregrounding notions of complications and enmeshment. Éduard Glissant's (2009) conception of 'chaos-monde' also echoes this complexity of relation as the world is essentially a chaotic and fragmented entity. In recognition of the chaos of the overlapping, intertwined, and dissolute concerns in the Caribbean, Benítez-Rojo and Glissant provide theoretical ground on which a queer theory may address similar complications.

More explicitly addressing gender and sexuality, Myriam Chancy's article: 'Subversive Sexualities: Revolutionising Gendered Identities' (2008) discusses the works of three

Caribbean/American writers and the ways in which these writers navigate queer themes. Chancy expresses that queer Caribbean writing, for the most part, necessarily takes place outside of the Caribbean within its complex matrix of freedoms. Thus, the colonial powers that enforced heteronormative and ecological domination, also become those to offer certain freedoms. Chancy states that, 'those writers and artists who have sought to elucidate the importance of alternative sexualities are by and large those who have left, by will or by force, their home nations. In this context, migration affords the opportunity of self-definition […] The US presents an opening but also a difficult crossroads where gain and loss can occur simultaneously' (53). Chancy uses the example of Vodou societies and beliefs to demonstrate how Caribbean practices have offered alternative ways in which gender identities can be viewed and transgressed. Chancy also discusses Audre Lorde's (1984) conception of the erotic in order to situate lesbian agency and bodily reclamation in the Caribbean stating, 'Women's bodies - and by extension their inner worlds - have been reduced to commodities […] How then do we come to term the "excessive" woman or the woman in excess, beyond such constructions - that woman who falls between genders, having qualities of both yet claiming neither category even as she claims her body though not the layers of social identities mapped upon it?' (62). This idea of commodification is central to the question of queer ecology as environmental devastation and humanitarian abuses are conducted in the name of profit generation and power accumulation. In this way, queer sexualities can be regarded as subversive as they resist commodification, reflecting Omise'eke Tinsley's observation that Caribbean women loving each other is like a cane cutter thiefing sugar.

Chancy's own work is discussed in Keithley Woolward's (2014) article, 'Queering the Line: Challenging Gender in Myriam Chancy's *Spirit of Haiti'*. Here, Woolward draws on Chancy's novel in order to demonstrate queerness' role in Haiti's historical cycles as the queer characters are the descendants of Henri Christophe, linking them symbolically with

Haiti's past. Woolward discusses the colonial origins of homophobia in Haiti as being largely a product of colonial France's 'mission civilisatrice' in the Caribbean. However, as with Chancy (2008), Woolward also recognises that contemporary discourse 'privileges diasporic transnational spaces as the condition of possibility for troubling and even naming and accounting for disempowered queer presences' (85) to express this temporal and spatial complication in which Western powers continue to offer 'civilised' ways of living. Chancy's depiction of HIV/AIDs is also discussed in relation to 'mauvais sang' as the national is embodied within the individual, queer body, an ailing nation personified in the characters. Woolward also references Tinsley's (2008) argument that queer relationships can be traced back to Atlantic slavery in the sense that 'they challenged the commodifying logics of capital accumulation and thereby asserted the humanity of these captured people. These affective bonds entailed '"loving your own kind when your own kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living deaths' (cited in Woolward, 2014, 90). In this way, queer histories become intricately intertwined in Caribbean history rather than separate from it.

This history of Caribbean homophobia is also presented in Erin Durban's book *The Sexual Politics of Empire*, where they address postcolonial homophobia in Haiti along two strands, ideologies imported during colonialism, and those of subsequent anti-colonialist nationalisms. Durban takes as their point of departure the natural disaster of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, one of the aftermaths of which was a rise in homophobia of queer people being refused medical treatment due to discrimination surrounding HIV and Evangelical Christian groups claiming the earthquake as a punishment for homosexuality. In this piece of research emerges again the idea of interdisciplinarity and coalition as Durban describes their approach as an 'unruly undertaking' which crosses 'the arts, humanities, social sciences, and law without belonging to any of them' (11). Durban identifies this approach as central to their

position as a scholar and activist and which has resulted in a 'patchwork ethnography' (15). In this way, Durban's work emphasises the plurality in such research which aligns with previously discussed methods of *rasanblaj*. Interestingly, Durban also notes that their ethnographic work has taken place in most part in cities as sites where queerness becomes more of an expressed possibility. As such, Durban contributes a collection of ethnographies and storytelling of queer Haitian experience grounded in its historic context and contemporary aftershocks.

The article, '"Cric, crac, queer": queer storytellers and story-membering in Lawrence Scott's *Witchbroom*, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and David Chariandy's *Brother*' by Bastien Bomans (2021) also investigates queer writing in Caribbean literature with an emphasis on resistance and memory. Bomans draws on the history of oral storytelling in the Caribbean originating as a form of resistance during the Atlantic slave trade stating that, 'in the field of Caribbean literature, the figure of the storyteller is commonly associated with an ethos of resistance against the racist and sexist representations of the colonial version of history. Furthermore, some creative writers have turned to this emblematic character to highlight the existence of Caribbean LGBTQI+ identities' (161). Interestingly, Bomans argues that 'queer storytellers differ from their predecessors in the sense that their queerness adjoins the dimension of sexual/gender non-normativity with the concerns of (post/neo)colonialism, racism and sexism and, hence, bridge different experiences of oppression and potentially form new alliances' (165). This idea of an alliance which bridges the gap between queerness and coloniality is central to this research and contributes to the conceptual complications of enmeshment, chaos, and coalition, which underpin much of queer ecology's theorisation. Bomans places great importance on history and memory stating, 'literature can lead to reparative "story-membering" and to possibilities for the past, the present and the future' (165). This idea of reparation and humanitarian justice ties in with the

Haitian idea of *rasanblaj* and of queer embodiment as weaving together these complex strands of history. Present in the literature here is the imperative to gather these interdisciplinary alliances in a complex and interwoven whole to reflect complex histories in the reparative and decolonial project in which storytelling plays a central part.

A work which has explored the environment in Haitian literature is, *Migration and Refuge: An Eco-Archive of Haitian Literature 1982-2017* (Walsh, 2019) which defines its compilation as 'a body of literary texts that depict ecological change over time and its impact on matters of social and environmental justice' (3). As a point of departure, Walsh draws on Yanick Lahen's work *Failles* (2010) in order to address the layers of environmental devastation in Haiti laid bare by the 2010 earthquake and the literature which subsequently emerged from this event. To this end, Walsh draws on Rob Nixon's conception of Slow Violence and states that, 'for Lahens and other Caribbean thinkers, questions of climate change and the survival of the planet have always been inextricably linked to the foundational problem of slavery' (5). Additionally, the study is grounded in the Haitian proverb 'tè glise', meaning slippery ground, as a lens through which to discuss implications for thinking ecologically and geologically about Haiti (Danticat, 2010). Through this exploration of natural disaster, Walsh and Lahens interrogate the sedimented layers of Haiti's history of colonialism, neocolonial foreign intervention, and dictatorship that were violently thrown to light by an earthquake which exposed the accumulated geological and social palimpsest of environmental degradation that had led to this critical point. This dissertation will apply this approach of interrogating these layers to a context of processual climate change in contrast to a singular natural disaster event.

In a similar manner to that which I will discuss using sugarcane, environmental anthropologist Amitav Ghosh has written in his work *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2022) regarding the global, neocolonial, capitalist climate crisis through the lens of the nutmeg plant. Ghosh

takes the nutmeg as the non-human protagonist of his analysis in order to argue both for the agency of our Earth's ecology in shaping world history, and for the significance of the birth of the plantation in our current environmental predicament. Central to Ghosh's argument is the importance of storytelling as a key tool with which to combat the climate crisis:

> 'This is the great burden that now rests upon writers, artists, filmmakers, and everyone else who is involved in the telling of stories: to us falls the task of imaginatively restoring agency and voice to nonhumans. As with all the most important artistic endeavours in human history, this is a task that is at once aesthetic and political – and because of the magnitude of the crisis that besets the planet, it is now freighted with the most pressing moral urgency.' (204)

For Ghosh, storytelling is essential for nurturing empathy and restoring agency both to indigenous communities and non-human agents as a way in which to conceive of a vitalist environmental politics which recognises the interconnectedness of humans with their earth. In Ghosh's analysis, whilst there is much recognition of gendered and racialised concerns, queerness and queer ecologies are not explicitly addressed.

Geographical Mappings and Explorations

This project draws upon the field of Geography in regard to primarily literary and urban geographies to contextualise these literary works within their sedimented ecologies and mapped environments from the Caribbean to urban diasporas in the US and Canada. One such scholar utilising this approach is Katherine McKittrick whose works *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006) and 'Plantation Futures' (2013) explore plantation geographies in creative works including the connection Dionne Brand traces between the US, Canada, and the Caribbean. McKittrick re-centres positionalities overlooked or oppressed historically by Geography, placing 'subaltern subjectivities, stories,

and lands' at the centre of her research (x). McKittrick draws on Glissant's 'poetics of landscape' in order to create a deeper sense of place which challenges traditional cartographic and colonial understandings:

> **'**The poetics of landscape allow black women to critique the boundaries of transatlantic slavery, rewrite national narratives, respatialise feminism, and develop new pathways across traditional geographic arrangements; they also offer several reconceptualisations of space and place, positioning black women as geographic subjects who provide spatial clues as to how more humanly workable geographies might be imagined' (2006, xxiii).

McKittrick's 'Plantation Futures' also employs urban geographies in order to examine the ways in which the plantation is reproduced in the forms of prisons and impoverished cities, arguing that these racial economies echo the economic structure of the plantocracy. In this way, the plantation has been demonstrated to be reproduced outside of its historical and spatial boundedness, an extending influence which reaches into the urban space.

The collection, *Surveying the American Tropics: A Literary Geography* by Fumagalli et al. (2013), takes a literary geographic approach to writing from South America, the Caribbean, and North America including work from writers such as Junot Diaz and Edwidge Danticat. This collection recognises the fluidity of diasporic writing as taking place across space and the telescoping lens between individual subjectivities and national concerns as the authors state that, 'a concern with literary geography involves the constant lengthening and shortening of focus' (12). As such, the approach presented here aims to decolonise traditional geographic approaches and to centre narratives which are personal and fictional, as opposed to national and 'objective'.

Geographers have also conducted exploration into queer urban studies such as Jen Jack Gieseking (2020) whose article, 'Mapping Lesbian and Queer Lines of Desire: Constellations of Queer Urban Space' discusses lesbian urban geographies in New York through discussions and mental mapping undertaken with research participants of varying ages and backgrounds. Gieseking's primary conception of queer urban space is that of constituting 'constellations' which she defines as: 'contemporary lesbians and queers often create and rely on fragmented and fleeting experiences in lesbian-queer places, evoking patterns based on generational, racialised, and classed identities' (941). The nature of queer urban space as being fluid and impermanent is linked to the lesser urban political and economic power of queer communities and the urban precarity this engenders. Within this, Gieseking states that 'it is racial and class identities that most significantly define the sprawl or clustering of constellations across the city' (956). Furthermore, it is stated that, 'importantly, my theorization of dyke constellations as resilience and resistance follows from and is indebted to relational geographic theorizations of constellations as networks of decolonization' (957). For Gieseking, racial and (neo)colonial considerations are highly present in their queer investigations and this theory of 'dyke constellations' will be drawn upon in this dissertations as a way through which the authors construct a queer counter-topography of their city. Gieseking also draws on wider geographical concepts such AbdouMaliq Simone's (2004) theory of people as infrastructure saying, 'like other marginalized groups the world over, my participants also use people as infrastructure, often referring to ex-girlfriends, lovers, and friends as guiding beacons' (947). Gieseking identifies a gap in the urban geographical literature stating, 'queer theory rarely draws on Geography, and most geographers rarely apply queer theory' (942). This research will build on this notion of queer constellations and address the observed gap between Geography and queer theory by employing a queer ecological approach which emphasises its inextricability rather than its separateness.

Similarly, geographer Matthew Gandy (2012) proposes a more complex reading of queer urban ecologies which moves 'analysis beyond queer space as a politics of spatial appropriation towards an enriched engagement with the complexity of urban nature itself we may be opening up hitherto unnoticed lines of dialogue and intersection. In particular, we may begin to bring some of the political dimensions of urban ecology into closer alignment with the cultural and material complexities of urban space.' (Cited in Heynen, 2018, 449). Gandy acknowledges the need for material geographies to be applied to the individual, political, and subjective experience in order to more fully conceptualise queer geographies in urban space. In his paper, 'Queer Ecology: Nature, Sexuality, and Heterotopic Alliances', (2012) Gandy also critically discusses Abney Park in London as a space both popular with the queer community for cruising and one of an overgrown, wild urban nature of ecological importance. Gandy draws connections between state attempts to organise and control wild urban nature and police queer activity, suggesting the possibility for 'heterotopic alliances in the contemporary city' between queer and ecological aims. For my purposes, whilst Gandy's analysis centres around the moral policing of one specific London park, he demonstrates the connection between 'taming' wilderness and queer behaviours and the salience of these regulatory practices in urban life.

Similarly, in Natalie Oswin's (2008) article, 'Critical Geographies and the Uses of Sexuality: Deconstructing Queer Space', Oswin recurrently refers to 'constellations of power' to convey the complex nature of defining queer space. Oswin states that 'rather than clinging to the fiction that we can locate queer spaces that exist in coherent opposition to heterosexual spaces, we need to intensify examinations of what comes together in processes of sexualization. By abandoning belief in the existence of facile geometries of heroes and hegemons, analysis is opened up to the myriad uses of sexuality' (97). To this end, early geographical queer investigations by feminist geographers such as Gill Valentine (2003) are

discussed having positioned queer spaces as well-defined, white, and predominantly middle class with little attention paid to their complexity and diversity. Oswin calls for a greater consideration of subjectivity in queer space, and to view these spatialisations as interwoven rather than in isolation with each other. Here again we find reference to constellations which inform my analysis of the queer connections charted across these works forming their counter-topography of queer experiences.

Geographical treatments of literature are also undertaken in the article 'Queer Ecology: Shared Horizons after Disturbance', by Jonathan Mullins (2020) in which he employs queer ecology to analyse the poetry and photography of two Italian artists. Mullins calls for 'coalitions' between disciplines and a focus on 'imaginative geographies' to provoke a deeper understanding of time and space. Mullins states that 'thinking more imaginatively about Geography is an ideological lever that not only facilitates an awareness of our positioning in a complex system, be it at the level of disciplinary strictures or of political and material formations, but also constitutes an epistemology, and a playful way of reimagining political boundaries, through entanglement, and the undoing of territory, binaries, and other simplistic morphologies.' This emphasis on entanglement underscores much of queer ecology's theoretical basis as well as the Caribbean practice of fragmentation and rejoining of *rasanblaj* which constitute the underpinnings for my cross-disciplinary theoretical framework.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed presents the inseparability of queer ecologies from decolonial and feminist concerns and that this can be applied productively to literary works. Throughout the literature there are recurrent ideas of coalition, constellation, and alliance which emphasise the importance of subjectivity, complexity, and the need for a diversity of approaches. These notions of entanglement and constellation will be further extended within this research to investigate the connective tissue between urban centres within and without of the Caribbean and the ways this can be considered as a piece of *rasanblaj* and as a counter-

topography. Lefebvre's (2003) conception of planetary urbanism and its operational landscapes alongside ongoing imperial geopolitics will provide a link between these disparate spaces and ideas. It can be seen from the existing literature that whilst the queer or the ecological is often discussed in an urban or literary context, these approaches are rarely considered in unison. In linking the four disciplinary fields of queer theory, ecology, literature, and Geography, the proposed project will address this gap in the research through an investigation of these critical interconnections.

Content Structure: From the Plantation to the City

This dissertation follows the space of the sugar plantation and the flows of queer love, water, and cityscapes that emanate to and from it through three chapters. The first chapter, 'Sugar: (Bitter)sweet Reclamations and Contestations', will discuss the use and subversion of the trope of feminised land in the works as a site of trauma as well as the reclamation of agency and sexuality. This will begin with a discussion of the expression of bittersweet queer love in Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) and Audre Lorde's 'biomythography' *Zami: A new spelling of my name* (1982). These writers draw on sugar and plantation imagery in ways which reclaim this space and sweetness through queer love, creating powerful metaphors for reappropriation. This chapter will explore how sugar is also reappropriated through revolutionary imagery in Brand's work and in Myriam Chancy's novel, *Spirit of Haiti* (2003), as the plantation landscapes are narratively reworked to serve revolutionary ends. Finally, the cyclical nature of Caribbean history will be explored through cycles of sugar in Roxane Gay's short story collection, *Ayiti* (2011). Andrea Chung's visual art will be drawn upon here as she employs sugar as a medium for expressing cycles of sexualising exoticism, violence, and environmental degradation in Jamaica.

The second chapter, ‘Water: Flows and Magic’ will take water as a key ecological extension of the sugar plantation, tracing its flows to and from it, and the spiritual and personal properties this engenders. As with sugar, water will be shown as a vehicle through which to present queer love through its ability to quench thirst, wash clean, and irrigate new growth. Water will be discussed as a key site of magical realism in the novels through *Spirit of Haiti* and Lisandro Suriel’s photography which presents Vodou spirits in ways which decolonise understandings of linear conceptions of space and time. This will be contrasted with the treatment of gender in European surrealism and the reclamations of these myths will be explored through Lorde’s biomythography. This chapter will also return to the theme of cycles through water and fire through which the writers present destruction and rebirth in ways which express the reassertion of so-called deviant bodies.

The final chapter, ‘Urban Ecologies: Subways and Suburbia’ traces the ideological and physical reach of the sugar plantation to urban environments from which diasporic writing takes place. This chapter employs scholarship from urban political ecology to demonstrate the presence of the plantocracy in the neoliberal city and the ways in which queer selfhood is negotiated through space. This chapter traces the characters’ arrivals in the Western cities New York and Toronto to trace reversed and extended colonialism and the ways in which David Scott’s theory of tragedy can used to view this extension of the plantation into modernity. This discussion of the genre of tragedy will be considered alongside that of magical realism and discussed whether the two may both serve as important decolonising lenses in an urban setting. The materiality of the urban environment will be discussed through Dionne Brand and Audre Lorde’s poetry as transformed nature permeates the poems, tracing connections between cities and their larger ecologies. As a key urban setting in these works, the subway will be discussed as a subterranean, clandestine space of mixing in which queer subjectivities and fears reveal themselves as well as acts of resistance and revolution.

Revolution in the city as presented through *In Another Place* will be discussed as sugar reappears as a metaphor for reclamations of joy and love on the city streets. Finally, this chapter will discuss constellatory alliances as they appear in the city as the queer urban experience is demonstrated to be both fragmentary and connective, guiding and scattered.

Chapter One – Sugar: (Bitter)sweet Reclamations and Contestations

The mapping of the Caribbean landscape is one largely characterised and fragmented by colonial plantations, across which the extraction of sugar has played a defining role in the economies and ecologies of exploitation in the region. Dominating large swathes of land, producing monocultures of crops, and drawing on regions' water supplies, the production of sugar has historically produced an ecology of extraction which multiplies wealth for powers in the global north whilst impoverishing resources for Caribbean populations. Plantation work is often exploitative and bloody, the tools used to harvest it and the cane itself being sharp and cutting, this work connecting cane cutters in the Caribbean with demands for sweetness from across the world. The gradual erosion and slow and fast violence of exploitation have economic and ecological implications for vulnerability to environmental instability and natural hazards in the Caribbean as well as financial and social precarity in a time of changing climate. Antonio Benítez-Rojo termed this 'the repeating Plantation' as a conceptual starting point from which to explore manifold issues as it serves as 'a telescope for observing the changes and the continuities of the Caribbean galaxy through the lenses of multifold disciplines, namely, economics, history, sociology, political science, anthropology, ethnology, demography, as well as through innumerable practices, which range from the commercial to the military, from the religious to the literary' (Benítez-Rojo, 1996, 38). The metaphorical weight of these implications in a grain of sugar has been observed and explored by writers as representing a connective tissue between Caribbean sugarcane fields and European dinner tables, the sugar produced under slavery symbolically rotting European teeth (Leigh Goffe, 2019). Sugar is sweet and yet harmful, eroding over time like the landscape that produced it. Within this, the exploitation of women during slavery as reproductive

vessels for the further production of enslaved people and the feminising of land as mother nature subjugated under masculine, colonial forces have particular gendered implications for the significance of sugar.

In particular, queer writers draw on the ecology of the sugar plantation to express a certain bittersweetness by which pain and pleasure are intertwined. A woman loving another woman in the Caribbean is a revolutionary act which goes against the requirement for the reproductive role of women in producing a plantation economy. As such, Tinsley's (2020) assertion that women loving each other is like a cane cutter thiefing sugar opens up much space for literary exploration among queer writers which I will undertake in concomitance with queer ecological and geographical lenses. Taking a queer ecological approach, it is productive to illustrate the queerness of the sugarcane plant itself as sugarcane in its natural form is a cross-pollinating plant which has both 'male' and 'female' parts, i.e. anthers and stigmas (see Fig. 1, Leite do Amaral et al., 2013). In this way, as a plant which can be considered in and of itself hermaphroditic, or queer, tracing a queer ecology of the sugar plantation begins in the very plant itself. From this point of inception to wider concerns of our complicated, queer environments, gendered and sexualised views of the sugar plantation can be deconstructed, and their social imprints challenged. Building on Amitav Ghosh's (2022) approach, I will take sugarcane as an active non-human agent in this analysis, capable of shaping narratives of histories. In this way, the sugar plantation provides a space from which to investigate both actual and metaphorical discussions and representations of sugar as a source of sustenance and sweetness, but also something bittersweet and bloodied. Subsequent iterations of the sugar plantation are also found in these works through its metastasized legacies of factories in the Caribbean feeding modern consumerism. This chapter will build on Tinsley and Gosh's work with further explorations of queer ecologies as they are enacted in these (g)local spaces through discussions of the ways in which sugar is

employed to reflect on bittersweet eroticism and love, sugar as revolution, and cycles of power and exploitation.

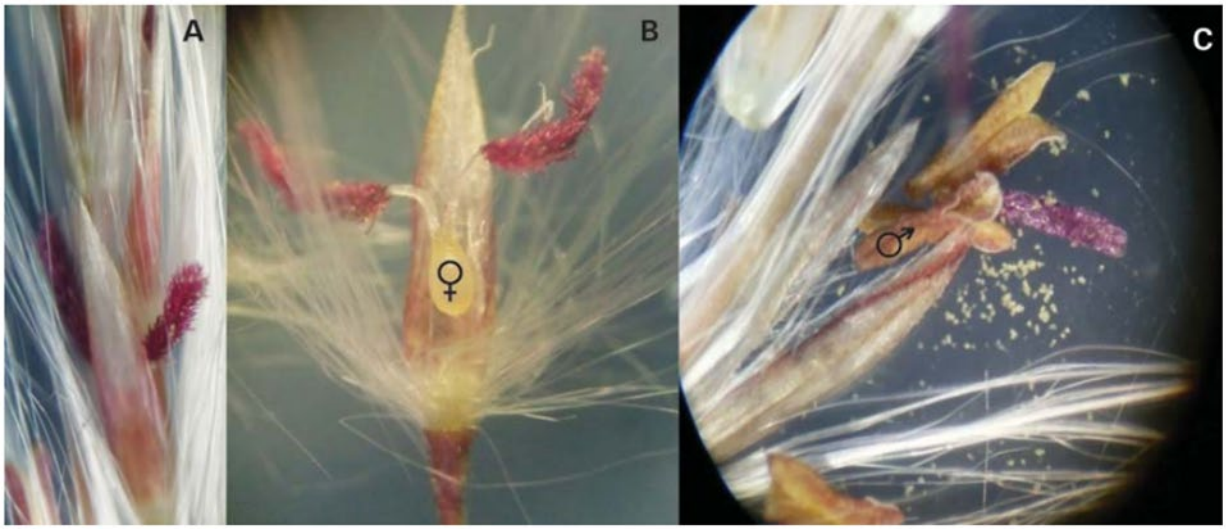

Fig. 1 Sugarcane reproductive organsm spikelets (A), anthers (B), and stigmas (C) (Leite do Amaral et al., 2013)

Bittersweet Love

The metaphor of sugar representing love and sweetness is a powerful one in the Caribbean context due to the mesh of colonial, gender, and environmental powers at play in the production of sugar. As Tinsley foregrounds, Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here* illustrates this reclamation of sugar between two women, Elizete, a cane cutter on a sugar plantation in post-slavery Trinidad, the work of which nevertheless remains close to slavery conditions, and Verlia, an activist working on unionising the plantation. In this novel, the women's love is described in terms of sugar as the prevailing motif by which they reclaim agency and express connection. The opening line of the novel, 'Grace. Is Grace, yes. And I take it, quiet, quiet, like thiefing sugar' (3) introduces from the beginning that a capitalised state of Grace is something sweet that the protagonist must steal, the clandestine nature of which is underscored by the repetition of 'quiet, quiet', a reminder that a woman loving

another woman is a political and subversive act on the plantation, going against their reproductive value. This form of queer love has been observed as not only a personal but a political act that resists colonial oppression. For instance, Tinsley (2008) argues that same-sex relationships were a means by which women resisted the commodification of their bodies during slavery by forming erotic relationships in the sex-segregated holds of slave ships. Tinsley states that, 'enslaved women and their descendants used sex with each other to effect a different kind of erotic autonomy, on how same-sex eroticism enters into the history of sexual labour in the Caribbean as a practice by which women take control of sexuality as a resource they share with each other' (20, 2020). This claiming of queer, erotic autonomy is important here in the act of reclaiming a 'resource' as, in a similar manner to Elizete stealing sugar, queer love becomes a form of sustenance which resists the sexual and reproductive exploitation of these women. This idea of a counter-exploitation of sorts is expressed in *In Another Place* when Elizete says that 'is nothing that draw me to she but that and the way she want nothing from me' (10), suggesting that her love for Verlia arises from its non-transactional nature, something which defines other aspects of her life such as her master who sexually abuses her. Here, we see the presentation of queer love through sugar as a manner by which Elizete experiences love in an empowering manner which is closely intertwined with her environment.

In a similar manner, Audre Lorde also depicts queer lovers as providing sweetness in her 'biomythography', *Zami, A new spelling of my name,* through the lovers Ginger and Afrekete. Lorde's first queer love, Ginger, is associated with sweetness and food imagery, having 'skin the color of well-buttered caramel and a body like the Venus of Willendorf. Ginger was gorgeously fat, with an open knowledge about her body's movement that was delicate and precise' (157). Here, the images of sweetness and excess evoke a reclamation which takes place across two possible sites; one being the sugar plantation, and the other the black

woman's body as Lorde celebrates Ginger's largeness. Historically eroticised and commodified under the colonial gaze, Lorde's description of Ginger's body recalls the African historical figure Saartje Baartman, known as Hottentot Venus, who was exhibited as an object of fascination in 1810 due to her large buttocks and labia and was used to justify racist treatments of black women which 'publicly envisioned black female sexuality as a test site for determining the boundary between human and simian, civilization and barbarism.' (Tinsley, 2020). Audre Lorde subverts this imagery through the character of Ginger as she celebrates this largeness and sexuality which was once used to animalise to instead humanise. Lorde depicts two women making love away from the male colonial gaze and describes Ginger's largeness and sweetness in terms of a homecoming experience: 'the sweetness of her body meeting and filling my mouth, my hands, wherever I touched, felt right and completing, as if I had been born to make love to this woman, and was remembering her body rather than learning it deeply for the first time' (161). Present here is a moment of queer euphoria and of belonging which recalls Lorde's essay work on erotic power in which she states that, 'we have been warned against [the erotic] all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves' (30, 1978). Lorde's essay on the erotic can be seen at work in her biomythography as she enacts this reclamation of erotic power between women rather than for 'the service of men' with Ginger. In a similar manner, Brand expresses Elizete and Verlia's same-sex relationship in terms of eroticism which defies the male colonial gaze as Elizete states that her master, 'gone mad catching me lying underneath Verlia, and even the sure killing in him couldn't sweep me away from the sweetness of her' (5). Brand presents Verlia's sweetness and love as transcending violence, the verb 'sweep' suggestive of an

environmental force such as a strong wave or wind, evocative of the strong weather events to which the Caribbean is prone, but Verlia's stolen sweetness anchors during the storm.

Lorde returns to the theme of sweetness with a lover in the final pages of *Zami* through her relationship with Kitty, said to be short for Afrekete, with whom the link to their shared Caribbean heritage is made explicit through their inclusion of fruit from the region in their love making. Afrekete is both here a mythical and a biographical figure as Lorde stretches the metaphorical elasticity of her biomythography to create an archetypal figure who leads the young, queer protagonist to revelations of selfhood through a complexly intertwined myth which draws both on African and European figures such as Oya and Aphrodite (Ball, 2003). In italicised reverie, Lorde describes how *'I held you, lay between your brown legs, slowly playing my tongue through your familiar forests, slowly licking and swallowing as the deep undulations and tidal motions of your strong body slowly mashed ripe banana into a beige cream that mixed with the juices of your electric flesh'* (296). References to forests, tidal motions, and bananas are evocative of the Caribbean landscape, again suggesting a kind of homecoming and a reclamation of a colonially stolen and denigrated eroticism. However, although it is a sweet image, the passage here holds less of a shadow of the sugar plantation, as it is the sweetness of fruit rather than the bittersweetness of sugarcane that they reclaim in their love making. Charlene Ball (2023) describes the way in which this passage subverts colonial tropes of fetishising and exoticizing Caribbean women as it presents,

> 'colonialist descriptions of native women of colour in exotic garb who bear upon their heads succulent fruits and other dainties, submissively presenting them-along with their own sexually available selves-to a (male, white) protagonist. Such a description ordinarily makes the woman described into a picturesque, objectified Other […] Lorde, however, deconstructs this objectified image by depicting one woman of colour bringing these riches from the earth not to a white man, but to another black

> woman, and not for the gaze of the white colonizer, but for the gaze of women-loving women.' (71)

In this way, in a similar manner to Brand's subversion of the use of sugarcane as a tool of suppression, as instead presenting it as a powerful queer symbol between women, Lorde and Afrekete's exchange of fruit and its use in their erotic play is a powerful reappropriation of othering imagery. The use of fruit imagery here is also interesting when considered in conjunction with local beliefs and associations of fruit with femininity. In an interview for Concordia University's oral history archives, Trinidadian participant Elizabeth (2020) recalls a warning from her childhood in which elders would chastise: 'if girls climb trees, they get the fruit sour' as a means by which to protect girl's femininity by discouraging activities considered masculine, the associations between fruit and femininity so strong as to be said to influence the fruit's development itself. In Lorde's biomythography however, in almost radically erotic narration, Lorde employs fruit in a way which performs a reclamation of this feminised symbol, away from its reproductive capacities and foregrounded in erotic joy between two women. Lorde takes the phallic banana and turns it to sweet mush shared between two Caribbean women, transforming this masculine symbol into something feminised, sustaining, and gentle. The implications of this fruit(ful) imagery is also extended as the setting of this scene of Afrekete's apartment is evocative of a lush Garden of Eden as Lorde depicts that, 'across each window, there were built-in shelves at different levels. From these shelves tossed and frothed, hung and leaned and stood, pot after clay pot of green and tousled large and small-leaved plants of all shapes and conditions' (295). Afrekete's apartment is described in terms of a jungle-like, tropical paradise evocative of Caribbean and African landscapes, the dynamic verbs 'tossed', 'frothed', and 'tousled', creating the impression of jostling, bristling, and uncontrolled growth. In their own Garden of Eden, plants flourish and fruits hold no shame but are instead an emancipatory agent in queer

eroticism. Creating their own environment in an apartment in New York, Lorde and Afrekete exist in their own island on which they produce sweetness of their own making, yielding transformative and emancipatory results far from notions of the sourness or bittersweetness of spoiled fruit and blood-soaked sugar.

Sugar as Revolution

The employment of sugar in these works is both connected with personal reclamations of love and eroticism and with revolution as an organised political undertaking. For instance, Dionne Brand's character Verlia is associated not only with erotic but also political power through her work in the black power movement to unionise the cane cutters. Verlia's politics is presented as being intimately connected with her sexuality and an erotic reclamation with sugar provides the connective bridge between the two. Elizete describes her political apathy transformed by Verlia: 'Revolution, my backside. Then, she say 'Sister.' […] I know I hear it silver, silver clinking like bracelets when a woman lift her arm to comb hair. Silvery, silvery the wind take it. […] Sweet, sweet, my tongue sweet to answer she and it surprise me how I want to touch she teeth and hold she mouth on that word' (14). The imagery here is highly contrasting of typical masculine associations of revolution with blood and violence, instead presenting a gentle, feminised image in which sisterhood is central and revolution sounds like the tinkling of bracelets while a woman brushes her hair. Sugar and sweetness recur in this image although this is tinged with a violent undertone in the phrase, 'I want to touch she teeth and hold she mouth on that word'. Here, revolution is presented as intimately connected with erotic desire verging on pain, the reference to teeth suggesting a certain hunger and struggle which is at once political and physical. In conjunction with the organised political resistance Verlia is enacting here is also an individual resistance which is queer in nature. Tinsley argues that queerness itself in the Caribbean context constitutes 'a praxis of resistance. Queer in the sense of marking disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so:

connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living deaths' (2008, 199). In this way, reclaiming 'commodified flesh' for themselves in their queer relationship is intertwined with Verlia's mission to reclaim sugar production for the cane cutters through unionising. Revolutionary and erotic power are near indivisible in Brand's narrative, and both engender action in Elizete allowing her to escape her apathy and the 'living death' of which Tinsley speaks. In connection with this idea of slavery as a 'living death', particularly in the Haitian context, the metaphor of zombification has been explored by writers with revolution as a de-zombifying force (Frankétienne 2010, Dépestre, 1979). Drawn from Haitian Vodou, the figure of the zombie implies an individual forced to exist in a state of living death controlled by the perpetrator of the spell and has been redeployed in the context of slavery, but also in subsequent iterations of power in the region. Colin Dayan states, 'the phantasm of the zombi – a soulless husk deprived of freedom – is the ultimate sign of loss and dispossession. In Haiti, memories of servitude are transposed into a new idiom that both reproduces and dismantles a twentieth-century history of forced labor and denigration that become particularly accurate during the American occupation of Haiti […] This reimagined zombi has now been absorbed into the texture of previous oral traditions, structurally reproducing the idea of slavery in a new context' (1998, 145). It is in this way that the figure of the zombie can be employed to consider Elizete's apathy as a cane cutter and Verlia's revolutionary work both politically and erotically as a de-zombifying catalyst. Significantly, in Haitian lore, the antidote to zombification is said to be salt, the antithesis of sugar. However, in Brand's narrative sugar acts both as the zombifying and liberating agent as it changes hands from coloniser to colonised. This treatment of sugar is reflective of Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity in which new cultural forms are produced in the process

colonisation (Bhabha, 2004). Here, Brand reconstructs sugar and zombification in this hybrid, third space and, rather than seek an oppositional antidote, repurposes the means of oppression for revolutionary means.

The connection between sugar and revolution is also drawn upon in the opening pages of Myriam Chancy's novel, *Spirit of Haiti,* which, similarly to Brand, presents a feminised view of revolution intertwined with plantation imagery and the ruins of Henri Christophe's kingdom built on the backs of his exploited subjects. That Chancy's intergenerational tale of Haiti begins with a description of a key event in the Haitian revolution, the birth of Christophe, from a female point of view is significant as it makes visible the women behind male revolutionary figure. The midwife that delivers Christophe tells his mother that, 'Your son […] will be as strong as my woman's back' (10). This is reflective of the Haitian creation myth figure of Sor Rose, an enslaved woman raped by a white coloniser, from which the Haitian Republic is born (Duffy, 2001). Chancy begins her own novel with the description of a birth which creates the Haiti of her setting, foregrounding women's sacrifice and pain. The setting of this female retelling of the event is sensorially saturated with sugar imagery as well as feminine imagery, as Chancy describes 'the thick and pungent smell of burned sugar rises in the air, envelops them with sweet victory' (p.12) Revolution here is again intimately connected with sugar as being symbolic of the repression against which the enslaved people are fighting, the reference to 'sweet victory' juxtaposing ironically the smell of the burned sugar as the revolutionaries reclaim sweetness through destroying something sweet. The violence of the revolutionary imagery is also highly present in the phase, 'bullets fly through the night air, splicing brown skin much like machetes hack through stalks of cane during cultivation' (p.12). Chancy can be seen to draw a parallel between the direct violence of bullets in battle with the indirect, slow violence of sugar cane cultivation, the 'brown skin' and 'stalks of cane' becoming synonymous with each other and intimately linked. Intertwined

here we find again connections between women's strength, pain, and revolution in the opening lines of the novel in order to set the scene for a narrative which challenges gender, sexuality, and political themes. The revolutionaries here destroy sugar in order to achieve sweetness, a juxtaposition which mirrors the bittersweetness of childbirth, layered images which foreground femininity in this revolutionary tale.

Sugar as Cycles

Concomitantly with its connections with revolution, sugar is also connected with cycles of exploitation and violence in the Caribbean which create a *rasanblaj* of layered histories through the medium of sugar. Here again we find close associations between violent imagery, blood, and sugar which form connections between the Caribbean's colonised past and its current neocolonial exploitation under capitalist global markets. Benítez-Rojo terms the Caribbean to be a 'repeating island' as, 'within the sociocultural fluidity that the Caribbean archipelago presents, within its historiographic turbulence and its ethnological and linguistic clamour, within its generalised instability of vertigo and hurricane, one can sense the features of an island that "repeats" itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs' (1996, 3). This repetition and bifurcation of history can be viewed in the manner of cycles as these complications of international colonial histories repeat and renew themselves in differing forms. Sugarcane can be viewed as a key element in these repeating, cyclical narratives as demonstrated in Roxane Gay's short story 'In the Manner of Water and Light' taking place in Haiti in which three generations of women work to heal the inherited traumas of their past. In this story, the grandmother works as a cane cutter at a Haitian plantation on the border with the Dominican Republic and conceives the narrator's mother in the Massacre River while hiding among dead bodies. The daughter narrates that when her mother 'tries to explain how she is haunted by the smell of blood, she says that her senses are suffused with

it' (83) and that 'my grandmother is also haunted by smells. She cannot stand the smell of anything sweet. If she smells sweetness in the air, she purses her lip and sucks on her teeth, shaking her head' (85). From one generation to the next, the haunting smell of sugar turns to that of blood as the conditions of violence and exploitation have transcended generations. Whilst Gay's story is set long after the Haitian Revolution, the conditions the story references are evocative of slavery and of the cyclical nature of exploitation in the region. It has been argued that since Haiti's independence, it has been foreign powers' perpetual aim to return Haitians to the plantation and to slavery in order to serve foreign capital under global capitalism replacing colonialism (DuBois, 2012 cited from Chancy 2021). This sense of repetition and cycles has perpetuated itself through companies such as the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) set up during the first US occupation (1915-1934) overseen by the US-trained Garde d'Haïti after US powers left in 1934, an army which supported a series of US-backed dictators (*Bitter Cane*, 1983). Investment from the US allowed by dictator Francois Duvalier and then further encouraged by his son Jean-Claude Duvalier engendered the establishment of hundreds of factories and sweat shops employing people under conditions of both slow and fast violence. Myriam Chancy describes these workers as the 'casualties of a capitalist social system that requires Haiti's (and other third world nations') labour force, their only economic "comparable advantage," to produce exports at reduced rates, migrants […] are a hostage group suffering what I call death by capital. World markets persist in labelling labour a currency for sale, while the bodies that perform it have no way of negotiating the value of their production; they are unable to withdraw their labour since they are not considered slaves, even though their wages are virtually non-existent' (2013, 104). Chancy demonstrates the ways in which slavery reproduces itself in a differing guise under global capitalism, ensuring a cyclical abuse of natural and social resources in Haiti. In this way, whilst Gay's story does not take place under slavery, the women's physical, sensorial

antipathies to the smell of sugar and blood are evocative not only of their period in time but also deeper histories of exploitation in the region deeply rooted in the land on which they live.

Similarly, Gay's story from the same collection, 'Sweet on the Tongue' employs sugar as a theme through which to narrate sexual violence in Haiti. In this story, a Haitian woman living in America visiting Haiti is kidnapped and taken to a sugar warehouse where she is raped by multiple men resulting in a pregnancy. Gay employs the setting of the sugar warehouse as a means by which to evoke Haiti's violent past of slavery and exploitation which continues to express itself in the criminality and poverty of the story's setting. The assault is described in juxtaposing images of sweetness and violence in the images of 'the floor sticky with sweet grime' and 'the sugar scratched my bare skin' (68), reflecting the ugly underbelly and violent history of sugar production culminating in this site of anguish. The protagonist describes how 'our bodies sank into the mountain of sugar. Grains of sugar floated in the air as he thrust. In the shafts of sunlight filling the warehouse, the sugar looked beautiful' (68). These juxtapositions of beauty and pain demonstrate the harsh reality of exploitation, the 'mountain of sugar' bringing the outer landscape into the warehouse and suggesting an excess and wealth being made elsewhere. Here again, sugar and blood become actually and symbolically connected in the phrase, 'grains of sugar fell on my tongue as I screamed. The sugar beneath me hardened with my blood' (69). In addition to narrating an individual story, the blood spilled over sugar production under slavery, occupation, and capitalism is personified in the protagonist, trapped in a cycle of violence. Martin Munro (2015) has argued that this thematic of cycles in Caribbean literature presents a dominating theme of perpetual apocalypse, one which the global north is only beginning to recognise and experience due to changing climates. Munro states that, 'Haitian and broader Caribbean history were founded on the apocalyptic meeting of Europeans and Amerindians […] Subsequent Haitian and Caribbean

history has been shaped by the no less apocalyptic reality of plantation slavery and colonialism, and their enduring legacies' (1). Munro states criminality as one such legacy of this state of apocalypse and its ensuing ecological and economic crisis, which is demonstrated directly here in the assault taking place on a mound of sugar. In Gay's story, these layers of apocalypse are revealed in this singular time and place; processual, generational, and apocalyptic histories of enslavement and exploitation through sugar amassing to create the mountain on which the narrator's own apocalypse occurs. Beneath this pinnacle are the sedimented layers of the Plantationocene, culminating in our current ecological emergency.

In this story again, Gay demonstrates generational violence presenting itself sensorially through taste as the protagonist states that 'my grandmother's tongue, like my son's, is awfully fond of sugar' (72). Whilst the women in 'In the Manner of Water and Light' revile the smell of blood and sugar, the characters' fondness for it here can be viewed as presenting a bittersweet connection with their roots. Tinged with violence and perhaps signalling a chilling repetition of, and entrapment within the cycle, the characters must live with the recollections of violence and find sweetness where they can. Importantly, it is the meeting with her grandmother's queer Caribbean nurse, Maria, that initiates the connection between these two generations as her encounter with Maria serves as the catalyst through which the protagonist chooses to introduce her son to her family. Gay's description of Maria as having 'dark brown skin, white teeth, soft sweet-smelling skin' (28) again recalls the theme of sweetness, but here in a feminised form associated with care rather than with male violence and the protagonist describes how in her company, her 'body feels loose, like every part of me is falling away' (53). Whilst the character is uninterested in Maria's advances, this encounter with a Caribbean woman untethered to her past serves as a reminder of a feminised sweetness which catalyses a reconnection with her family. This queer encounter can thus be viewed as performing a reclamation and transformation of the sugar and sweetness that has

caused the protagonist so much pain. Here also, we see a reclamation of environment through sweetness which looks towards a possible path of healing during the Plantationocene of care and nurture rather than violence and exploitation.

Of note here is the work of artist Andrea Chung who employs sugar as a medium through which to explore her Jamaican heritage and the ways in which Jamaican history perpetuates itself cyclically. Chung utilises sugar as a sculpting medium in order to underscore sugar's historical role and as something which symbolically acts as a preservative, retaining histories and halting time. Chung highlights sugar's sticky nature with its ability to produce discomfort, reflecting the uneasiness of violent Caribbean histories and what Goffe terms a colonial history 'sugary with the gooeyness of a suspension of Afro-Asian intimacies and the sticky fingers of time' (2019, 54). Chung forges the connection between reproduction and hyper-sexualisation of Jamaicans through sugar in her work 'Sweet Agony' (2011) in which she replicates hyper-phallic Jamaican tourist souvenirs in sugar (figure 2). Chung here implies that tourism, sexual exploitation, and exoticism are the new sugar of Jamaica, presenting new entitlements to Jamaican bodies and sexualities. Though presented here through a male figure, the use of sugar to depict sexual exploitation and abuse is linked again to themes of promiscuity and fertility projected onto Caribbean individuals as forming a part of the plantation economy. This use of sugar through which to explore topics of slavery in the Caribbean has been explored by Leigh Goffe (2019) through what they term a 'gastropoetics' of the sugar plantation by which they suggest that sugar can provide 'an alternative archive, an archive of digestion, which diverges from the traditional contours of the historiography of the Atlantic world. Metaphorically speaking, historiography is a matter of digestion, of who gets absorbed and incorporated into history' (33). In order to 'digest' sugar as a metaphor and as an alternative archive, links between sugar, gender, and sexuality are central to the discussion.

Fig. 2 Sweet Agony, Andrea Chung 2011

That the exploitation of land and labour in the Caribbean is viewed by Gay through a gendered lens in these two stories is important as this is evocative of the fact that in Haiti, the majority of factory workers are women, women who are often vulnerable to sexual abuse by their employers (Bitter Cane, 1983). Chancy highlights this in her discussion of American baseballs being manufactured in Haiti in which she terms baseballs the 'new sugar of the countries' (xxx), stating that 'baseballs of a certain age, hide the means of their fabrication, the exploitation of thousands of Haitian women employed for "American" sport who suffered economic and physical exploitation in order to produce what is in the end both a plaything and a money-maker' (2013, 232). In a similar manner that sugar can be considered an excessive, indulgent ingredient for the sweet teeth of the global north, the presentation here of Haitian women exploited for their labour to make a 'plaything' engenders similar

metaphorical and actual lines of enquiry. Through these metaphorical and actual presentations of sugar, the commodification of Caribbean labour and environments can be seen to reproduce differing forms which each have their inception in the colonial plantation. Entwined with these colonial, cyclical repetitions are enmeshed the trappings of gender and sexuality deeply interlaced with grains of sugar in these works.

Through these works, themes of sugar and sweetness are employed in order to present reclamations and contestations of eroticism, love, and revolution, as well as being illustrative of the cycles of exploitation and power around which the narratives take place. The sugar plantation becomes a site on which to build new meanings of self-hood and queerness whilst recalling deeply rooted histories of colonialism and slavery. This narrative re-working of the sugar plantation can be considered what Cindi Katz (2001) terms a 'counter-topography' which resists and reforms capitalist and colonialist views of what topographical knowledge means to a region, by paying critical attention to the social, emotional, and environmental mesh of relations performed on this space. Far from a homogenous, capitalist, or (neo)colonial view of the sugar plantation, the counter-topographies the writers produce here of complex relations constructed through sugar and bittersweetness, provide a counter-topography which produces 'a critique of the social relations sedimented into space and for scrutinizing the material social practices at all geographic scales through which place is produced' (Katz, 2001, 1229). Reconfiguring here the sense of place of the sugar plantation is important in reclaiming this space amongst the crossroads of power that act upon it. Away from the plantation, we also see writers employing themes of sweetness in their characters in order to represent eroticism and love in ways which counter the sexual labour and abuse that has been historically present on the plantation. This treatment of queer (bitter)sweetness is deeply connected to ecologies of the Caribbean which have been shaped by plantation ecological imperialism and form the initiating event of the geological Plantacionocene. When

considering our geological age of changing climate and Plantationocene, the sedimented layers of which this constitutes are explored here through the lens of sugar. Sugar in these works is deeply entrenched in the character's environments and self-hoods, the queering of which constitutes an important way through which to view the topographies they present on the surface as well as the layers of sediment present underneath. The next chapter will explore that which connects, passes over, and permeates these surfaces, discursively and materially connecting these spaces; water.

Chapter Two - Water: Flows and Magic

Flowing from within and without of the sugar plantation and its extending environments and ideologies, water constitutes another counter-topography through which queer ecologies can be traced in these narratives. By mapping the connections and flows of water as constituting the connective tissue between the plantation, individual, and ocean connecting these islands to the rest of the world, these narratives demonstrate its importance as an ecology to be explored. Such watery spaces include the Atlantic Ocean connecting these Caribbean islands with their diasporic populations and being the historic site of the Middle Passage, a space containing much violence and trauma. A fluid entity, water can be stemmed, redirected and (over)used, and the absence of water in the forms of drought, its reforming into natural hazards, or its liability to become polluted with disease, provide a dangerous quality in addition to its role as essential to life. This overuse and redirection is evident in the sugar plantation as, to produce one kilogram of sugar requires 210 litres of water, constituting a significant intervention and resource reallocation in sugar producing environments where an abundance of sugar often necessarily signifies an absence of water (Water Footprint Network, 2023). Sugarcane production is particularly water intensive as it requires more water than cocoa and coffee crops and further water is required for the production of its transformed products such as molasses, rum, and granular sugar (Hauser, 2017). Fertilisers and pesticides along with the by-products of this production are often then re-released into the water as pollution leaving water 'smelling sweet like sugar' (Galvin 2021). In the post-slavery, capitalist world, water is also redirected from local populations in order to maintain and sustain factory production for global markets, this (ab)use of water for economies of extraction forging a link between past and present. Excess and lack of water, as well as its mutations into deathly hurricanes and tidal waves, make water a keystone, fluid site of climate change, the use of which as a resource will only increase in contention.

One such pertinent instance of water (mis)use in the Caribbean is the construction of the US funded Caracol Industrial Park following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti which diverted and polluted water and land away from increasingly vulnerable Haitians under the guise of economic prosperity and access to global markets (Chancy, 2020). In loud colonial echoes, rather than generate promised prosperity, the industrial park continues to degrade exploited and vulnerable ecosystems using the same cycled water that was redirected into the sugar plantations. The work of Andrea Chung is again illustrative here of these connections as her cyanotype, Brain Coral (2019) uses the sun in creating this print, the watery blues of the chemical coating, and the sugar which she places on the paper along with the coral (see fig. 3). Here, the sugar encroaches on the coral/brain/globe, a ghostly representation of the ecocidal practices which have garnered the higher sea temperatures bleaching the coral and withering green spaces in Caribbean countries along with its individual and global implications of environmental change.

As with and connecting to sugar, water is an important site both metaphorically and physically through which to explore colonio-capitalist powers as well as local practices which reclaim these spaces and flows. Water as a resource has gendered implications as the collection and storage of water in the Caribbean has typically been the work of women. Mark Hauser (2017) demonstrates this in his discussion of 'water ways' in which he recounts how Caribbean women have historically inscribed their own methods of water storage through the making of calabashes. Hauser observes, 'water ways inscribe themselves into landscapes, household assemblages, and written accounts. Some water ways were passed from one generation to the next, and others were borrowed. All helped reproduce and negotiate competing agendas of production and reproduction that plagued plantation landscapes' (228). Redirecting and inscribing these new flows of water in response to colonio-patriarchal scarcity constitutes another counter-topography through which to consider queer ecologies.

This is demonstrated in the works through watery allegories which present a quenching of thirst or a washing clean in which the writers explore what it means for women not only to thief sugar for themselves, but also to use gendered water practices for their own growth. Water is shown to be both withheld and reclaimed in the works and spaces such as rivers and the sea provide symbolic markers of pain and renewal, their fluid nature permeating the characters' lives. The Caribbean's archipelagic nature also makes water a central element of both connection and separation geographically and ideologically. Bodies of water frequently become space in which local beliefs and traditions are enacted and magical realism occurs through this fluid, connective, and transformative medium. Through narrative discussions of water, time and place become fluid and flowing in ways which run counter to Western conceptions of linearity and reveal the layers of history this water churns over and erodes. This chapter will explore the politics and poetics of water explored by these writers in order to reflect on themes of queer eroticism and love, atemporality and magical realism, and cycles of history through water and its antithesis, fire.

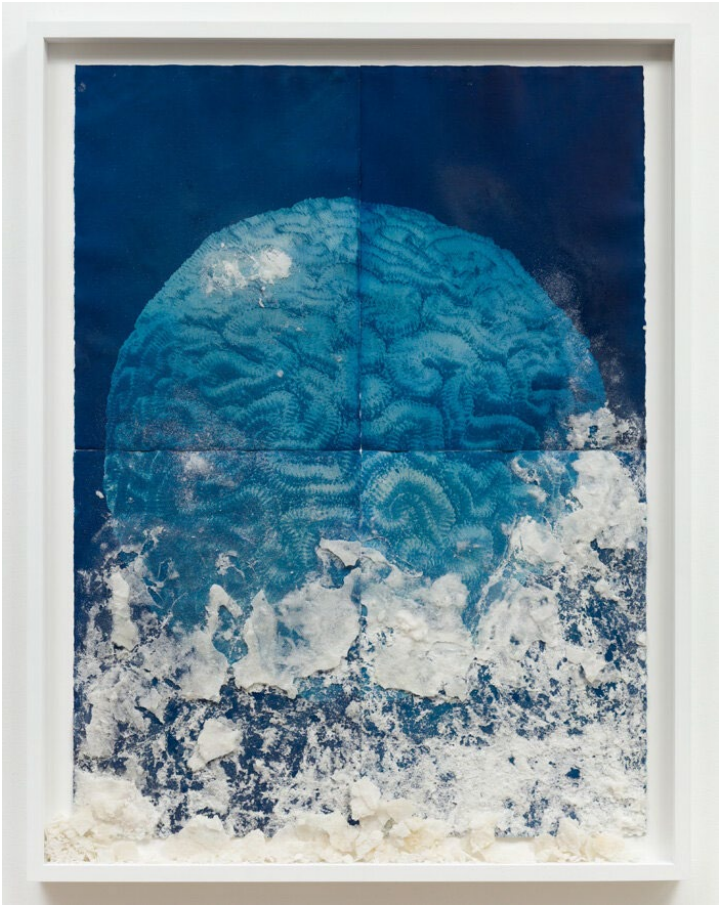

Fig. 3 Brain Coral, Andrea Chung (2019)

Water and Queer Love

Tracing water's flows within and without of the sugar plantation constitutes a key connective element of this ecology, a queer perspective of which opens up much fertile ground for the exploration of queer love and eroticism as presented through watery imageries. In a similar manner through which the writers have been demonstrated to subvert sugar, treatments of water reappropriate colonial maritime spaces of slave ships and neocolonial environmental scarcity, as water is employed through queer love to quench thirst. As with her treatment of sugar, in Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place*, flows of water are employed to illustrate

the way in which Elizete and Verlia's relationship mirrors their Trinidadian environment in which their queer love provides life-sustaining nourishment. This environmental imagery is present when Verlia is described 'like a shower of rain coming that could just wash me cool' (4). Here, Brand subverts the associations of queer love with something dirty or unnatural, by suggesting that Verlia's queerness is in fact as natural as rain and has cleansing properties. Verlia is also associated with the sea when Elizete describes their love making: 'she open me up like any morning. Limp, limp and rain light, soft to the marrow. She make me wet. She tongue scorching like hot sun. I love that shudder between her legs, love the plain wash and sea of her, the swell and bloom of her softness' (5). The description here of their love making as intimately connected with water imagery not only plays on the erotic associations with women's wetness, but also creates the impression of a place of abundance in which a hot sun and light rains cause flowers to bloom. This paradisiacal setting is implied to be an island through the sea imagery of the 'plain wash and sea of her', reflecting their own island of Trinidad, drawing connections between individual and national bodies, and subverting the woman-as-environment trope which is not harvested for patriarchal-colonial profit, but instead washed over with female pleasure. However, this image of Verlia as sea also has latent in it a certain potential for danger evocative of the position of Caribbean islands permeable to travellers by sea, recollecting the Middle Passage. This recalls the histories of how their ancestors were brought to Trinidad, suggesting a certain pain behind these ocean metaphors which are cognisant of the colonial oppression behind the homophobia they are navigating. This connection between the middle passage and queerness has been observed by Tinsley (2008) as she points out that queer Creole women name each other *mi mati* meaning 'my girl', which is said to have derived from 'my mate' as in shipmate, to describe 'she who survived the Middle Passage with me' (192). Tinsley suggests that the forming of these relationships between women on slave ships can be considered queer in nature and are

illustrative of a reclamation of their commodified bodies, resisting in fluid ways their subjugation to the ocean journey. In this way, through queer eroticism, Brand employs watery imagery in order to connect the characters once again with their environment in ways which recall painful histories and also reclaim them.

Brand also extends this natural imagery of water between the lovers as Verlia states that, 'Elizete, you is bigger than me by millennia and you can hold me between your legs like rock hold water. You are wearing me away like years and I wonder if you can see me beyond rock and beyond water as something human that need to eat and can die, even as you dive into me today like a fish and want nothing or so you say' (5). Here, Verlia's personal sense of fragility is depicted through water as a fluid, changing and vulnerable entity which is juxtaposed with images of Elizete's geological rootedness in place. This natural imagery is used to reflect the paradoxes of the sense of strength in Elizete's innocence contrasted with the fragility of Verlia's outward strength and determination. Whilst erotic scenes from Elizete's perspective represent Verlia as rain and ocean, those from the opposite view emphasise Verlia's human mortality and fragility with water imagery serving as a reminder of limitations. Verlia implies that whilst their queer love quenches thirst, she still 'need eat', suggesting that their connection can only go so far in sustaining her. Elizete is depicted as diving into Verlia 'like a fish', the ease of this imagery suggesting the extent to which Elizete has found ease and a sense of belonging in her queer relationship with Verlia, in her natural habitat so to speak, like a fish in the sea. However, these maritime images of Verlia also foreshadow her eventual death when she jumps off a cliff into the sea, 'flying'. Verlia is swallowed by the very ocean she is said to have represented, but in death finds freedom in a different metaphor, that of a bird, far from the terrestrial and aquatic concerns of the sea and land. In this way, Brand centralises water along with sugar as metaphors through which to

explore the reach of queer love, a reach whose limits are demonstrated when Verlia perishes in the same ocean from which she once drew her power.

Water is also employed as a medium through which to explore queer eroticism and love in *Spirit of Haiti* in the character of Philippe, a gay man, who throughout the novel is closely associated with water and his natural environment. Bodies of water are important sites of revelation and of Vodou spiritual practice in the novel as they provide a space of fluidity in which time dissolves and queerness becomes present. For instance, Phillipe's realisation of his sexuality occurs at a sacred Vodou waterfall in which he recounts that, 'it was the first time he had wanted to touch someone like this. The sensuality of the waterfalls made his hands alive with desire and his fingertips sought out Alexis with renewed urgency, the innocence of touching he had felt until then dropping away like the water pooling at his feet' (p. 86). Here, Chancy forges a direct link between the sensuality of the waterfalls as a spiritual place and Phillipe's erotic awakening, suggesting a presentation of queer sexuality which is both natural and also here religiously sanctified. The reference to his innocence 'dropping away like the water pooling at his feet' creates a natural, beautiful image rather than a perverse one, suggestive of a cleansing force, washing away and bringing new life. However, as with Verlia, the image of the waterfall also holds in it a threat of violence in its thundering force and foreshadows Philippe's death. In the process of dying from AIDS, Phillipe also takes his own life at the end of Chancy's novel, jumping off the walls of the Citadel, this fall foreshadowed by the crashing fall of the water in this revelatory scene. In this way, Chancy presents Phillipe's queerness as at once a thing of beauty and of danger, simultaneously his rise and his fall, rooted in his environment. For Phillipe, being gay and Haitian crosses histories of colonial homophobia with spiritual practices in Vodou, and the contemporary dangers and discrimination of HIV/AIDS. The way in which Phillipe sheds his past innocence at the waterfall foreshadowing his future plight demonstrates the way in

which Chancy employs water as a temporally shifting medium in her novel in which layers of time overlap and are stored. This is reflective of what Anne Galvin (2021) argues as the ways in which geographically and anthropologically, the material properties of water 'create a continuity with the past' as water 'embodies temporal collapse' (36). Water dynamically reshapes landscapes, acting as a connective medium between past and present, shaping the landscapes of the past, present, and future all at once. Antonio Benítez-Rojo has also highlighted the importance of water in Caribbean literature stating that, 'the culture of the Caribbean, at least in its most distinctive aspect, is not terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly and resists being captured by the cycles of clock and calendar. The Caribbean is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity' (1996, 11). This demonstrates the nature of an archipelagic setting in which to consider the metaphorical and actual implications of water as through this sinuosity and these waves of currents, time is presented as non-linear. Chancy employs water as a powerful, atemporal force in *Spirit of Haiti* as a way in which national and individual concerns are connected with present fates. Water also serves as a connective medium between human and spiritual worlds with Vodou *lwa* acting through water and importantly, through queer characters as conduits of their messages. Water laps at these islands' edges harbouring ships which bring and take away, threatening the sea level rise of a changing climate, the past's mistakes bearing heavily on the present.

Water and Magic

Parallel to its use as a medium for the expression of queer love and eroticism, water is also a key element through which Chancy employs magical realist tropes in her novel which serve as the connecting medium between past, present, future, and spiritual worlds. Magical realism is characterised by its inclusion of inexplicable supernatural elements which are not at odds with its reality, but form part of it (Schroeder, 2004). Importantly, magical realism here will

not be considered as fantasy antithetical to reason, but rather a representation of a Caribbean world view. In this way, magical realism can be considered a key literary technique for decolonising narratives as it counters European Enlightenment philosophies of rationalism and linearity, instead privileging non-linear, labyrinthine representations of time and space (Warnes, 2009). Myriam Chancy introduces magical realism in the form of water spirits in Haitian Vodou in the opening passages of her novel. In this passage, the 19th century Henri Christophe, feeling called to swim in the sea, encounters a mermaid-like figure wearing a necklace of blue stones, 'her body a candle flame flickering against the blue-green of the water. The chains, fastened to her ankles and wrists, moved with her like serpents to music' (p.14). Here, Chancy blends the figure of the spirit with the historical figure of the revolutionary, blurring temporality and reality in order to present Christophe's call to revolution as intimately linked with both the spiritual, natural world and with historical events. Karen McCarthy Brown (1991) has suggested that, as mermaids did not form part of African imaginaries before colonialism, the inclusion of mermaids in Vodou lore is taken from the carved mermaids adorning slave ships, directly connecting them with legacies of slavery (cited in Tinsley, 2018, 161). As such, Chancy's presentation here of the mermaid draws directly from painful histories of enslavement which takes a European mythical figure and joins it with its accompanying history. In addition to slavery appearing in Vodou, Cedric J. Robinson (2000) demonstrates that maroon revolts were intimately linked with Vodou. Robinson observes that figures such as Mackandel and Boukman were both revolutionary historical figures and Vodou legends. Additionally, Vodou ceremonies were central to maroon political organising through song and dance, Robinson states, 'where rebellion was immediately impractical, the people prepared themselves through obéah, voodoo, Islam, and Black Christianity. Through these they induced charismatic expectations, socializing and hardening themselves and their young with beliefs, myths, and messianic visions that would

allow them, someday, to attempt the impossible' (310). This recalls Michel Rolph Trouillot's (1995) discussion of the Haitian Revolution as an unthinkable history in which such a revolt was, in the eyes of the colonising world and slave-owning powers, impossible. In this way, spiritual beliefs and figures play active roles in Caribbean histories, here reflected in Chancy's watery images which take on a magical realist quality and present a Haitian world view.

Homi Bhabha refers to magical realism as 'the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world' (cited in Warnes, 2009, 1) as the mode is a way through which to confront violent colonial histories and represent the unrepresentable in the literary language of the colonised rather than coloniser. This use of magical realism as a decolonising force has also been viewed in the visual art of queer Caribbean photographer Lisandro Suriel who employs magical realism intentionally to oppose documentary photography in order to represent black Caribbean subjectivities (Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art, 2022). For Suriel, local myth and lore hold more representational power than supposed objective Western documentation, subverting the medium of documentary photography to confuse and blur boundaries between the real and the magical, introducing figures such as watery Vodou spirits into documented landscapes (see fig. 4). In Suriel's work, not only is magical realism a decolonising technique, but also a representation of queer worlds in which environment, personhood, and sexual and gender non-conformity become complicated and intertwined. As with Chancy's narrative, figures transgress temporal and spiritual boundaries in ways which remain rooted in place rather than confined to chronological eras. Histories, beliefs, and stories form part of the layers of the landscape and whilst generations live and die over time, these spirits and memories remain stored and flowing in and out of water.

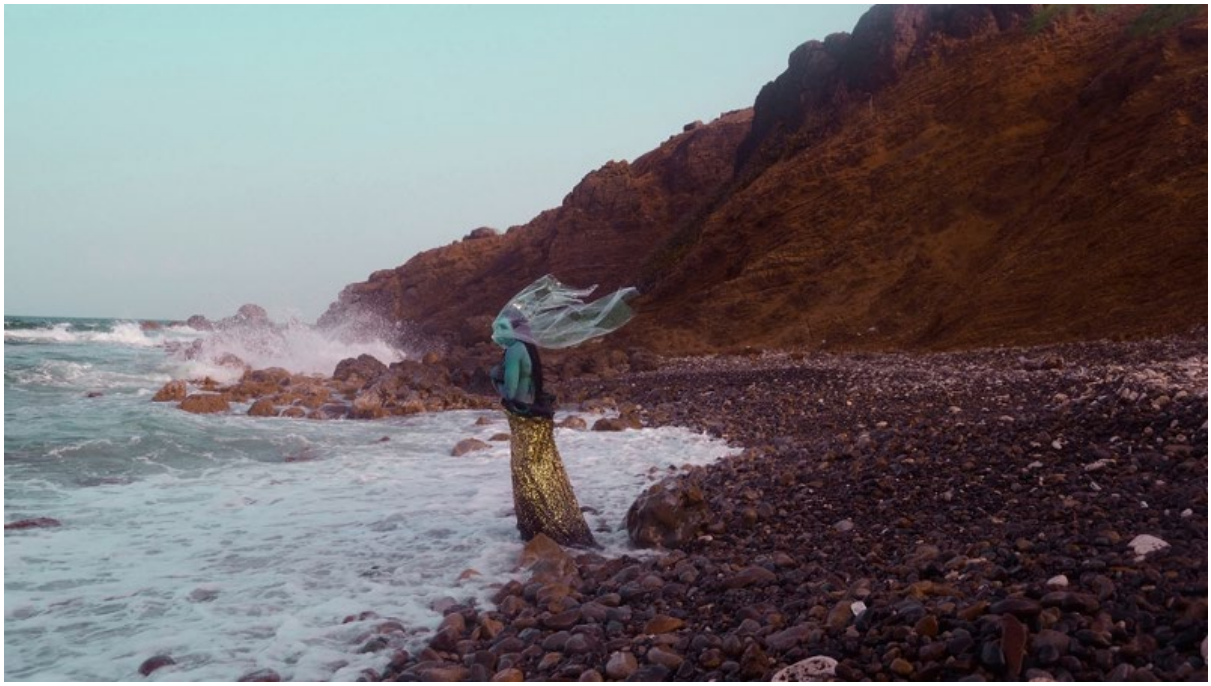

Fig. 4 Myths and Sages of West India, Lisandro Suriel

Chancy's treatment of magical realism and Haiti's spiritual world can be said to be personified in the character of Léah in the novel who is intimately connected with Vodou water spirits, particularly that of Ochún, and who wears the blue stone necklace Christophe sees worn by the mermaid. Léah is described in terms that recall Christophe's mermaid-like figure: 'her wet body rises, a piece of ebony driftwood spat out from the lip of the sea […] Her body glistens, shimmers, a knife blade hit by a ray of sun', 'she glistens like a dark pearl finely smoothed by the muscles of the rarest of sea oysters' (27, 29). Léah is described in terms which make her a part of the sea rather than at odds with it, her emotional and physical nature reflecting that of the ocean, being at once likened to juxtaposing images of a 'knife blade', and a 'pearl finely smoothed'. In this way, Léah, like the sea, is a personification of its contradictions, its ability to heal or to harm, its beauty and its danger. That Léah is specified as an openly lesbian character in the novel is important as this reflects the queerness and gender non-conformity of Vodou practice in Haiti. Many Vodou gods are gender and sexually fluid, the goddess of love Erzulie in particular being associated with queerness as

she is said to be a protector of queer individuals and even turn people's sexuality (*Of Men and Gods*, 2002). In her work, *Ezili's Mirrors*, Tinsley (2018) highlights the way in which Erzulie is associated with water, her name deriving from the Lac Aziri in Benin, in both spiritual and very physical ways. As water collection in Haiti is typically the work of women, including trans women and queer men (Masisi), Tinsley demonstrates the way in which Ezili's significance transposes onto the quotidian world due to water's function as a receptacle for various detritus and disease as well as a life-saving resource. Tinsley argues that these 'connections between femininity – whether transfeminine or cisgender – and water – whether brought home by women or by Masisi – are not only metaphoric here but concrete, quotidian, and life-or-death; and women's and Masisi's desires to conjure the clean-running water that Ezili represents are not purely idealistic but eminently practical, literally down-to-earth' (6). This view of the parallel existence of that which is both spiritual and practical is not only gendered and queered here, but also connects with ideas of atemporality as Tinsley demonstrates that water as a store of pollutants and waste signifies that 'it is possible for the remnants of the past to poison you, yes – but, if properly filtered, that same water can become the key to survival' (13). This connection between past and present through water is a productive one not only in a literal sense of water holding waste, the detritus of which often stems from neocolonial iterations of plantation economies, but also in the literary representation of water-holding memory.

When the protagonist of the novel, Carmen, visits Léah in Haiti, she is told that her unborn child is a daughter of Ochún, and Léah relays a message from the goddess that 'you know what is at the bottom of the sea' (207). In this passage, Léah acts as a messenger between Ochún and Carmen, as well as between past and future, alluding to the deaths of slaves in the sea and to the future of the child. This connection continues after Léah's death at the hands of the army through water as Carmen goes into labour in her bathtub in Montréal, the final lines

of the novel depicting, ‘a bathtub filled with red waters and blue memories. All three, along with the whispering ancestors following on wings of wind, place their faith and hope in the new life about to be born, and the amber of the rising sun at their backs’ (294). In this way, water serves as the central connective tissue between time, place, and spirituality, the ‘red waters and blue memories’, the colours of the Haitian flag, and which recall violent histories as well as watery magic. That this is facilitated by a queer character, whose fluidity renders her inseparable from her environment, brings about a personification of a queer ecology in Léah whose magical properties render her a powerful decolonial, queer literary figure. In an era of rising sea levels, these watery sites replete with memory threaten to burst and overflow, to wash over and flood. Examining water’s spiritual, queer properties in the Caribbean context reminds us of climate change’s colonial past rather than solely its threat of an apocalyptic future for the West.

These uses of magical realism by Chancy and Suriel as a decolonising and queering tool in their work can also be viewed as providing a feminist and queer counterpart to European masculinist traditions of surrealism. Surrealist tenets in 1920s Paris conceived of by artists and writers such as André Breton positioned women as objects of the surreal rather than individuals with agency, sources of surreal inspiration and veneration (Lyford, 2007). This ideological treatment of women as passive muses by surrealist artists and writers was critiqued by fellow surrealist René Magritte in his work, *Je ne vois pas la femme cachée dans la forêt* (1929) in which he contrasts the idealised painting of a woman surrounded by photographs of surrealists of the time to foreground their blindness to women as active agents in and of themselves (see fig. 5). In contrast with European masculinist traditions of surrealism, magical realism foregrounds female and queer figures as active agents of the magical rather than its passive subjects. As such, magical realism here provides both a queer and a decolonising perspective which reclaims agency drawing on traditions which run

counter to their Western counterparts. It is interesting to note that Warnes argues that magical realist narratives 'develop from an urge to reclaim a space of otherness by appealing to myths of difference' (2009 p. 5). In centralising these differentiating myths in her novel, Chancy reclaims the power of othering narratives in order to present a time-spanning and interwoven story from a Haitian world view, stitching together a *rasanblaj* of past and contemporary, and spiritual and human worlds, employing rather than denying spiritual forces at work on its surface.

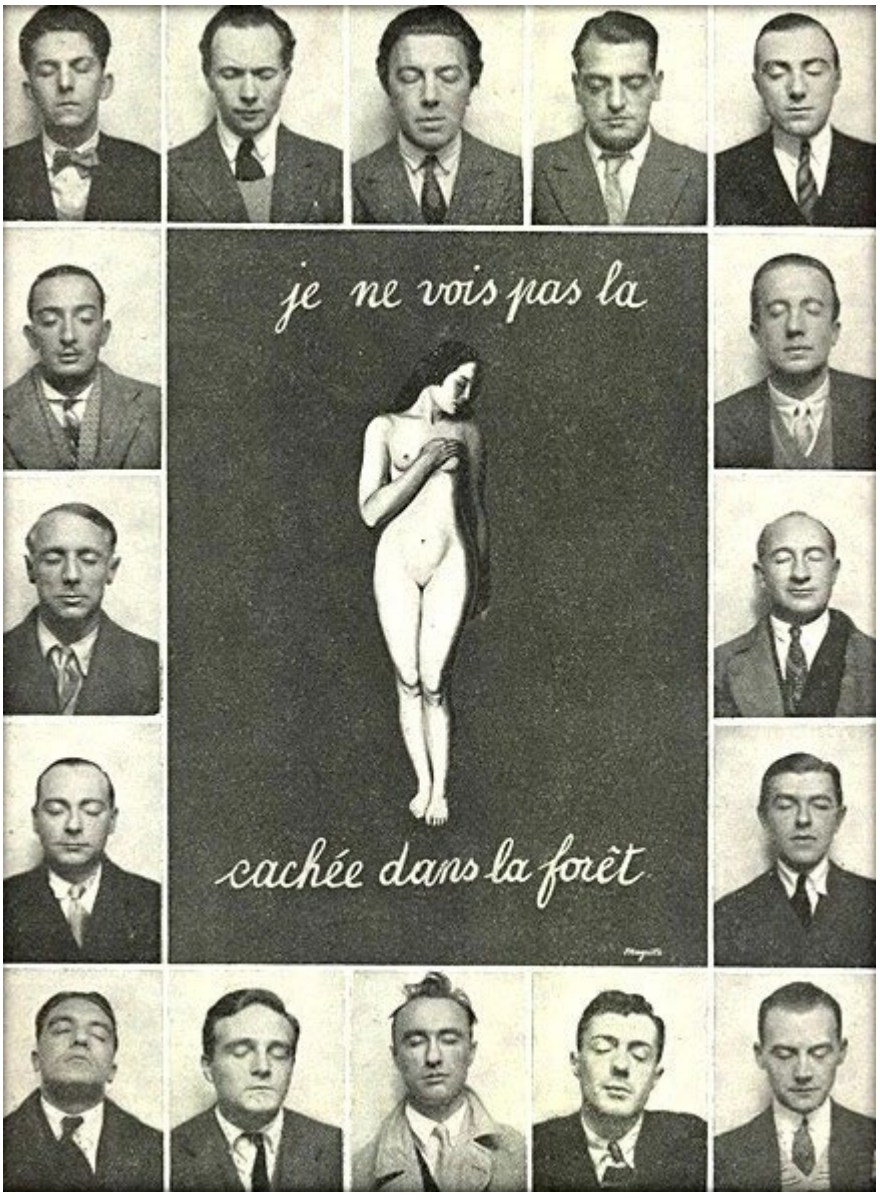

Fig. 5 Je ne vois pas la femme cachée dans la forêt Rene Magritte, 1927

This reclamation of mythmaking can also be viewed in Audre Lorde's *Zami*, which she very intentionally termed a 'biomythology'. With this invention of a new genre, Lorde asserts her reclamation of her life and heritage, blurring the lines of truth, reality, and love in order to introduce mythical figures and places into her tale and leave herself unrestrained by Western categorisations. A central mythical figure in *Zami* is that of her mother's homeland, Carriacou which is described in magical terms, affording it a mythical quality which surpasses colonial geographies. Lorde describes the way in which,

> 'Carriacou was not listed in the index of the Good School Atlas nor in the Junior Americana World Gazette nor appeared on any map that I could find, and so when I hunted for the magic place during geography lessons or in free library time, I never found it […] But underneath it all as I was growing up, home was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and bind up between the pages of a school-book. It was our own, my truly private paradise of bluggoe and breadfruit hanging from the trees, of nutmeg, and lime and sapodilla, of tonka beans and red and yellow Paradise Plums' (13).

The description here straddles magical realist mythmaking and childlike fantasy with the bountiful listing of fruits and references to 'magic' and 'paradise', recalling a sense of home untouched by Western knowledge and still lush and plentiful. That this paradisiacal island could not be located on a map, had not been caught in the confines of cartography as Lorde terms it, presents it as escaping colonial geographies as it instead exists only in the geographical imagination of the young Lorde. That this mythical land is an island bounded by the sea recalls both its fluid connectivity with the outside world, and its separateness, the water around it serving simultaneously as protector and connective tissue. Throughout the biomythography, Lorde's queerness is bound up with Carriacou through her understandings of belonging and homeland, her titular renaming is revealed ultimately to be derived from

this magical place, ‘Zami. A Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers’ and that ‘there it is said that the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother’s blood’ (303, 304). It is through this local lore that Lorde finds acceptance with her Caribbean, queer identity, an important act of self-naming which resists derogatory labelling by others. Carraiacou’s mythical, magical qualities as an island in which queer women are named and live together, encircled by a protective sea, reflects the employment of magical realism by Lorde as both literally and metaphorically fluid, using water as a key site of spiritual and actual life giving energy. However, as Tinsley (2020) observes, there is a certain limiting power to this magical-mythical place as, ‘Lorde’s imaginary, idyllic shores of Carriacou gesture toward beachscapes as a possible crosscurrent in which to imagine sexual complexity and decolonised Caribbeanness at a conflux, only to end by not being able to carry this possibility through – by leaving this space as myth rather than reality’ (211). As such, Carriacou remains a mythical place, the imagining of which is an important and powerful assertion of selfhood for Lorde, but also one nonetheless absent from her quotidian reality.

In addition to the passage set in Afrekete’s apartment as being evocative of a paradise island Garden of Eden in which fruit’s sweetness is erotically reappropriated by Lorde, Afrekete is also a figure associated with water and the ocean. Charlene Ball (2023) has observed that Lorde’s Afrekete is a combination of the Greek goddess of love Aphrodite who is frequently associated with water, the Yoruban river goddess Oya, and the African sea deity Aflakete. The description of Afrekete’s apartment is suffused with watery imagery such as the plants which ‘tossed and frothed’, reminiscent of the movement and foam of waves and she is said to have a ‘thirty gallon fish tank that murmured softly, like a quiet jewel, standing on its wrought-iron legs, glowing and mysterious’ (295). The mysterious imagery of Afrekete’s fishtank provides a slice of ocean in her apartment, its likening to a jewel suggestive of a

reclamation of the kind of plunder sought by colonialists and ending up at the bottom of the sea. This ocean imagery also reappears when Lorde and Afrekete make love on the roof of her apartment building as she describes, 'the ghostly vague light drifting upward from the street competed with the silver hard sweetness of the full moon, reflected in the shiny mirrors of our sweat-slippery dark bodies, sacred as the ocean at high tide' (300). Here, Afrekete once again conjures an archipelagic/ocean existence with Lorde in the middle of New York City in which the streetlights and moonlight compete to shine off their naked bodies and their queer love is granted sacred status. As with Chancy, Lorde here employs water imagery to create associations between queer love and nature as something which is regenerative and cleansing. Afrekete is perhaps the most mythical of figures in Lorde's biomythography and is one highly connected with natural imagery of which water plays a central part flowing in and out of these images and connecting her to island spaces. These fluid, queer bodies constitute *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1992) as are sites of collective memory and a sense of place which is accessed here through queer erotic encounters. In this way, the authors employ water as a way through which to explore queer, magical relationships which connect past, present, and future, as well as spiritual worlds and faraway lands.

Cycles: Water, Fire, and Anger

The role of water in the cyclical nature of Caribbean history in these works mirrors that of sugar as sites of cultural memory which play a defining role in the repetition of history. Just as systems of violence and exploitation continue to replicate the model of the sugar plantation in a postcolonial world, its adjoining flows of water also enact this repetition. Central to these cycles of violence and renewal in the works is water's opposing element, fire. The writers employ fire as an opposing and concomitant element alongside its watery counterpart. For instance, Chancy's narratives in *Spirit of Haiti* are intimately connected not only with water but also fire which similarly provides the connective tissue between past and present and

spiritual and human worlds. Whilst Chancy's spirits express themselves through water, ancestral voices also manifest themselves through fire to express anger, adding dimensionality to the ghostly reminders of blue, watery memory. When Carmen walks in the forest to hear the voices of enslaved ancestors, Chancy states that, 'the voices are not at peace. They clear a furious path through the forests. She follows, feeling the heat of their frustration licking her feet like flames' (267). This reference to flames presents a fiery anger which is connected to rather than oppositional to the water's memory. In Léah's message from the water goddesses, she also imparts that, 'they say: *Fire is your friend*' suggestive that water and fire are twin elements in renewal and rebirth, the Vodou god of fire Ogoun working in tandem with Ochún (207). This motif of fire also follows Carmen to her home in Montréal as she meets Gladys, a woman seeking help from domestic violence who is the descendant of Marie-Josèphe Angélique, an enslaved woman who in 1734 set fire to her master's house in Montréal, a fire which spread and destroyed much of the city. Aware of her heritage, Gladys states of her violent husband, an ex-Tonton Macoute, 'I know where I come from. I know what strength I have […] I will burn his house down with everything in it' (p. 37). Here the layers of Haitian history collapse in Glady's actions as she does indeed burn down her home, as histories of slavery and resistance in Marie-Josèph and more recent histories of violence in Haiti through her Tonton Macoute husband are destroyed and renewed through another fire. However, Chancy also provides a certain retelling of this tale as Gladys escapes from the fire unsuspected, cleansed of her past and able to live a free life, whilst the real Angélique was captured and burned as punishment. Katherine McKittrick (2006) recounts the importance of retelling the story of Angélique:

> 'The case of Angélique is important because it upset the discourse then being articulated which was crucial for Canada to secure its standing as a state that did not hold slaves […] her body came to play the role of both defining and denying Canada's

> racial and colonial hierarchies […] parading a black woman through local Montréal in the eighteenth century, executing her, and burning her remains, achieved two important spatial projects: spectacular punishment of someone and something that is said not to exist, and the destroying of bodily evidence: or, blackness is located, assessed as deviant, punished, erased, and cast beyond the nation" (117)

In this way, the erasure of black resistance by fire is productively redeployed by writers such as Chancy who utilise it instead to enact liberatory change and to work in concordance with water to express anger, renewal and an *un*silencing of the past and supposedly impossible reclamations (Trouillot, 1995). If water holds memory, fire enacts the anger latent within these memories. Just as Léah, Phillipe, and Alexis are aware of their descent from Henri Christophe, Gladys is also aware of her blood from Marie-Josèphe Angélique and all characters enact cyclical performances of generational anger and revolt in ways which are deeply connected with their environments.

In a similar manner, Roxane Gay also uses water concomitantly with sugar as a way in which to represent memory through landscape and place in her short story, 'In the Manner of Water and Light'. In Gay's story, in the three generations of women, the mother is conceived in the Massacre River as the grandmother and grandfather hide from Dominican soldiers, a symbolic conception which connects the mother deeply and traumatically with the riverine landscape. Just as the grandmother is haunted by the smell of sugar, the mother 'is haunted by the smell of blood, she says that her senses are suffused with it' (83). In this traumatic bodily remembrance, blood and water become mixed together as the water carries these violent histories within it. The mother's conception in a grave site here is one of tragic irony as Gay depicts how, 'surrounded by the smell and silence of death, my grandparents crawled out of the river that had, overnight, become a watery coffin holding twenty-five thousand bodies' (89). However, for Gay it is not simply the conception of new life that engenders renewal and

rebirth, but a direct confrontation with the landscape itself as the three women visit the river: 'I curled my toes in the silt of the riverbed and shivered. I had pictured the river as a wide, yawning, and bloody beast, but where we stood, the river flowed weakly. The waters did not run deep. It was just a border between two geographies of grief' (101). This moment of interruption breaks the generational cycle of hurt and pain through a reconnection with the landscape, the playfulness of the phrase, 'curled my toes', demonstrating a levity which challenges imagined geographies with actual environments. That the granddaughter finds the waters run shallow, dried by the sun, presents a healing between seasons of rain which reflects the spaces of calm in cycles of violence. Nevertheless, the landscape continues to be divided along these lines of history as they are defined as 'geographies of grief'. This personification of the land mirrors the elements of the land present within the women's own bodies, whilst they carry deep antipathies for the smells of blood and sugar, the landscape also carries their grief. In this way, Gay employs water in such a way as a connective element between individual and national which is the medium through which cyclical histories are enacted.

Water also reappears as a setting in Gay's story from the same collection, 'A Cool, Dry Place' in which a Haitian couple migrates from Haiti to the US and the voyage across the sea is depicted in violently erotic imagery reflecting and challenging memories of the Middle Passage and the dangerous crossings of undocumented migrants today. In this story, Gay depicts a reversal of a (neo)colonial sea journeys in which it is the black Haitian who travels to a Western country in search of a new life, dreaming of the wealth and excess of American consumerism. On the boat, the couple share an erotic scene which blurs the lines between pain and pleasure, violence, and love:

> 'I fall into Yves, kissing him so hard I know my lips will be bruised in the morning. I want them to be. Yves pulls away first, drawing his lips roughly across my chin and

> down to my neck, the hollow of my throat, practically gnawing at my skin with his teeth. […] He sinks his teeth deeper into me and I can no longer see the fine line between pain and pleasure. But just as soon as I consider asking him to stop, he does, instead lathering the fresh wounds with the softness of his tongue' (172)

In this passage, Gay subverts expectations of migrants as well as of love and sex in order to present a journey which is not coerced nor idealistic, but is driven by a violent passion which gnaws, bruises, and wounds. Across Gay's work is a recurrent theme of reclaiming sexual agency after experiences of assault and in this narrative, the couple reclaims and repurposes colonial violence enacted through ocean spaces of enslavement and abuse for their own pleasure. Gay states that, 'with each stroke he takes me further away from the sorrows of home and closer to a cool, dry place' (173), the verb 'stroke' recalling both the sexual act and the act of rowing or swimming, suggesting that his drive is propelling her across the ocean. As Keithley Woolward (2014) observes, 'the sea carries at once the violent history of the Middle Passage and the always present potential of resistance and revolt and the whispers of a thousand secrets in each ebb and flow' (90). This ever-present potential of resistance is demonstrated through the writers' treatments of water and ocean spaces in these works and for Gay, this takes place here through erotic reclamations.

These associations of ocean spaces with violence and anger recalling enslaved histories are also present in *In Another Place* as Dionne Brand speaks of the rage of Elizete's enslaved ancestors. Brand speaks to the force of this anger as though it is a new island, a piece of land to which they could assign their name:

> 'They owned the sublime territory of rage. Such rage it would hawk and spit out a grass-throated ocean, islands choking; so much it would long for a continent to wash up on and to chastise. They were not interested in belonging. It could not suffice. Not

now. It could not stanch the gushing ocean, it could not bandage the streaming land. They saw with the bloodful clarity of rage.' (43)

The subversion here of enslaved people owned by white colonisers owning their own sublime land of rage is a powerful one and one on which they are able to build on the ocean space a rage-torn 'grass throated-ocean, islands choking'. Brand makes it clear that seeking belonging and acceptance will not be sufficient, attempts at healing with bandages to stanch the blood are of no use, instead they must turn to embracing the bloodiness of anger. In this way, just as Chancy uses fire as an antithesis and extension of water, Brand employs anger and blood as ways in which to counter the ocean space and resist its cycles.

Whilst water is presented as a store of memory and death, fire and anger can be said to be presented by these writers as a means of resisting this as a regenerative power and voicing these histories. This is perhaps most evident in Audre Lorde's writing in *The Cancer Journal*s (1980) in which she confronts her own death from breast and liver cancer and her experiences of sexism and racism in medical settings. Lorde writes, 'I am going to write fire until it comes out my ears, my eyes, my noseholes – everywhere. Until it's every breath I breathe. I'm going to go out like a fucking meteor!' (109). Here, Lorde treats her writing as flame, illuminating and burning, transforming her ailing body into something fire-breathing and dragon-like in a powerful reclamation of her agency. Lorde states that, 'we all have to die at least once. Making that death useful would be winning for me. I wasn't supposed to exist anyway, not in a meaningful way in this fucked-up white boy's world' (93). Lorde's assertion that she, a self-titled Black lesbian warrior poet, was not supposed to exist, has been periodically attempted to be denied existence in a patriarchal, neocolonial world, gives her a unique subjectivity in which there is a certain freedom. In writing anger and writing fire from her positionality as an individual whose existence is in its very nature deviant, she uses her

remaining time and words to set fire to the narrative. Fire here is to be unafraid and unapologetic, to rail against water's histories.

In this chapter, I have explored the implications of narrative representations of water across the works through riverine, oceanic, and personal landscapes which flow in and out of the sugar plantation both physically and ideologically. These queer writings and writers have been shown to complicate understandings of water through associations with erotic reclamations of time and space, centring queer love as something which quenches thirst and can cause both flooding and drought. Water is intimately connected with the spiritual world in these works as watery goddesses and spirits are keepers of cultural memories and active participants in the characters' relationships and destinies. Vodou *lwa* such as Erzulie have been shown to exist through water and to embrace this fluidity both in gender and sexuality. That the goddess Erzulie can be demanding of her followers, requesting offerings of champagne, perfume, and sweet treats such as sugary cakes traces this connection again between water and sugar, reclamation of which can be bittersweet and magical (Tinsley, 2018). That water can have very real implications such as flooding, droughts, and extreme weather events, is not considered as antithetical to the magical, but part of it as spirits hold on to histories and realities across generations, engendering new meaning for what histories water holds in store in an age of climate change. The writers' treatments of water resist Western, linear narratives by resisting temporality and European surrealist traditions, instead centring sinuous tales which enact complex subjectivities, genders, and sexualities in a *rasanblaj* of experience. Fire and anger work in parallel with and against concerns of water in order to demonstrate rebirth and renewal, that it is not enough just to remember, but also to set the narrative alight. As a facet of queer ecologies, water is a key site through which to contend with changing climates as its flows have the potential to carve, flood, and destroy lands. In grappling with these new ecological realities, queer narratives such as these present

water as the connective tissue between past, present, and future, a space in which to contend with the powers that brought us here and through which to trace a decolonial countertopography. The following chapter will travel across these waters to the next sites of the writers' explorations; that of the city.

Chapter Three – Urban Ecologies: Subways and Suburbia

Just as flows and cycles of sugar and water can be traced through these works to outline a queer ecology of the sugar plantation, treatments of urban environments also produce a space which is both conceptually and physically linked to the ecology of the sugar plantation. The migration of the Caribbean diaspora in these works to cities such as New York, Toronto, and Montréal present a way through which to observe not only the formerly colonised space of production, but also the former coloniser's site of consumption. The ways in which the characters' move from their island homes to cities in Canada and the US provides an extension of empire as well as a reversal of it as the colonised arrive at the gates of the city whose wealth they played a part in building. The space of the sugar plantation here can be considered as an operational landscape of planetary urbanism as conceived of by Henri Lefebvre (2003) by which the globalised, neoliberal centralisation of capital in cities creates a new phenomenon by which environments serving the metropole with resources become part of the urban fabric despite its location outside of the bordered confines of the city. Lefebvre terms these as 'colonies of the metropolis' (4) as they serve as resource sinks for their cities. For my purposes here, this phrasing denotes more than Lefebvre implies as these 'colonies' are frequently directly linked to histories of empire as continuing extensions of colonisation through economies of extraction to serve wealth accumulation in cities in the Global North. That these metropolitan spaces are considered part of a connective tissue of resources and of nature, and not at odds with or superior to it, is essential in their connections with spaces such as the sugar plantation. These urban ecologies thus become complicated and muddied, even queered, through considerations of social reproduction, urban infrastructures, and capital accumulation as being connected in a spider-like web across sites around the world. Just as

water flows in and out of the sugar plantation, is dependent on it whilst also altering it, forms of capital, power, and globally driven climate change feed in and out of the sugar plantation. As such, the experiences of queer characters in these metropoles weave into the fabric of their urban ecology, negotiating the difficulties of, and at times reclaiming streets built from, colonial wealth. Acting on complex sedimented layers of geographies of nature and power, the characters provide a view through which to consider the materiality of urban life through a fragmentary *rasanblaj* of queer experiences. Cities are also a powerful setting in which alliances and queer constellations are formed through social organising in queer spaces and through political movements such as the Black Power movement. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the writers present the materiality of urban ecologies, the role of suburbia in the works, the exploitation of the characters in the city as an extension of empire, the significance of the space of the subway, and urban revolution across queer constellations.

Arrival in the City

The shift from the setting of the sugar plantation to that of the city is one foregrounded by Dionne Brand in *In Another Place* as she traces both Verlia and Elizete's migrations to Toronto and its surrounding suburbs. In these migrations, Brand ensures an inextricable link is formed between the city and the plantation as sugar continues to pervade the atmosphere through ever-present echoes of colonialism. In this, Brand suggests that the plantation is not a simple place grounded in geography, but a sprawling idea, the power of which extends tentacularly across space. This connection with empire is made explicit when Elizete arrives in Toronto: 'today she was Columbus, today the Canadian National was not the Canadian National yet and the Gladstone was not a bar and nothing had a name yet, nothing was discovered' (47). This reversal of the cane cutter becoming Columbus to discover a new city is a powerful reimagining of the colonised experience, the namelessness of this new place suggesting both a sense of trepidation of the unknown and of possibility of renewal.

Katherine McKittrick (2006) draws on Édouard Glissant's poetics of landscape in order to argue for the importance of naming stating that it **'**reconciles the black subject to geography, […] the naming of place— regardless of expressive method and technique—is also a process of self-assertion and humanization, a naming of inevitable black geographic presence' (xxii). In this sense, Elizete's arrival in Toronto as a nameless place holds the possibility for her self-assertion, a geography in which she is the explorer, not the explored.

In a similar manner, on Verlia's arrival in Canada, the echoes of the sugar plantation and of empire are present in the depictions of sugar. Brand recounts the way in which, 'donuts, donuts is how Sudbury smells and food wrapped up and frozen. She is wounded, sated, in the kitchen stuffed with food, and wounded' (148). The sickly description here of the sweet donuts presents a sensory consequence of the violent work of the sugar plantation in Trinidad and the juxtaposition of the words 'wounded' and 'sated' reflect both this sense of satisfaction, excess, and convenience, and its underlying violence. The theme of the zombification of the cane cutter also returns here as Verlia's aunt and uncle are described as, 'offering her a pillow in their grave, in their coffin engraved in ice, ice, ice, in their donut smelling walking dead sepulchral ice' (149). The layering of death imagery in the words, 'grave', 'coffin', and 'sepulchral' places emphasis on the life-lessness of Sudbury, the repetitive triptych 'ice, ice, ice', contrasting sharply the lush warmth of Trinidad. That this is again connected with the image of the donuts suggests a death linked with sugar, that the gluttony of colonial tastes will engender not only their own ill health, but also that of the colonised. The absence here of retributive justice and vindication underlines the connectivity of time and place and the inextricability of the plantation from the characters' lives. Verlia's uncle is described as having 'worked himself to the bone. Shot himself in the foot. To prove he was a good servant to a white man happily dreaming of slavery' (143). The figure of the uncle here is a tragic personification of the wider problematic of neo-colonialism's

manifestations. As Lucy Swanson observes, the zombie figure is ‘a vehicle for cultural critique, whether it is found in literature or popular belief, or whether it critiques enslavement, dictatorship, or imperialism’ (2023, 17). This critique is extended past imperialism again by Brand to modern capitalism as whilst neither a plantation worker, nor an enslaved individual, Verlia’s uncle remains trapped in a zombified state of subservience to continuing abuses of power.

In addition to the figure of the uncle here, Brand can be said to present numerous characters as suffering a tragic plight in her novel as Verlia and Elizete face insurmountable tragic dilemmas against which they wrestle what is suggestive of a pre-ordained fate. This is reflective of David Scott’s (2004) argument for the emplotment of postcolonial narratives as one more suited to the genre of Tragedy than of Romanticism. Scott argues that,

> ‘Tragedy offers the most searching reflection on human action, intention, and chance, with significant implications for how we think the connections among past, present, and future. Tragedy questions, for example, the view of human history as moving teleologically and transparently toward a determinate end, or as governed by a sovereign and omnisciently rational agent. These views of human history suppose that the past can be cleanly separated from the present, and that reason can be unambiguously disentangled from myth’ (12).

Scott’s argument is compelling in the context of postcolonial novels such as *In Another Place* due to the tragic genre’s attention to the intentionality and accountability of characters’ actions and their relationship to the narrative’s cause and effect. That the tragic consequences of colonialism are explored through the intentionality of decisions made by groups and individuals is presented by Scott as being in contrast with the hopeful rationale of Romanticism: ‘where the anticolonial narrative is cast as an epic Romance, as the great

progressive story of an oppressed and victimised people's struggle from Bondage to Freedom, from Despair to Triumph under heroic leadership, the tragic narrative is cast as a dramatic confrontation between contingency and freedom, between human will and its conditioning limits' (135). The recognition of conditioning limits here reflects the theme of an inextricability from the plantation economy in Brand's novel as it presents a recognition of the forces against which the characters struggle as opposed to a simple, linear progression of justice. Via the work of CLR James, Scott also draws on the sugar plantation as a key space for the construction of modernity as it introduced the system of extraction and exploitation on which our modern capitalist economic structure was founded. In Brand's novel, the sugar plantation can be viewed as the insurmountable tragic setting against which the characters struggle and the forbidden queer love between the two Trinidadian women as the tragic dilemma. Through this lens, Verlia is the tragic hero of the narrative with her hamartia being her self-depleting sense of responsibility for others, a fate which appears sealed from the beginning, and which ends in her taking her own life.

Whilst Scott's approach provides important historical recognition of the tragedy of postcolonial literature, in keeping with the *rasanblaj* nature of these works, it is of note that Tragedy as a Western genre is here intertwined with magical realism as a Caribbean, decolonising one in urban settings. This is demonstrated as, similarly to Brand, whilst in *Spirit of Haiti* Chancy presents queer characters with tragic fates, this is also interwoven with magical realist elements in Alexis' experiences of urban America. It is interesting to note that, having contrasted attitudes of European surrealism with those of magical realism in the previous chapter, Japhy Wilson has argued that surrealism has always been both urban and apocalyptic. Wilson (2023) argues that surrealism has its roots planted in wounded and decaying post World War One Paris which intensifies 'the collapse of meaning characteristic of urban breakdown under conditions of combined and uneven apocalypse' (721). As such,

the violent palimpsest of the urban fabric forms a foundational tenet of surreality, a conceptual link evocative of Chancy's recognition of tragic histories of enslavement with magical realist tropes. Chancy also reveals these inescapable tragic histories through urban settings in the Global North as Alexis' experiences in Tennessee are narrated with magical realism that takes on a more sinister quality. Whilst Chancy employs water as a medium through which to explore the regenerative properties of Vodou and as a store of memory in Haiti, in America, water is depicted in terms of tragedy and trauma offering little hope for salvation. On his arrival in America, Alexis describes the Mississippi in the following terms,

> 'I smell the water, flat, lifeless; I sense its brownness, thickened with earth, remains of bloated corpses, excrements, modern pollutants. This is a river that knows no rest. But its smells are foreign to me, somehow more pristine than anything I know of home with the streets crowded with people standing shoulder to shoulder, sweating out their worries and hurry, mounds of garbage being burned out in the open, singeing air with decay and, encircling it all, the raw, acrid scent of the sea. Sadness fills me because I know this water's history is also my own, like ancestral blood in the veins' (98).

In contrast to depictions of waterscapes in Haiti, the lifelessness of this watery setting is notably devoid of magical encounter, instead offering a tragic setting of cross-generational pain. In this urban, diasporic setting, the nature of Chancy's magical realist depictions shift from those of gods and spirits dwelling alongside the characters to ghostly figures trapped in the landscape. Chancy employs this natural imagery and magical realist depiction when Alexis is involved in a fight protecting a friend from a homophobic attack. In her description, the assailants are transformed by Chancy into trees, 'their branches hold long, sharp knives that tear at top layers of my skin like fingernails. The wind has lost its voice. My ears are emptied seashells. And the fists keep coming at me from every direction because the trees are

everywhere, a forest of trees. They grow mouths that spit tobacco juices in my face and I drink them in like sap, forgetting that we are far from the tobacco fields' (166). Here it is as though the landscape itself is attacking Alexis, the tobacco spit of the attackers becoming sap, and the setting momentarily transforming into a tobacco plantation, layers of time and space collapsing into this violent encounter. The imagery of seashells from Haitian shores are 'emptied' by the trees of the American landscape, spilling violently. This layered landscape of histories of violence also becomes apparent through the river as they 'run the length of the river towards a cave where the Natives had hid from the white men who had killed the people of their villages over three hundred years ago', where he sees 'the forms of human bodies […] I turn to look at the people behind me but they are skeletons with chains hanging loosely from their wrists and ankles' (168). In this magical realist encounter, the historical layers of colonial violence are made visible as Native Americans and enslaved Africans exist alongside Alexis' contemporary experiences of racism and homophobia. In this way, Chancy presents past tragedy as inextricable from that of the present and, in turn, the tragic as being inextricable from the magic, employing magical realism as a technique through which to represent the unrepresentable (Reeds, 2013). In this way, reading Chancy's work with Scott's argument for postcolonial tragedy in mind, whilst Chancy's narrative ultimately presents a more romanticised conclusion of hope, magical realism and tragedy are not conflicting genres, but are instead closely linked. Both genres question linearity of time and place, foreground consequence and accountability, and can be viewed as powerful decolonising genres. That there are both tragic and magical elements in these works presents a narrative meeting of Caribbean and Western world views in a *rasanblaj* and a countertopography of storytelling. The unifying feature of these disparate genres is their awareness of the 'natural' world and the looming figure of the sugar plantation. In the extensions of this landscape, the ecologies in these works hold both tragic and regenerative possibilities, their links with queer

love suggesting that to queer ecology in Caribbean literature is to explore the connections between destruction, regrowth, and love.

The Urban Fabric

The interlinked and overlapping appearances of queer ecologies in these works are intimately connected with their urban environments through the writers' depictions of urban ecologies and the fabric of the city. That nature forms a part of the city rather than being at odds with it, existing in transformed forms, has been observed by David Harvey (1993) who famously stated that, 'there is nothing unnatural about New York City'. Harvey demonstrates that the city exists as a matrix of transformed nature which I argue draws upon similar concepts of intentionality and accountability that the tragic lens offers as it recognises operational landscapes of extraction of the city as well as the ramifications of this transformed nature within it. The queer characters in these works interact with this urban ecology in ways which form connections with these landscapes of extraction. In Brand's novel, Toronto is depicted in the following terms:

> 'the city is a construct of shells, glass and aluminium, brick and concrete, it hardens like a beetle, scarabaeus and shiny-eyed, just to avoid a November and what comes after. But all of this thickening and shelling can only do so much and the eyes unlucky enough to be without scales must look to the real sky sometime. Then November is a tragedy of scarred trees and rumpled clothes, of the skin's defensive shrivelling, of huddled shabby bus-stops and a wind ready to ice and crumble the bone. The city shrivels, its plastic skin roughens scabrous, and people bow their heads to the tunnels underneath and to impatience till April or May.' (197)

Brand's attention here to the materiality of the city in her references to 'glass', 'aluminium', 'plastic', and 'concrete' layer to create an image of a monstrous, beetle-like creature of

resource extraction and accumulation. The city here becomes a living being in and of itself, transforming and abusing nature, its trees scarred by its harshness. Geographer Kasia Mika (2004) argues that 'cities are dense networks of interwoven socio-spatial processes that are simultaneously human, material, natural, discursive, cultural, and organic. The myriad of transformations and metabolisms that support and maintain urban life, such as water, food, computers, or movies always combine environmental and social processes as infinitely interconnected' (22). This theme of a processual urban material transformation and interconnectivity is also highly present in Brand's poetry in which the texture of Toronto's urban fabric is recounted in evocative detail. In her long poem 'Inventory', Brand makes this connection between operational landscapes of extraction and the city explicit in the lines:

'the wealth multiplies in the garbage dumps,

and the quiet is the quiet of thieves

there are cell phones calling no one,

no messages burn on the planet's withered lungs

all that koltan from Kahuzi-Biega, the landslides,

to carry nothing' (444)

Here connections are formed between the city, its garbage dump, and landscapes abroad, interlinked through the object of the cell phone. In Brand's writing, the city does not stand alone as an entity but is continually linked to its consequences further afield as landslides feed consumer culture and convenience in the Global North. In addition to the city being a

sprawling, global force, Brand depicts the city as an individual, personified entity which creeps under its residents' skin:

> 'now she was trembling, tasting
>
> all the materials the city stuffs in its belly
>
> now she was concrete and car, asphalt and oil,
>
> head whirring like any engine,
>
> becoming what they were all becoming' (449)

In this passage, the city and its residents become indistinguishable from one another as its materiality is something the individual can taste, she herself transforming into 'concrete and car, asphalt and oil'. In this image, individuals gradually transform into machines in the operating of the city, becoming themselves infrastructural elements. This is evocative of the concept in urban political ecology of people as infrastructure in which people play an essential role in the operation of the city, becoming themselves key pieces of infrastructure (Latour, 2005 Simone 2001/2004). That this conception is considered in conjunction with intersectional concerns such as race, class, and gender is important here in terms of the queer Caribbean positionality. Just as Brand depicts her narrator as becoming part of the city's machinery, in a similar manner, Audre Lorde draws on the materiality of the city in her poetry. In the poem, 'New York City 1970', (1974) Lorde states that, 'I submit to [the city's] penance for trial/ as new steel is tried', suggesting that she is herself an infrastructural element that is required to be hard and unbending in this city, that the city needs her labour in order to operate. These materialities of the city in depictions of steel, oil, and koltan draw connections between both international landscapes of resource extraction and the use of individuals as urban resources, both of which are crossed through with the power dynamics of colonial legacy.

Overarching this urban materiality in Brand's work are themes of survival rather than joy, and this is presented through her criticism of consumer culture. This urban, queer ecology can be viewed in Brand's poem 'Thirsty' as she likens the disposability of consumer culture to the transience of love in the city, stating, 'Here I could know nothing and live, harbour a dead heart, slip corrosive hands into a coat' (373). This imagery of a dead heart and hands corroding like metal suggests that the city has transformed nature so mechanistically to the point of killing love, a consequence of violent practices of (neo)colonial resource extraction here being felt in bionic, feeling-less individuals. Brand explores this theme of excess and emptiness in the following passage:

'in the city there is no simple love

or simple fidelity, the heart is slippery,

the body convulsive with disguises

abandonments, everything is emptied,

wrappers, coffee cups, discarded shoes,

trucks, street corners, shop windows, cigarette

ends, lungs, ribs, eyes, love,

the exquisite rush of nothing,

the damaged horizon of skyscraping walls' (363)

The complication here of the city's material mesh and complicated love is directly linked to the disposability of consumer culture in Toronto, as love is emptied just as 'coffee cups' and 'wrappers' are. This juxtaposition between the amassing of material possessions and the emptiness and 'exquisite rush of nothing', creates a city of contrasts in which excess and

yearning come hand in hand. This attention to the waste of the city as it interplays with love is a literary presentation of the queer, urban ecology of the city as experienced by the individual, one which is grounded in global as well as local power matrices.

The inextricability here of the city from its global webs of power and of the individual as indivisible from infrastructure, also constructs the city as in part an extension of the sugar plantation as it is shown by the authors to reproduce similar lines of power imbalance and exploitation. That the characters experience similar events of exploitation and abuse in the city as they have on the plantation transposes social and racial hierarchies onto a different setting. For instance, when Elizete arrives in Toronto as an undocumented immigrant, the violence and sexual assault she experiences mirrors that experienced at the hands of Jeremiah in Trinidad. Brand depicts Elizete during the assault as 'flat, against the immense white wall, the continent' (89), the reference here to the continent transforms the micro-scale of the city apartment wall to the macro-scale of the American continent, suggesting this event is representative of larger, national exploitations. Brand depicts this treatment as representative of the undocumented immigrant experience:

> 'She wants to tear them with her teeth, hate is an extra head, another heart. God, she knows, is deaf, male and graceless. A man you don't know bends you against a wall, a wall in a room, your room. He says this is the procedure, he says you have no rights here, he says I can make it easier for you if I want, you could get sent back. His dick searches your womb. He says you girls are all the same, whores, sluts, you'll do anything. His dick is a machete, a knife, all the sharp things found on a kitchen table, all the killing things found in a tool shed' (89).

Here, Brand employs imagery which is evocative of cane cutting, likening the man's penis to a machete, drawing a parallel between the violence and exploitation of the two which

suggests systems of abuse are replicated in the city. Brand's phrase, 'his dick searches your womb', also draws this parallel with the appropriation of Elizete's reproductive value which has been seen as a key site of abuse in the plantation context. The highly invasive nature of this image as extending not only into the vagina but into the womb itself extends this invasion not only to Elizete, but also to her potential children. This replication of plantocracies and exploration of the sedimented layers of colonialism in the city is demonstrated by Katherine McKittrick's (2013) work on plantation futures in which she discusses the site of the New York African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan in New York. In 1991, during an archaeological survey for a new office building development, it was discovered that this site was in fact a burial ground of between 10,000 and 20,000 black and enslaved individuals from the seventeenth century which was filled in and built on in 1827 during an urban expansion project. This example is highly demonstrative of the layers of history on which these metropoles are built, in this case directly constructing new sources of neoliberal capital generation on the backs of enslaved labour. This is evocative of David Harvey's (1997) conception of the urban palimpsest in which the city is constituted of its sedimented layers of history. Brand peels back and reveals the layers of this palimpsest through Elizete's treatment as an undocumented migrant and the ways in which it echoes the plantation she left behind.

This personification of national abuse through Elizete is also present in Brand's poem 'Thirsty' in which she asks, 'how come/ I anticipate nothing as intimate as history' (359). The intimate level on which these figures are experiencing the aftershocks of history provides a telescoping between the individual and the global central to the question of what it means to queer our understanding of these ecologies. Just as time has been demonstrated to unfold in non-linear ways in these works, so too does space. Audre Lorde expresses this interlinked sense of time and space in her poem 'New York City 1970' in which she states:

> 'flames walk the streets of an empire's altar

raging through veins of the sacrificial stenchpot

smeared upon the east shore of a continent's insanity'

Here again, we find the image of the continent which is personified through the choice of the words 'veins' and 'insanity', suggesting an embodied America in which the city becomes a cathedral, an altar of empire on which oppressed peoples are sacrificed. This layering of (neo)colonial power matrices by which religious and colonial power dynamics continue to act on the surface of the city in a supposedly postcolonial era is highlighted by these writers as they present the city as an extension of the site from which its wealth was built. Brand emphasises the importance of remembering this in 'Thirsty' stating, 'the dingy hearts in the newsrooms, that is/ a city, the feral amnesia of us all' (377). This will to remember and resist the 'feral amnesia' of the city underlies Brand's attention to exposing the layers of time in the city as she pauses the frenzy of modern urban progress to recognise its continued connection with exploitation and extraction. Brand's unveiling of these layers acts in addition as a cautionary tale for continued practices of environmental degradation and urban development which characterise the Plantationocene. As natural environments are scraped clean and temperatures increase, environmental refugees will turn to the cities in which the metabolised forms of their former homes are churning around urban wealth. In this way, these authors present the city as an extension of the space of the sugar plantation both in physical and ideological ways as the layers on which the city stands, as well as the individuals within it, operate along power structures entrenched in colonial legacy.

The Subway

A key urban site which recurs throughout these works is that of the subway which is employed by the writers as an underground space of collision, social mixing, and cyclical movement. The subway is frequently cast by the writers as a space of personal turmoil and

growth for the characters and its recurrent and repetitive nature reflects the spatial and temporal cycles of the city. The metaphorical reach of the subway is significant in these works and a key manner through which urban space is defined and constructed as it connects the urban microcosms to its macrocosms, the material, emotional, and historic lives of the city dwellers in a churning, ever-moving space. The nature of the subway as an underground infrastructure presents a space which is at once connected with and separate from the rest of the city, a subterranean network sitting below the stratified metropole above, a positionality marginalising it as a space. The ecology of the subway is one in which the materiality of transformed nature collides, the aforementioned 'stuff' of the city caught up in its carousel. Stefan Höhne (2021) observes the ways in which the introduction of the subway to New York involved a process of creating a compliant passenger subject who would adhere to behavioural scripts to ensure the smooth circulation of labour around the city. Höhne argues that late-nineteenth century modes of Foucauldian biopolitical control contributed to the construction of the subway as an extension of the containerisation and diffusion of goods and labour from its ports to the city. Hohne argues that, 'instead of honoring the romantic ideals of virtuous autonomy, it was a matter of producing subjects who would conceive of themselves as controllable, efficient, emotionless agents, compatible with the technical modalities of infrastructure. In other words, passengers would be compelled to transform themselves into cargo' (97). In this way, Höhne demonstrates the subway as a capitalist utopian extension of the Fordist production line, an accelerated conveyor belt on which the characters in these works find both the pain and freedom of anonymity and mobility. As a key site of the urban machinery, the subway becomes a significant site of queer urban ecologies, a metabolic accelerator of encounter and transformation.

The recurrence of the subway is characteristic of much of Audre Lorde's writing set in New York, such as her poems 'New York City 1970' and 'One Year to Life on the Grand Central

Shuttle'. In the former poem, Lorde returns to the religious imagery of empire through her depiction of the subway in which it, 'work[s] plastic offal and metal and the flesh of their enemies/ into subway rush-hour temples'. For Lorde, the subway becomes the temple at the empire's altar at which plastic, metal, and flesh are indistinguishable, becoming the internal organs of the city. Höhne observes the intentionality of the construction of stations to mimic cathedrals which traces the extensions of the religious beliefs of empire into the modern, urban utopias of capitalist production and innovation. In the latter poem, Lorde extends this metaphor of the subway as a site of material digestion and a sense of being devoured stating,

'Pressure cooks

but we have not exploded

flowing in and out instead each day

like a half-digested mass'

'the someday foolish hope

that at the next stop

some door will open for us

to fresh air and light and home.'

The metabolism of the city here as feeding off its inhabitants through the space of the subway suggests an urban exploitation which is an extension of, rather than a modern phenomenon separate from, empire's ends. The chosen vehicle of this process of extraction of the subway presents a fertile metaphor for the city's inner workings and perpetual motion.

In a similar manner, Dionne Brand evokes the space of the subway in her poetry to reveal the inner workings of the city as a space in which power and exploitation collide. In addition to Brand's transformation of people into machines, her poem 'Inventory' anthropomorphises the city itself, becoming an injured individual:

'the underground subways are hysterical with gurneys,

and yellow tape and smoked saliva,

the cities wear bandages over the eyes' (447)

As people become machines and machines become people, the confusion of the city here becomes a scene of panic and hurt, evident in the underground space of the subway in which these collisions occur. Brand's description of the 'bandages over the eyes' is also suggestive not only of bodily harm, but of a will to ignore and feign ignorance. It is clear from Brand and Lorde's poetry that there is little hope for this space, a tragic setting perhaps as, in addition to Lorde's swollen, pressure cooking subway, Brand depicts it in 'Thirsty' as, 'tumescent, expectant like a grave' (361). That Brand employs here again the image of a grave returns us to the haunting images of the burial ground in Manhattan and themes of zombification in which the city's residents exist as a kind of living dead. This theme of zombification transposes the shadow of the sugar plantation once again onto the city as Haitian zombie metaphors of enslavement reappear in these underground urban spaces. McKittrick draws on Achille Mbembe's (2019) theory of necropolitics to view the city as an entity which, much like the plantation, dictates how people can live and must die, arguing that Brand's 'Inventory' reads as a 'tabulation of urbicidal acts' (13). Taking inventory of this urbicide, Brand draws on similar images of death and zombification as she does in the setting of the plantation, demonstrating the city as an extension of empire bound up in the international web of these power matrices.

Connected with this theme of hurt, zombification, and the simultaneous emptiness and fullness of the space of the subway, is that of queer love for Audre Lorde, for whom this setting is used to express the loss of love. As a space underground, the subway tunnels reflect the clandestine nature of queerness in the city, a space under the empire's altar in which to hide deviant bodies. Lorde's work, 'A Poem for Women in Rage' (1982), depicts a homophobic attack and draws on the image of a subway or train to state,

'In the deathland my lover's voice

fades

like the roar of a train derailed'

That here the loss of the lover's voice is likened to a derailed train presents both the constancy of their underground, queer relationship, but also the high risk and fragility of something hidden and fast-moving, prone to being knocked off course. In the face of homophobia, the city transforms to a 'deathland', the constancy of the train interrupted, importantly not come to a halt, but sent careering off its course. In a similar manner, in Lorde's biomythography, Lorde narrates the end of a relationship through the evocation of the subway: 'The night before my last session in therapy, I dreamt that Muriel and I stood waiting for a train in a midnight-blue subway station. There are clusters of people about, but their backs are turned and I cannot see their faces. As the train pulls into the station, Muriel falls off the platform beneath its wheels. I stand on the platform as the train rolls over her, powerless to do anything, my heart breaking beneath the wheels' (270). Here, the fear of the apathy of the city to the death of their queer love is evident in the faceless people who turn a blind eye. That Lorde depicts both Muriel and her own heart as being crushed beneath the subway is evocative of the finite extent to which an underground existence can be maintained. Having ridden the subway underground and navigated their queer relationship for

years, their heartbreak is ultimately subject to the brutality of the city's fast-moving infrastructure, whose perpetual motion does not stop without them. In this way, the site of the subway is employed by Lorde and Brand as a way in which to expose the brutality of the city's relentless motion, a space which is both a site of resource digestion of its inhabitants, and one in which queer love can be both enacted and lost in the substratum.

Revolution in the City

Whilst the city is presented by the writers as a devouring, extracting force, in Brand's novel *In Another Place*, Toronto is in equal parts a space of personal growth and revolution. Brand's attention to the political potential of the city in Verlia's character when she joins the Black Power movement is reflective of Jacques Rancière's conception of politics in which he asserts that doing politics in a city is defined as staging a moment of interruption as, 'space does not become political just by virtue of being full of power or competing interests. It becomes political by becoming the place where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated' (Dikec, 2003). In this way, the city here is itself not a revolutionary place, but instead a space in which injustice and inequality can be interrupted. That politics is viewed in this sense as both a temporal and spatial possibility is important as it goes against sedimented consolidations of power, making revolution permanently achievable. This is demonstrated in Brand's novel as, whilst the subway is a space of harshness, it is also an important vehicle for Verlia's political actions, her newfound mobility in a socially active environment is accelerated by the subway's speed as it serves as the connective tissue between underground organising practices. On her arrival in Toronto, Verlia decides to, 'grow the perm out of her hair. She's been waiting for this. She'll grow it wide like a moon' (150). Her afro hair as a symbol of the Black Power movement and the reference to the moon here suggest both of a return to power found in natural imagery rather than the urban's transformed nature, and an access to a certain lunar femininity. Arriving at her stop, Brand describes, 'her hair fills the

subway door at Bathurst and Bloor' (158). Here the hostile environment of the subway is reclaimed as Verlia physically occupies the space with her hair, not minimising herself, but staking claim to the possibilities and doorways open to her. This moment of political interruption as conceived of by Rancière by Verlia begins a series of resistances in the city space. The possibility of the subway as a vehicle for change is also present in Brand's depiction that, 'she knows that the minute she hits the subway, "Power to the People!" will bloom from her lips' (165). That this proclamation is engendered by her arrival at the subway suggests a feeling of the possibility of this connective urban network, the subway acting as a tool of social organising, representing an affordable and fast way of enacting change across space. The use here of the natural imagery again in the verb, 'bloom', recalls Brand's reference to the moon, as revolution is worked through with natural imagery, suggesting an organic growth resulting in the urban ecology. In this way, the subway becomes a space of connection as well as disconnection in which inequality in the city can be interrupted and reappropriated for revolutionary means.

This reappropriation of urban space can be seen across multiple sites in Brand's novel as Verlia challenges and reclaims the city's layers for her own revolutionary ends. Whilst Elizete's arrival in Toronto elicits a namelessness as 'nothing had a name yet, nothing was discovered' (47), Verlia takes to actively renaming the city as part of her reinvention. Brand recounts, 'look at us laughing into the park. Henson-Garvey Park, we named it, right here in Toronto. Look at us laughing into this new name and into our new selves' (158). Verlia and her cohort's renaming of a city space after a black power leader, transcribing their own experience of the city onto its existing maps, reclaims space built on global capital and colonial wealth. Brand's word choice here of 'into', repeatedly employed in this phrase, suggests that their joy and hope are being physically suffused *into* this place, inserted into spaces where this has not been perhaps historically present. This urban landscape is central to

Brand's treatment of revolution and political organising as Verlia's personal development as an activist occurs very intentionally in Toronto, skills which she then brings back to Trinidad and to the sugar plantation on which she meets Elizete. Brand states that for Verlia, 'it doesn't matter that it's Toronto or a country called Canada. Right now, that is incidental, and this city and this country will have to fit themselves into her dream' (159). Similar to the image of Verlia's afro filling the subway door, Brand reverses the notion that Verlia is supposed to fit into the city's machinations as an urban infrastructural subject and instead requires the city to adapt to her own aspirations. Brand goes on to elaborate, 'any city would have done it, any city away from the earth-bound stillness of her own small town, any city from which she could look back from a distance separating her own being from its everyday pull. Any city where she could be new. Any city where she could start out. Any city which could banish dreams. Any city gouging on the raw raw science of streetcars, skyscrapers, no family, no grief' (159). As a character who suffers from insomnia and nightmares, the distinction here between Verlia's dreams and the dreams she hopes to banish in the city is an important one as the city represents for her possibilities on which she can assert control as opposed to the uncontrollable nature of sleep. The violent imagery of the 'gouging' city is also here reappropriated as the harsh materiality of the city is a freeing symbol of disconnect, an unrecognisable place in which no ties to her past present itself. Here, urban possibility at once becomes a highly detached, but also connective force, constructing a landscape in which newness can be continually remade.

The urban ecology of this revolution as connected with that of the sugar plantation and the theme of bittersweet queer love is also made explicit by Brand as she sprinkles sugar onto this new setting. Urban revolution becomes sweet in the following passage:

> 'She marched in the middle of it, near the front trying to look serious but wanting to laugh for the joy bubbling in her chest, the crowd around her like sugar, sugar is what

> she recalled, shook down her back by her sister, sticky and grainy and wanting you to laugh, and the shock and strangeness of her skin shaking sugar. The crowd like sugar down her back, sisters and brothers to the left and right of her marching. So much goes through her when the chant pushes from her lips, she wants to cry and all of her feels like melting into it, sugar. "Power to the People" […] They invent sugar. She marches along with the crowd, without the pain in her chest.' (167)

The reappropriation of sugar as a colonial export crop here in a march for the Black Power movement is a powerful reclamation of the imagery which we have seen previously in Brand's work in reclamations of queer love on the plantation. Its employment here to encompass black joy and political interruption extends this metaphor to form the connection between queerness and decoloniality, as together they provide a twin renunciation of racial and sexual colonial oppression. Just as Verlia renames spaces in the city, she also reinvents sugar, infusing it with new meaning, reworking the materials of the oppressor in her favour. The materiality of sugar is again employed here by Brand in its stickiness, propensity to melt, and granular mobility, as a plaything to be embraced rather than something uncomfortable. The joyful imagery here suggests that revolution is sweet, and sugar can be reclaimed and reinvented, poured out onto the streets of the city.

Constellatory Alliances

Another way through which the writers conduct reclamations of the city space is through the constellatory alliances formed between queer characters which form a *rasanblaj* of connections and everyday political interruptions in addition to instances of social organising and protest. This is reflective of urban geographer Jen Jack Gieseking's (2020) theorisation of 'dyke constellations' in which she argues that queer and lesbian communities construct constellatory alliances across the urban fabric which engage with space in necessarily ever-

changing, fluid ways. Gieseking states that, 'lesbians and queers produce urban space in what I call constellations whereby lesbian-queer star-like places (in their range of import and brightness) relay the importance and comparative rarity of placemaking in queer worlds […] Their places are often fleeting, as they appear and collapse much more quickly due to rising rents and political shifts' (942). It is this queer remapping of the city according to fleeting and fragmentary alliances that can be viewed in these authors' works as characters rework the city through their connections with other queer individuals and spaces. For Audre Lorde, urban space in New York in the 1950s is fragmented and organised according to sexuality and race, constellations between which much space is left for loneliness. In *Zami*, Lorde emphasises the importance of queer bars as a young woman, but states of other black, gay women that, 'we recognised ourselves as exotic sister-outsiders who might gain little from banding together' (208). That Lorde's urban constellations are connected through queer women and spaces, but divided along lines of race is reflective of the fragmentary nature of New York's queer cartography and selective alliances along existing power structures. Lorde traces her identity shifts as they change throughout the city stating, 'downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and an invisible Black. Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder' (210). This morphing of identity to conform to different spaces within the city where neither allows a full expression of both identities, is indicative of the partiality of not only queer spaces in the city but also queer identity. This is evocative of Gieseking's study in which, during her construction of her personal mental map of New York, a participant is quoted as observing: 'apparently there's a spot, and my girlfriend finally pointed it out, where I would drop hands as I would get closer to my house [in Queens]. […] I had trained myself that just, if you're walking you just drop hands because you're—it even happens—once I hit Sixth Avenue in the Village you drop hands, [when you] I go into Washington Square Park. Then you get to the East Village and you can hold hands again' (953). This conditionality of

queer experience in the city reflects the ways in which queer individuals are required to negotiate entrenched power structures through space.

For Lorde, her experiences of queer love not only rework the city, but also have the power to transport beyond it. This can be viewed in her poem, 'A Poem for Women in Rage' which, although narrating a homophobic attack, also presents her lover as an escape from the city's materiality:

> 'like a promise I await
>
> the woman I love
>
> our slice of time
>
> a place beyond the city's pain.'

The oxymoronic implication here of time being a place is evocative of the notion of queer constellations as points in the city are fleeting, fluid, and temporal rather than fixed and spatial. The choice of the verb 'slice' also introduces a violent undertone, foreshadowing the attack to occur in the later stanzas of the poem. That Lorde's presentation here of a queer urban space as being in fact a queer person, is reflective of what Gieseking expresses in her study as, 'like other marginalised groups, the world over, my participants also use people as infrastructure […] often referring to ex-girlfriends, lovers, and friends as guiding beacons' (947). The treatment of people as infrastructure in the city reappears here as for infrastructure to maintain life becomes queered, peopled, fragmentary, and temporal. This sense of transportation away from or above the city's limits is also highly visible in Lorde's depiction of her relationship with Afrekete with whom, as a fellow Caribbean woman, they transform the city into a lush tropical paradise. In contrast to Lorde's relationship with Muriel which is depicted in terms of the underground subway, the final encounter depicted with Afrekete takes place on the roof of her apartment building, an opposite verticality on which Lorde is

raised above the city towards the sky. Lorde describes appearing from Afrekete's apartment in the following terms:

> 'It was not onto the pale sands of Whyndah, nor the beaches of Winneba or Annamabu, with cocopalms softly applauding and crickets keeping time with the pounding of a tar-laden, treacherous, beautiful sea. It was onto 113th street that we descended after our meeting under the Midsummer Eve's moon, but the mothers and fathers smiled at us in greeting as we strolled down to Eighth Avenue, hand in hand' (300).

In this passage, elements of the Caribbean landscape and of New York are superimposed onto the other as the 'tar-laden' street becomes a 'beautiful sea' and the evening fills with paradisiacal coco palms. Lorde creates a new urban palimpsest onto which she imposes her own counter-topography which reworks the city into something beautiful, a *rasanblaj* of experiences woven together across space. Not only here is Afrekete a star in Lorde's queer urban constellation, but she actively reworks this constellation, transforming the streets of the city and infusing them with a sense of home. In this reworked city, Lorde is unafraid to walk demonstrably close with her, holding hands and being smiled at by strangers. It is interesting to note that this evocation of constellations also appears in discussions of queer ecologies, as Jonathan Mullins states on the importance of this ecological approach, 'we cannot extricate ourselves from disturbance, and we need to notice relational constellations that point the way to unexpected forms of survival' (2020,229). As such, it is not only through people that queer constellations can be traced, creating a complex network of human and non-human actors. Whilst the city presents a fragmentary threat in much of Lorde's writing, it is in this alliance between her queerness and the Caribbean landscape that the city becomes a space of empowerment. Similarly to Brand's depiction of Verlia showered with sugar during a Black Power march, Lorde's being surrounded by coco palms as she walks hand in hand with

Afrekete brings Caribbean ecologies to this city space, a queer, urban ecology dotted with stars.

In this chapter, the urban environment has been studied as the final site connecting to the sugar plantation as a space for investigating the flows of queer love and ecologies. The city is a space which centralises power, the tentacular reach of which causes flows of capital, resources, and people to and from its operational landscapes. I have taken theories of people as infrastructure, planetary urbanisation, and political interruption, from urban political ecology in order to explore the root processes of extraction and exploitation which, in our modern age, is decidedly urban. Migrations of individuals in these works from spaces of extraction and colonisation to those of consumerism and empire-making demonstrate the nature of these spaces as extensions and continuations of their (neo)colonial ends. Although in transformed forms, nature also exists in the urban, constructing a material urban fabric which is highly present in the characters' lives. This urban dilemma can be viewed through Scott's lens of postcolonial tragedy as colonial power structures and exploitations are seen to replicate across supposedly 'modern' and liberated urban spaces. We have seen that the authors contend with this through twin uses of magical realism and tragedy in order to reconcile this paradox of modernity and to adapt genres to differing settings. The urban geographical conception of people as infrastructure has also been employed to these works to recognise the work of individuals in the running of the city, a resource which is confounded with physical infrastructures such as the subway. Moments of political interruption in the city in these works have demonstrated the possibility of revolution and the ways in which these challenge dominant orders. As with treatments of sugar and water in the works, the authors have demonstrated in the urban context a non-linear, fluid conception of time and space which can be said to queer heterotopic and colonial cartographies of space, transforming them to reveal the layers of sedimented history all at once. The dimensions of the city

become visible through the writers' treatments of these layers and of the constellations which make up the queer city, temporal and spatial organisations which challenge existing cartographies and foreground deviant bodies. These bodies sprinkle sugar and plant coco palms in acts of interruption and revolution which reintroduce ecological empowerment to the urban landscape, a reminder of their own queer ecology in the mechanistic city. These literary presentations of the city interrogate these urban spaces in this geological layer of the Plantationocene and the metabolic processes that are changing our ecosystems.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, this research has sought to demonstrate the new perspectives and connections that are engendered when considering the sugar plantation in Caribbean literature through a queer ecological lens. The sugar plantation has been traced through its flows of sugar, love, water, and metropolises to demonstrate the bittersweetness of reclaiming such spaces in both powerful and painful ways. Through literary depictions of queer life and love, connections have been forged between environments, histories, and individuals through an interdisciplinarity that complicates genres of fact and fiction in decolonial and eco-feminist manners. Applying a queer approach has expanded and enriched notions of ecofeminism in challenging not only patriarchal but also heteronormative power dynamics. The dissertation sought to investigate whether such an interdisciplinary lens of queer ecologies could be a productive one through which to consider Caribbean literature in an age of climate change and has uncovered many areas in which this has indeed proved a productive approach. Employing a literary geographical approach has been shown to aid in the decolonial, feminist, and queer aims of this project as it takes fictional narratives as alternative archives at times considered outwith the academic purview. This approach has demonstrated that themes such as love, eroticism, and magic, have a salient place in academic discussions of our ecological age. It has demonstrated the importance of storytelling in conceptualising and living in our age of climate change in contending with notions of accountability and consequence.

Drawing on Cindi Katz's work, these narratives have been shown to have constructed a counter-topography of the sugar plantation on which to contend with and reconstruct a *rasanblaj* of notions of queer, Caribbean self-hood as they reclaim constellatory cartographies of sugar for the fulfilment of their own purposes. This has been demonstrated

in Chapter One through discussions of eroticism, love, revolution, and cycles in which sugar is repurposed and remade in decolonising rather than colonising practices. The writers have demonstrated that to write sugar is to write bittersweetness as reclamations necessarily take place on entrenched histories of violence and appropriation. These narratives complicate simple notions of linear progress and resist the homogeneity of experience through the mesh of interrelated and entangled matrices of power and resistance they entail. In this chapter, sugar is demonstrated to be a nourishing source of revolutionary and erotic energy as well as the material stuff of enslavement and trauma. The writers sprinkle sugar in their narratives in order to make the story sweet, but also uncomfortably sticky; indulgent and also wanting.

Chapter Two considered water as a key fluid extension of the sugar plantation in its irrigation, oceanic, and riverine capacities which provide a material of connection through which to trace these queer ecologies from the environment to the individual. Water has been shown to act as a store of cultural memory, a surface on which to journey, transport, and steal, and an important site of mythical and magical encounter. That these encounters resist heterosexual classifications provides a powerful queer and decolonial lens through which to consider these landscapes, the carving of which by watery and spiritual worlds is foregrounded by these writers. As a telescoping tool between the local and the global, water provides a connective tissue between the Caribbean and its diaspora, a reminder of the extending nature of ecology as not separate but inextricable. These decolonial visions of water resist temporal and spatial conceptions of linearity in ways which imbue it with its own agential capacity rather than simply acting as a colonio-capitalist resource. In this way, these watery narrations are key to countering the eurocentrism of environmental and climate change discourse, recognising water as a space of meaning in times when flooding, melting, sea level rise, storm surges, and droughts are becoming ever more pressing realities encourages a rethinking of what it means to narratively rework our earth. In the ghostly

shadow of the sugar plantation, during the Plantationocene, these considerations loom large in the works as they present what it means to queer and decolonise these landscapes.

The third chapter discussed the neoliberal city as the apex of these capital and ideological accumulations in which plantocracies as well as political interruptions are reproduced. The urban environment is a key extension of these queer ecologies as transformed natures, urban metabolisms, and infrastructural components are the result of the planetary process of resource extraction of which the sugar plantation formed a founding part. Through these diasporic, urban writings, these cities are presented as extensions of the characters' histories rather than separate from them, instead becoming a digestive mass of transformed materials in which they must resist familiar exploitations and enact revolutionary change. The layers of the urban palimpsest are revealed by the writers through their narrating of the strata of the city from the subterranean subway to the plastic littering the streets, and to the apartment rooftops which provide sacred oases away from the street. The writers demonstrate that queer life in the city is constellatory and fragmented in nature, defined simultaneously by connection and separation, in other words, bittersweet.

Whilst the works studied here were by female-identifying writers and featured predominantly queer stories of the same nature, the perspectives of male-identifying, queer Caribbeans have not been explored extensively in this project. A potential offshoot of this research would be to investigate Caribbean writing from the perspectives of male-identifying, trans, or non-binary people. As this project stemmed from its roots in eco-feminism, the focus has been on female-identifying queer experience, one which is by no means universal. In particular, from the male-identifying queer perspective, it would be fruitful to investigate writing surrounding HIV/AIDs in the Caribbean and its diaspora which is also replete with political, racist, and homophobic histories enacted across cities in particular. Authors such as Assotto Saint, a Haitian author who lived and wrote predominantly from New York, wrote extensively about

the HIV/AIDs crisis in his essays and poetry, himself and his partner having contracted the disease. Opening up this research to trace this epidemiology in literature and its colonial/capitalist roots would provide fertile ground for discussions of Caribbean queer ecologies and their links to political movements in cities.

In addition to the sugar plantation, the research conducted also furnished examples of other landscapes in which political resistance have taken place which could provide opportunities for further research. A recurring theme of the research was the refuge provided by 'natural' landscapes and the ways in which these fostered clandestine political and revolutionary organising instrumental in resistance movements. For instance, whilst conducting research at the COHDS CHORN archives, one interviewee for the Haitian Life Stories Project, Philippe Fils-Aimé, recounted an event in his childhood in Haiti during the Duvalier Dictatorships which took place in a sunflower field. Fils-Aimé recounts this sighting of the communist cell as such, 'moi, j'allais dans le champ et je m'émerveillais de toutes ces fleurs jaunes […] c'était mon lieu de refuge […] je commençais à voir les gens qui venaient, qui s'installait dans le champ, dans une de mes cachettes […] ils échangeaient des papiers, ils discutaient'. That this sunflower field acts as both a space of childhood refuge and one of clandestine political organising is one which could engender discussion of the reappropriation of natural landscapes, the layered uses of which reveal colonial and neoliberal histories as well as the new forms of resistance taking place on the surface.

The literature reviewed at the beginning of this project demonstrated that whilst queer ecologies, Caribbean literature, and urban and climate change geographies have been discussed extensively in isolation, studies combining these fields were comparatively rare. This project has considered these disciplines in conjunction with each other in order to multiply and diversify the approach taken. Grounding these texts in their ecological contexts both past and present has been instrumental in recognising the enmeshment of stories and

storytellers in their environment and the active role it plays in these narratives. This sense of environmental and material complication is one which is highly compatible with the nature of queer theory which has necessarily been one of fragmentation, alliance, and constellation. The consideration of individual, queer Caribbean stories in the context of the Plantationocene is one which foregrounds the individual agencies which stand at the crossroads of colonialism, gender, and sexuality. Applying queer ecological theory to this is productive in questioning notions of queerness as 'unnatural', and instead positioning queerness centrally within the global matrices of ecology in which these stories are being told. In an era in which environments are changing due to degradation, pollution, and resource extraction, this approach becomes ever more salient as we grapple with how to tell this story.

The importance of positionality of narrating climate change has been demonstrated by Amitav Ghosh (2022) who has analysed the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged narrative conceptions of climate change. Ghosh argues that the COVID-19 pandemic was an indirect climate crisis event as it was the result of accumulative habitat destruction and increased animal-human contact which encouraged the transfer of the virus from animals to people. Ghosh argues that the narrative framing of the pandemic positions it as a novel phenomenon rather than the consequence of systematic environmental degradation and that it challenges climate change discourse. Ghosh observes that the pandemic challenged the notion that poorer countries would naturally suffer more from climate change whilst the ensuing events demonstrated very different results as it was wealthier countries such as the UK and US which suffered the highest mortalities. Additionally, Ghosh observes that many wealthy cities such as New York will be the most susceptible to sea level rise as they have been built in coastal areas, transforming positions of colonial power and trade connectivity into a climate change liability. In this way, Ghosh demonstrates that who narrates the climate crisis matters greatly and the benefits that decolonising this narrative would have. Similarly,

Naomi Klein's (2023) investigation of COVID-19 through 'mirror worlds', foregrounds the ways in which people of colour experienced higher death rates during the pandemic in the US and Canada being most likely to be on the frontlines of pandemic response and without adequate protection. In this climate catastrophe event, the necropolitics of the plantation of who can live and should die casts a long shadow in these diasporic communities. In this way, considering stories in their full geographical and ecological contexts is a literary approach which expands and complicates the possibilities of the text in the same manner that investigating Geography through literature humanises cartographies.

In a time of climate change, just as storytelling matters and ecologies matter, queer love also matters. In the works studied, the characters' queer lives are grounded deeply in their environments whether they be urban, watery, forested, or deforested. The networks of constellatory alliances and points of stars are woven into the fabric of their ecologies in a *rasanblaj* which produces stories which insist on the inextricability of the natural world rather than its separateness. Investigating these narratives from a queer, ecological perspective presents a positionality which is well placed to contend with the gendered, sexualised, and racialised roots of our current climate crisis. They demonstrate accountability and consequence, as well as resistance, agency, and joy. Environmentalist Barry Lopez stated that, 'it is more important now to be in love than to be in power', a view which argues for the foregrounding of enchantment as a tool to combat our climate crisis (2020, 121). Whilst this statement's beauty certainly comes from a position of privilege in which power is perhaps taken for granted, there is also power in the notion of foregrounding the importance of love for social and environmental change as expressed by Bell Hooks' call for a 'love ethic' (1999). This notion of enchantment is one with which literature is uniquely positioned to contend, narrating these connections between people and ecologies, and asking what it means to tell these stories. To open up both queer love and queer ecologies in literature can be a

joint pursuit in which enchantment and reclamation take place across storied cartographies mapping these new and old landscapes.

This dissertation took as its point of departure Omise'eke Tinsley's work, thought-provoking scholarship on water and sugar which I return to here as she discusses what it means to her to be a Caribbean, queer woman:

> 'Let yourself fall under the sea, tonbe dan lanmè; and there you look at the Black Mermaid man lady with fishes and fishes and pearls and flowing down behind and realise that you are himher, you are that safe coral castle at the bottom of the ocean floor where you can take in what you need. You reach for the ancestors around you and ask how to make a workable present out of a painful past, how you divert that water from the sugar mill to baptise yourself and weave your hair like waves flowing down behind. You go down and you come up, you go down and you come up again, you go down and you come up from the underwater juke joint swampland public pool Black Atlantic Bristol Bay Aqua Star to a place where you can live.' (2018, 166)

It is this mission to visit the mermaids at the bottom of the sea, to steal the sugar, divert the water, and reclaim the city that these writers enact as they address these spaces saturated with often painful histories, frequently returning to the surface for air. To view these stories through a lens of queer ecology of the sugar plantation and its long shadow is to recognise these flows and connections as they exist and not only as they are theorised. Tracing sugar from its colonial history through these works in its metabolised and transformed forms provides an ecological impetus for viewing queer life and love which contends with (re)appropriated landscapes and their sedimented layers. Writing bittersweetness acknowledges these possibilities and holds space for the constellatory array of joy and pain to be found across these complicated, queer ecologies. These writers demonstrate the ways in

which the sugar plantation extends tentacularly across time and space, repeating, slicing, and sprinkling sweetness.

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